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BEST SF: 1970

edited by Harry Harrison and Brian W. Aldiss

THE BEST SF STORIES OF THE YEAR FROM THE BEST SF MAGAZINES IN THE WORLD

Robert Silverberg * Gene Wolfe * A. Greenberg
Thomas M. Disch * Naomi Mitchison * and others

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INTRODUCTION

HARRY HARRISON

Change has come to science fiction, as it does to all things, despite the pained cries of the simple at heart who wish to hold it back. Since no one person or group can speak for an entire body of literature, evolution comes about with something resembling glacial speed, but like the glaciers the changes are irresistible. Whether we like it or not we are eventually overwhelmed.

A glance at the acknowledgement page that lists the sources of the stories in this volume provides solid evidence of one major change. For the first time in history the annual best science fiction volume contains more stories from book sources than from magazines. This is not capriciousness on my part or any lack of magazines. During the course of the past year I have read every SF magazine that appeared, and have gone through every other journal that has published science fiction in the past or might do so in the future. The pickings were lean. I talked to a number of magazine editors during 1970 and they echoed my own disquiet; they are not getting all the stories they need. Books, yes, many good SF books are coming out, so there is no problem in obtaining novels for serialization, or in using parts of novels as stories. But the magazines are not buying all the good stories they would like to buy. Why not? One of the main reasons, perhaps, is that they are being siphoned off into the new phenomena of the "original anthology."

These anthologies are *not* magazines, or even magazines in book form despite some weak attempt to classify them as that. They are books that buy book rights to stories and pay royalties on them. They enjoy the usual science fiction trait of inflated titling, *Infinity, Nova, Orbit, Quark* and such, but also enjoy some greater liberties. One of these is the blessings of time. Time for the editor to speculate, search out writers and stories, nurse along productions and rewrites, cogitate. This is very different from the insatiable

maw of the monthly magazine that closes with a metallic clash every thirty days and must be constantly fed. One of the original anthologies drawn from for this volume was six years in production, from conception to publication, which is certainly a long enough gestation period for any writer. In addition to time, the original anthologies serve to introduce new editorial talent. An editor is a self-defining entity who is born, not made. Editorial techniques can be learned; the art of correct decisions cannot. All that any editor can do is purchase the stories that he appreciates himself. If enough of the reading public approves his taste then he is in business. If not, not. Since every editor is an individual the new editors are bringing a breath of fresh air into SF. Or are they only setting their sails to catch a breeze that is already blowing? In either case the result is good stories, the best of which are represented here.

Perhaps these changes that have come to SF are signs of maturity, or a flexing of the muscles of the better writers and an exploration of the parameters of this form of fiction. Certainly knowledgeable writers on the outside seem to be using the SF form more and more often. Robert Coover, Alvin Greenberg, Jerry Farber, not the usual names found in an SF anthology. Yet they belong here. Brian Aldiss, our man in Britain, put it quite clearly after reading "The Pedestrian Accident."

> SF is a literature of extremes, its pages littered with test and terminal cases; the extraordinary is its meat, the ordinary it passes over in silence. Coover takes the case of a man on the brink of death, and produces an alien's viewpoint from his last lucid moments, as he lingers in a familiar environment that has suddenly become as surrealistic as the canyons of Callisto.

Yet I doubt if we will be overwhelmed from the outside. The same doubts still appear to exist about the nature of science fiction as they do about the nature of science. *London Magazine*, a prestigious journal that obtains financial assistance from the British Arts Council, featured a poem entitled "Moon Landing" by W. H. Auden, along with a series of drawings, "Moonshots," by Minos

Argyrakis. The drawings, of a quality and content usually found on lavatory walls, find nothing but phallic symbolism in rockets and that takes care of that. The artists seem unaware that SF discovered this bit of Freudian titillation years ago and has long been bored by it. Auden is a good bit more artistic than Argyrakis but appears to be lumbered with the same attitudes:

> It's natural the Boys should whoop it up for
> so huge a phallic triumph, an adventure

There is more on this theme and he ends up blaming the apparatniks for making a squalid mess of history until:

> all we can pray for is that artists,
> chefs and saints may still appear to blithe it.

I'm not so sure about those chefs in there, but the rest seems reasonable enough. The real problem here is the eternal, and untrue assumption that one kind of man—scientists, politicians—makes all the trouble in the world, while the poor little people can neither understand it nor change it. Perhaps Mr. Auden ought to read more SF. We would welcome him to our ranks if he were really interested. New blood is always welcome. Although not all of the strangers who wander into this new realm are as pertinent as Coover or Farber. One graduate of years in a college creative writing program sold a story to an SF magazine that contained these lines:

> (the machines provided) . . . hypnosis and temperature control in case the hyperspace mechanism were to fail. In that case, the press would be able to keep the crew alive for an estimated thousand light-years . . .

In addition to reading SF to pick up the hoary old term "hyperspace" this writer ought to have read a bit more basic science. Light-year is a measure of distance, not time. Science fiction, like science, is a regimen that demands a measure of respect.

The Soviets are respectful of both, goodness knows, and

at times in the past it has been hard to tell some of their SF from pure scientific lecture. This period may be ending with the new generation of SF writers there who seem to have a lot in common with our newer writers here. Politically too? If I did not know better I would say that the major decision in Gleb Anfilov's story is a heartlessly capitalistic one. Though perhaps I am being too anthropomorphic about that fine robot.

It is equally interesting to see other Eastern countries being represented—Czechoslovakia and Poland—with the Nesvadba and Mrozek stories. That there is a growing international awareness of SF cannot be denied. Look, there is Naomi Mitchison somewhere between Scotland and Botswana, and Anfilov in Russia. Hayden Howard lives in Santa Barbara so he knows far more than he cares to know about applied ecology on spaceship Earth, while Tom Disch is leaving the East Coast to write in France for a year. The first International Science Fiction Symposium was held in Japan this year, the annual Trieste SF film festival ran its happy course—while the world science fiction convention took place in Germany.

Is SF coming of age? In his afterword, Brian Aldiss mentions the many college level courses in science fiction. Some people may decry this attention by academia, but it can certainly harm no one. There is a corpus of good SF works, and SF *is* the literature of our time, so teach on.

Perhaps the acceptance by academia will produce some critical works of stature. I certainly hope so. Kingsley Amis' *New Maps of Hell* still stands alone as the major critical work by a single author. Though this year saw publication of Robert Silverberg's *Mirror of Infinity* where a number of critics chose stories to comment or to work their exegetic skill upon. For future PhD candidates in Science Fiction I offer the following thought for elaboration.

Unlike any other single discipline or school of writing, SF contains a complete spectrum of interests and ages. There is kiddy-book SF and juvenile SF, carefully labeled as such and put in the open on library shelves to hook children for life. There is the simple old pulp SF still being dredged over by anthologists and being reprinted and

written anew for fringe paperback publishers. There are the sword and sorcery buffs who can find their favorite reading on all sides, as well as the lovers of what has been called "adult fantasy." Not to mention the aficionados of Edgar Rice Burroughs who never tire of exploring Barsoom or that unusual Africa just one more time. And then there are the readers of science fiction who want good stories and good books and buy them in ever-increasing numbers. These readers ask only for quality—and they are getting it.

There is a steady gradation here of both age and reading interest. Room for all. The fact that Coover's science fiction can be read and enjoyed takes nothing away from Tarzan. To each his own. Within the large house of science fiction there are an awful lot of rooms. The fact that I personally do not care to enter some of them is my hangup. (Even as a child I found the writings of Howard Philips Lovecraft a bore—though untold thousands will hate me for saying this.) I feel that the pulps were fun at the time, but the better authors now at work, with greater literary skills and a larger reservoir of SF awareness to draw upon, are producing work that is a greater pleasure to read. Writers like Disch, Silverberg, Wilson speak for our times. I like to hear what they have to say.

Particular thanks, as always, to Brian W. Aldiss for both critical aid and advice, as well as his scouting of the British and European SF scene. Gratitude as well to Larry Ashmead, Joe and Kit Reed for their much appreciated assistance in finding stories in areas not considered normally fruitful of SF. But they are. I have learned and am spreading the net wider each year. A special note of thanks to Toby Roxburgh for aid above and beyond his usual editorial call.

HARRY HARRISON

GONE FISHIN'

ROBIN SCOTT WILSON

The author of this story is a teacher, as well as being the first teacher of a course in the writing of science fiction. He knows his craft very well and practices what he preaches, breathing new life into the much examined theme of telepathy and spies and the military.

They had briefed me in Washington just before I took off for Frankfurt, but it had been pretty sketchy; you don't need to know much about a case to perform escort courier duty. I knew only that this boy—Kurt Johnston—was some kind of mental freak; other than that there was just the standard info: physical description, date and place of birth, security clearance. He was black enough, God knows. Darker than my own *café au lait* which, before black became beautiful, was a source of secretive pride but open embarrassment to my mother, who used Royal Creme Pomade to straighten my sister Kitty's hair and sang a lot about Jesus while she ironed. "Honkie bastard" was what our neighbor, a fat, evil-smelling lady named Mrs. Beamis called me when she came over one night to bitch about me messing around with her Sadie. But that was way back in the late forties, when I was just old enough to wander out of the grits-and-grease smell and into trouble on U Street NE in Our Nation's Capital, before I was old enough to wander all the way out.

He made me think a little of Lena Horne, for whom I used to have the hots in the way you did toward movie stars back in the days when movies were lasciviously chaste and not pornographic, when they didn't show people screwing and you could look at a beautiful woman and—since no one else was having her—imagine you were; back when "Stormy Weather" was the only black and white you could see in living color, and Sidney Poitier

hadn't come to dinner yet, and Lela White hadn't yet been seduced by Dustin Hoffman or whatever his name was.

Same pinched, almost semitic features, as if Haile Selassie had scattered his maker's image through the land, fathering Lena and grandfathering this boy; straight little nose: she could flare a nostril like nobody's business when she inhaled dramatically about four bars into "Bill Bailey," and I'd get shaky sitting there in the balcony of the Grand thinking about me and Lena and listening to the sibilant whispers of "shee-it, man" chorusing around me in the dark, which I guess gives you a good idea of how old I am.

And he wore his hair in a full Afro, pretty much the way Petey had after his first semester at Princeton, after he stopped answering our letters and—I guess—went Panther. But there was nothing of Petey's wiry build about this boy, this Kurt Johnston. When he stood up for the introduction, stiffly, German style, he stuck up out of the ground a good half a foot above my five foot eight, and there was lots of muscle under his bulging, too-tight German schoolboy's jacket. Difficult to believe he was only fourteen.

"*Sehr Angenehm,* Mister Bronstein," he said, acknowledging our introduction with formulary precision, bowing slightly, almost clicking his heels.

"*Freut mich sehr,*" I said, unconsciously adopting the nigger-who-made-it-good stiffness toward another, unknown black man. It went with the German. "*Aber sprichst du kein englisch?*" I used the familiar *du* form because I knew he was only fourteen. Without the briefing, I would have used the formal *Sie*: so adult did he look; so much power did he seem to radiate.

"Yes, sir," he said a little haltingly, in a voice that still cracked a bit. "I am speaking the English very well."

Even after fifteen years off and on in European operations, I am still a little startled when I meet a black man whose native tongue is German. But of course there are many thousands of them after thirty-five years of American troops in the *Bundesrepublik.* They are the progeny of black soldiers who have suddenly found they are members of a minority so small that it becomes less a disadvantage than simply a curiosity; who have played out

the big black stud bull animalistic image their white comrades have established for them, who have screwed white girls or the mulatto daughters of their predecessors-in-arms because there are no other girls, because there is still some status in screwing white, because they buy the myth and play the role a dominant culture has assigned them, because there still are not enough Lena Hornes to go around for all the little black boys in balconies who stiffen up watching the latest white sex-goddess and whisper "shee-it, mother!" to one another in the sticky popcorn dark.

Still, it is startling. But who am I to be surprised at ethnic oddities? A black man with a Jewish name who started out as a showcase Negro in 1960 and played the system the right, cautious, uptight way and made it big in twenty years of government service; a good establishment-nigger who for most of that time did not think of himself as a Tom, so far had he wandered from the grease-and-grits; a not very black man who never heard that ancient phrase, "to cross over," without a pang and whose occasional, crushing, obliterating sense of guilt was maybe a little bit requited by a son who died of a cerebral hemorrhage induced by a nightstick. In Chicago, twelve years ago, they called them "batons," as if the fuzz—no, that was Petey's word—as if the police used them to conduct the chorus of chanting militants, *andante con moto*, in "Hell no, we won't go!" I guess Petey and the others were still chanting it eleven years later at Princeton. But, my God! Whatever I thought I was then, I never thought I was a New Jersey State Policeman!

Yes. Well. There in the Air Force ready room of the Rhine-Main air terminal just outside Frankfurt, walled about with chipped blue-gray plywood, fall-leaf littered with squashed paper coffee cups cradling drowned brown cigarette butts, Ed Gary completed the introduction and said to me, "Well, Peter, he's your package now. You wanted temporary courier duty, and you got yourself a real piss-cutter this time."

I nodded. I'd known Ed a long time, since we'd learned the business together at the Berlin Wall. He would never say or even think "some of my best friends . . ." but for him

it was true. "You want to fill me in?" I said.

Ed beckoned me over toward the curtained windows, away from the two men and the boy they were protecting. Except for the five of us, the ready room was deserted, cleared of its usual crowd of transiting servicemen.

When we were out of earshot, Ed said, "This is a rough one. Have you been briefed on COKEBOTTLE?"

The world—a code name—rang a bell. "Yes, I think so. When I was Chief in Copenhagen a couple of years ago, there was something about digging through school psychologists' records all over the place, some kind of computer analysis to find . . . what was it? Some kind of special mental attributes?"

"Telepaths."

"Telepaths!" I was genuinely surprised. I hadn't known all that much about COKEBOTTLE. There had, obviously, been no need for me to know. "I didn't know *that*!"

"Yeah. In '77 the Psycho-Medical staff came up with a special requirements list, and the Outfit ran a massive search everywhere they could in the West. From what they tell me, they had a pretty good idea what to look for from studies of certain cases of juvenile catatonia, and what they wanted to find was a kid who looked like he might have the characteristics of a latent telepath, but hadn't developed it to a point where it would get to him. That was COKEBOTTLE."

"Um," I said, beginning to understand. "I remember the search, or at least the little piece of it in Denmark in '78. I don't think they found much of anything there. I thought at the time it was pretty much of a boondoggle."

"Well, it wasn't. They didn't find anything in Denmark or the U.S. or much of anywhere except here in Germany." He nodded toward the boy seated across the room reading a *Micky Maus* comic book. "Maybe it was because he was the only black kid in the *Kinderheim*. Got used to being different before the talent hit him. . . . Right, Kurt?" Ed's voice was barely audible to me, but the boy looked up, smiled, and nodded.

"You mean he's a telepath?" I couldn't suppress the astonishment in my voice, although I usually come on

pretty cool. It is part of my schtik. "He can read minds?" Ed nodded and the boy nodded as if they were strung to a single puppeteer. "Come on now," I said. "You must be kidding me." Of course, I didn't really disbelieve Ed at all; elaborate practical jokes are not part of life in the Outfit. But still I had to show disbelief; it is part of human nature to solicit more information by expressing doubt. Think of the folks who learned aerodynamics by saying: "What? Two bicycle mechanics from Dayton, Ohio, have built a machine that flies? Horseshit!"

"Yeah, I know," said Ed. He flicked his eyes in Kurt's direction. The boy rose, carefully laid his comic book open on the settee, and walked across the room to join us. The two men started to follow him, but Ed waved them back. They had no need to know. Out loud, Ed said, "Do you mind a little demonstration, Kurt? You know how it is with new ones."

"No. I do not mind, Mr. Gary."

I thought: what a splendid-looking boy he is. How strange it would be if the successor to *Homo sapiens* should be the result of racial intermarriage on a new, broad scale. What a blow it would be to the racists—both kinds—if somehow the massive mixing of genes should produce a whole new race with the beauty and strength of this boy. And maybe a new kind of mind. . . .

The boy said, "Thank you, Mr. Bronstein. I try to keep healthy, I exercise with *die Hantel*—uh—barbells? But please do not think me to be some freak or new thing. My father was an American, like you. My mother was a German, I think *eine Mulattin wie Sie*. There are other boys like me in other—uh—*Kinderheim*, but think they do not understand the *thinking*. And—uh—*Rassenhass* . . ." He was stuck for the word and looked questioningly at me.

"Race hatred. Racism."

". . . *Ja* . . . race hatred will always be here no matter what is happening, no?"

"Yes. Of course."

"But," he added a little shyly, "I am happy that you are not one, not a—uh—racist."

I thought: my God, he really can read minds! There are

things there he should not see. I felt embarrassed, like a kid surprised in a locked bathroom.

The boy smiled broadly. "Do not worry, Mr. Bronstein. I do not pry. Only things that are now, up on top, when you think. Other things are very hard for me and very unpleasant."

"Here," said Ed, handing me a newspaper. "Read something to yourself from this and you'll see why the Outfit has been interested in Kurt and what he's been able to do for us. Okay, Kurt?"

The boy nodded and I began to read silently. It was a copy of that day's Paris edition of the New York *Times*. As I read, Kurt spoke rapidly, much more rapidly than his English conversation: "Richmond, 14 April 1980 (AP). Black Co-op Party Chairman Enoch Jarvis announced today a broad new range of economic sanctions against consumer-oriented businesses, including specific corporations in publishing, chemicals, transportation, and the ailing automotive industry. The BCP, now under investigation by a Federal Grand Jury, has in recent months. . . ." I stopped reading and Kurt fell silent.

"Okay," I said. "I'm convinced." And then I realized and whistled. Kurt smiled before I said, "The perfect espionage agent! He can read anybody's secret files anywhere, as long as someone is reading them!"

"Not quite anywhere," said Ed. "We had to teach him Russian, for instance. And his range is only a couple of dozen miles."

"Then you must have had him in . . . ?"

"Moscow. Right. For over a year. In an embassy apartment six kilometers from the Gorky Street KGB headquarters. We cleaned them out before they tumbled to it."

"How'd they find out?"

"We don't know. They've been doing a lot of research in ESP too. Maybe they've got their own Kurt. We don't know. All we know is that they are committing everything they've got to get hold of Kurt, or kill him. We've lost three men just moving him this far."

I looked at the boy with sympathy, my right hand

moving automatically to the clip on my waistband and the .38 Police Special nestled there. "Are you frightened, Kurt?"

"Yes, sir. But when I come to America, everything will be all right." I looked at Ed and tried to suppress the thought. "Yes," said Kurt. "I know that not everything in America will be good. But there I will not be so different. There are others of my color. It will be harder for them to find me."

Standing there in the oddly deserted ready room, I remembered Petey's statement one evening the previous summer, just before he returned to Princeton for the last time. We had maintained a polite, low-key debate all summer, I not so much disagreeing with his growing militancy as acting as a sounding board for his ideas. That evening, on the back steps of the house in McLean, he had said, "But, dad, nobody ever got anything without a struggle, and it's these little local actions that give us the experience for the big ones."

"Okay," I had said. "But what else do they accomplish? And look at the risk."

He had stood up then and pointed to the stars just breaking into light. "Like stars, or fish in the ocean, dad. The Man sees us that way. To the Man, we all look alike. We are only twelve percent, and we need leaders, right? The danger is when we all look alike to each other. Guys like me are learning how to be the different ones, the leaders."

"Yes," I had said, unable to keep the sad cynicism out of my voice. "And guys like Huey Newton and Martin Luther King and Fred Hampton and Malcolm X and George Maxwell—dead men don't make very effective leaders."

Petey had shrugged and given me a look I wish to God I'd never seen. "Neither," he said, "do GS-16s in the government." It had been one of those futile, wounding, incoherent conversations that I guess all fathers have with their college-age sons.

But Kurt was right, of course. A little cosmetic work by the Outfit's specialists, a new identity, submergence in a heterogeneous population: To the Man, we all look alike. I admired the boy's courage. Aloud, I said, "Right, son.

We'll make it all right." Why, I wondered, had I said "son"?

Kurt smiled at me with the look lonely boys have. There was something between us that we both knew. Maybe it was just race. Maybe it was something more. For the first time, I consciously communicated to him without verbalizing: *You know, don't you. About Petey and the Princeton riot. About Mary and me, about the guilt and feeling lost. Why I'm working as a courier instead of a country chief. The distraction of keeping on the move, and Mary keeping busy in the Black Co-op movement, trying to pay the bill for twenty years of noninvolvement; and I am pulling further and further back into myself trying to understand if "Black American" is a contradiction in terms and losing, every day, losing a little more of identification with. . . . But why do I need to confess to a fourteen-year-old boy?*

"Yes," said Kurt, his smile gone. "I understand. There is a gap." Ed looked from one of us to the other, suddenly outside. There was a prolonged silence. "I think you better get going, Peter," he said.

I swam back up from the painful depths of introspection and gave my head a quick little nervous shake of impatience. "Right. What have you laid on?"

"Well, we think you are okay here so far. We've got positive control on the airfield. General Conners has got the 3745th APs all over the place, and there's an MP detachment from Heidelberg spread out around the perimeter."

I nodded. "Are we flying MATS?"

"No. We're sending a decoy out to the MATS 747. You're going commercial superson. There's a Pan Am flight direct to Dulles. The KGB won't be expecting that."

"Sort of the purloined letter bit, hey?"

"That's the idea." Ed looked at his watch. "The decoy will be moving out now." He parted the curtain on the window overlooking the flight line. Down on the field, a blue Air Force Mercedes was drawing up to the side of the MATS 747. Two men got out, one a tall, burly Negro, the other a shorter black man. They moved hurriedly up the boarding ramp and the aircraft door swung shut behind

them. Almost instantly, the massive old plane began to move out the taxi strip toward the downwind end of the runway. I turned away from the window. "Come on, Kurt. If there're any KGB heavies around, they'll be making a play for the MATS plane. Let's get going."

Ed said, "Go directly to the Pan Am boarding gate and mingle with the other passengers. We'll have the whole area covered." He handed me our tickets, and Kurt and I left the ready room, walked through the Air Force administrative spaces, and entered the main passenger terminal. The loading area for our flight was crowded; the Boeing superson carries just over three hundred people in both classes. I stuck close to Kurt as we filed through the gate and walked with the hurrying crowd to our plane. Out at the end of the field, I could see the big MATS plane turning to start its takeoff run. Suddenly there was a black plume of smoke and a few seconds later the sound of an explosion reached our ears. The 747 burst into flame and skidded off the runway and slewed violently in the grass, one giant wing dropping and crumpled. Fire sirens screamed and men rushed to vehicles.

"Rockets!" shouted Ed, who was just behind us in the crowd. "They got it with rockets!" We kept on going, across the ramp and up the stairs and into the interior of the superson. Ed stayed behind at the foot of the steps, his eyes busy on the crowd, his pistol half drawn. A few people who had preceded us into the plane and had seen the explosion out the starboard windows rose from their seats, scrabbled coats and packages from the overhead rack, and headed back toward the door, their taste for flying suddenly gone. There was considerable confusion in the aisles.

I got Kurt into a seat and stood out of the aisle watching everyone who came aboard. Kurt looked up at me. "Mr. Bronstein, there is a man. He has a gun. Under his raincoat. It is black . . ."

I had my pistol out and was firing before the man with the black raincoat draped over his arm was able to get off a shot. He fell backward through the door and into the passengers behind him. Someone in the tower must have given the pilot the word. The door slammed shut on the

confused and screaming group at the head of the steps, and a moment later the plane began to move. The pilot swung the aircraft through ninety degrees and fed full power to the engines. The taxiway was clear and long enough, and the pilot took off directly, using it as a substitute runway. We were airborne in seconds and there was no rocket fire.

By the time we had reached cruising altitude, the hostesses had most of the passengers quieted down. They were a white-faced bunch, following us with their eyes as we went forward to the cockpit. I wanted to talk to the captain. Judging from the magnitude and desperation of the KGB effort at Rhine-Main, we could anticipate something almost as desperate at Dulles when we landed three hours later. Espionage agents—professionals—taking pot shots at each other in dark alleys is one thing; a suicidal rocket attack on a passenger aircraft is something else again. God knew what they would have waiting for us at Dulles; it didn't occur to me then that we had anything else to worry about. All I could think of was that it was essential that the crew be persuaded to land at some other airport, somewhere where the KGB could not be expecting us.

Kurt was round-eyed with a boy's excitement, full of questions about the aircraft, most of which I could not answer. He seemed blithely unconcerned about the attempts on his life. When I thought that, hustling him forward up the aisle, he shrugged and said, "There is nothing I can do about it." And then, without drawing breath, he said, "How high are we, Mr. Bronstein? How fast does the airplane fly? How many passengers will it carry? How long does it last, this flight? Is this a bigger airplane than the Concorde? I have ridden once upon a Concorde. From Moscow to Rome once I have ridden upon an Illyushin. But they are not so big I think and not so fast as this Boeing."

Up forward, I turned Kurt and his questions over to the first officer and sat with the captain at the navigator's bench. He was a middle-aged man named Greyson, and he was worried. "I don't know what this is all about, Mr. Bronstein," he said, "but I've got almost two hundred passengers back there and I don't wany any more trouble."

I explained the situation to him as well as I could, leaving out the intelligence aspects of it. "So you see, we can expect similar difficulties at Dulles."

Greyson nodded. "All right, I'll radio for clearance at Baltimore Friendship."

"No. No radio. They'll have you on radar anyway. I want you to call for emergency landing clearance as soon as you get in the Friendship pattern. I don't want any radio until you're just ready to land."

Greyson shook his head. "I don't know. I'm in enough trouble already with that hairy takeoff at Rhine-Main. . . ."

"Don't worry, Captain. My organization will square it with the FAA and your company."

"You got that much clout?"

I showed him the little card in my billfold, the one with the Presidential seal. He nodded and shrugged. "You got that much clout."

The third officer, who was minding the store, shouted, "Captain! We got aircraft approaching! Radar shows them bearing zero one zero and closing at 1300."

The captain took three quick strides to the left-hand seat, slipped his earphones on, and said to me, "Bronstein! These KGB people wouldn't go after a flag aircraft in the middle of the Atlantic, would they?"

I said, "I don't know. They may be desperate enough to try anything." Kurt, who had been standing behind the first officer, said, "They're—uh—*freundlich*, Mr. Bronstein. They come from some place in Iceland."

The captain turned in his seat and looked curiously at Kurt. "How do you know, young man?"

Kurt looked at me questioningly. "He just knows," I said.

Simmons, the third officer, said, "Radar shows them at five miles. They've turned parallel to us. They ought to be visual." It was a clear, bright afternoon above the cloud-decked Atlantic. I peered out through the navigator's window. Off to the south, three specks raced along with us. I couldn't make out the type, but Simmons, who had binoculars, could. "The kid's right. They're F-115s."

The navigator had resumed his position behind me to monitor the radar at his desk. "Three more!" he said.

"Coming up fast at one one zero!"

"They Russians," said Kurt. "They have orders to *übivaht*—uh—*zerstören*—this aircraft!" There was no fear in the boy's voice. Only great excitement.

I translated: "Destroy!"

"Give me full power, Al!" shouted the captain, and the flight engineer got busy at his console. The F-115s wheeled out in front of us and zipped back past us to the east and the threat there.

Kurt said, "It is getting dim to me; the distance. . . . But one of them has died. A Russian. Another is not dead yet, but he thinks only of his mother, and he is *ohnmächtige* —uh—unconscious."

"Probably passed out in a high-G turn," said Greyson. "They must be dogfighting." There was just the slightest sound of envy in his voice. Kurt looked up at him. "I would like someday to hear about your forty-eight missions in Korea, sir."

I was suddenly struck with how completely we all accepted Kurt's power. I had not hesitated to shoot the man with the raincoat draped over his arm. Greyson accepted Kurt's interpretation of the events behind us—now many miles—without really questioning it. Such was the boy's presence, his obvious calm control. A drama was being acted out behind us, maybe fifty miles or so, in the clear April sky. I hoped only that it would stay behind us.

The captain called for a fuel report and ordered cruise power again. Simmons reported another flight of three aircraft entering escort pattern with us. Kurt confirmed that they were friendly. "They are from some place called Argentia. One of the pilots is very angry because he had to miss something. He calls it a 'heavy date' in his head, and. . . ." He broke off in fourteen-year-old confusion. "I do not entirely understand."

Laughter is a good cathartic, and the tension in the cockpit diminished. Greyson surrendered the left-hand seat to the first officer and joined me once again at the navigator's bench. "I got to hand it to you, Bronstein. Your people seem to have thought of everything. It's good to see those 115s out there."

"Yeah. I don't think either of us knows just how valuable your cargo is this trip." And then it struck me just how valuable this boy was. What power! Not only could he clean out the files of the Gorky Street KGB headquarters, he could handle tactical situations with calm and intelligence. No one engaged in conflict of any sort could stand against an operational intelligence system such as Kurt, single-handed—or should one say single-minded? —represented. No wonder the Sovs were willing to do anything to see the end of him.

Do anything. Land-based rocket attack. Mig-27 air attack. What else lay in their arsenal? MIRV's? Targeting would be a problem, and they wouldn't dare use nukes. Kurt wasn't worth *that* much to them. That left. . . .

"Kurt!" The sound of my own voice startled me. "How did you detect the hostile aircraft?"

He was startled too and a little at a loss to answer properly. It was like asking someone how he smells onions. "Why—uh—why, when the man said he saw aircraft on the radar, I thought about the aircraft, in that direction, and I heard . . . no . . . *verstand* . . . what they were doing. I—uh—"

"Okay, Kurt. That's all right." There was obviously no word for what he did. "But now, think down. Down to the sea and under the sea. A small room. Many dials and gauges. A man in a submarine—*ein Unterseeboot. Siehst du was?*"

There was a moment of dead silence, only the buzzing hum of the autopilot as it corrected for the weight of a passenger walking aft to the toilet. Then: "Yes! Mr. Bronstein, yes! There is something down. A green room with many, many lights and dials. Like this, only bigger." He waved his arm around the cockpit. "And a man. He is counting backward in Russian, *vo'sem, sem, shest, pyat.* . . ."

"Yeah, Greyson!" I shouted. "A submarine! They're counting down! Surface-to-air!"

Greyson was back in his seat before I had finished. "Seatbelts!" he shouted. "Full power!" He twisted his head to glance at me. "We're at 45,000 feet, Bronstein. How much time from launch?"

I did some quick calculations, trying to recall the characteristics of the SAM's we knew were deployed on the Z-class nuclears that cruised the North Atlantic. "Seventeen or eighteen seconds at most."

"*Dva, adin*—uh—*feur*! He pushed a button, this man, and said 'fire'!" Kurt's excitement confused his tongue.

"Hang on!" said Greyson, and I was thrown hard against the bulkhead as he kicked hard left rudder. Kurt tumbled back against me, and I put an arm around his shoulders in instinctual protectiveness, even though—at fourteen—he outweighed me by twenty pounds. He did not shrink from my embrace. There was a moment of crushing weight and then a lightening and then the horizon outside the windows straightened again. There was a noiseless blast a mile or so off to port and the plane jumped like a car crossing railroad tracks.

Kurt stirred in my arms and pulled himself erect. "They count again," he said. There was a look of real joy on his face, a look Petey used to have at baseball games. He was enjoying the whole thing as only a fourteen-year-old could. Me, I was so scared I feared for continuing sphincter control. "*Desyat, devyat, vo'sem. . . .*" counted Kurt in Russian.

"Gimme full power again!" There was sudden acceleration and another tight, climbing turn. Again, I was crushed to the deck with Kurt, a tight fetal ball, curled against me. Like a kid who has lit the fuse to the biggest cherry bomb he could find and waits, full of pleasurable anticipation, for the neighborhood, the city, the state, the world to explode. I wondered how the passengers were taking it back aft. We straightened out on our original course. Another soundless blast shook the aircraft from two miles away.

"What's the range of those goddamn SAM's, Bronstein?"

"Fifty miles, max."

"Okay. We ought to be clear unless there's another sub ahead of us." He looked questioningly at Kurt, who shook his head. There was just the slightest look of disappointment in his fine, coffee features. "All right, Al," said the captain. "Let's drop back to cruise."

A stewardess came in through the cockpit door, and Greyson met her anxious look with words of reassurance. "Tell the passengers we were evading a thunderhead."

"At 45,000 feet?"

"They won't know the difference. Tell them we are all clear now. Tell them we'll be landing in about forty-five minutes and that because of weather at Dulles, we'll have to land at Friendship."

"Hold it," I said. "Don't tell them that. Don't mention it to anybody." The stewardess looked at me and then at Greyson. He nodded. "Do like the man says, honey."

The rest of the flight went without incident. No more Migs, no more submarines. Kurt continued his interrogation of the first officer, his enthusiasm for the details of the aircraft unabated. Only now and then did he pause a few seconds as if he were listening for something. I subsided into the jump seat behind Greyson and thought about the reception to come, about what the Outfit could do to protect this boy, about the years ahead of him guarded everywhere, a secret weapon, property of the state. He would be America's secret weapon, all right. With him, everything was open to us, anything was possible. We had something better than the ultimate weapon; we had the ultimate source of knowledge about everybody's ultimate weapon. It saddened me, somehow.

When we were in the landing pattern over Baltimore, Greyson called for and was granted emergency landing clearance, and I put in a call to headquarters, redirecting whatever escort they had arranged to Friendship. The plane landed, and Greyson taxied up to the ramp. The passengers debarked, but Kurt and I stayed behind, waiting for the escort to come for us.

They had done an elaborate job. A heavily armored semitrailer and six-place cab was waiting for us. There were enough armed men to guard Fort Knox. As soon as we were in the truck cab, I asked Joe D'Amore if all the fuss wouldn't attract too much attention.

"Sure. It might. But I think we've got it whipped." He slid back a hatchway in the rear of the cab as we pulled out onto the Baltimore-Washington turnpike. "You and the boy can go back into the trailer through here." Back in the

gloom was a battered '74 Buick. "As soon as we reach a blind pulloff on the parkway, we'll drop you off in the car. If there's any KGB around and they want to follow the truck the rest of the night, fine. You won't be in it."

I nodded. It was the purloined letter business again. Kurt and I scrambled back through the hatch and got into the Buick. The Outfit had been thorough, as usual. There were even some old cane poles sticking out through the rear windows. What could be less suspicious, less worth the attention of the most dangerous espionage agency in the world than two black men cruising through the soft April evening along the Baltimore-Washington turnpike, going fishing?

They all look alike, don't they?

Just south of the AEC turnoff there is a pulloff. We had the Buick out of the semi and were bowling down the turnpike alone within thirty seconds. I took a tortuous course through Silver Springs and then over on the Circumferential to Bethesda, where I drove up one street and down another, checking for a tail.

There was nothing, although a Bethesda police car followed us for a while, until they were sure we were leaving their jurisdiction. We were home free. Now all I had to do was to drive over into Virginia to the Outfit. There, I would be relieved of my charge, and Kurt would begin his new life.

But something was bothering me. A whole lot of things, a year, twenty years, a lifetime of things were suddenly bothering me. I pulled off the Circumferential and drove up the narrow road into the seclusion of Potomac Park. We were safe enough there. And inconspicuous. Two black men with fishing poles. I stopped, and in the fading twilight, I turned to face the young man beside me. He looked at me, sweetly calm, trusting. "Kurt," I said. "You are a very powerful human being."

He grinned. "Yes, I know." There wasn't a shred of arrogance in his voice.

"What do you want to do with your power?"

He waggled his head in uncertainty. "I am not sure. I want to do things, good things. I want to do things for my—people."

"America, you mean? Your country?"

"Yes. So far."

"And do you see America and Mr. Gary and me and the government as all the same thing?"

Kurt waited a while before he answered me, his fine features glazed by the diminishing light. In profile, the resemblance to Lena Horne was striking, although there was nothing the least feminine about his face. "No. Not really the same thing," he answered with some hesitation. "You and Mr. Gary and the government are all *part* of America but it is perhaps something more." He hesitated again and then added, his manner more firm, his words more forceful: "I think I want to help America be what it should be, maybe not what it wants to be. Do you understand? I am not sure of the words. . . ."

"I understand. And that's what I wanted to know. But there is maybe something more." I hesitated in an odd embarrassment, my thoughts ahead of my tongue, braver.

"I understand," he said when I paused. "About your son Petey and the gap and why you are confused about what it is to be a Negro in this country in this time. I understand, and, yes, I would be flattered to be considered so by you. But perhaps your wife, perhaps she might feel differently about me. . . ."

"Ha!" I said explosively, suddenly sure of myself, suddenly aware of who I was, sliding the old Buick into motion again with an exuberant jerk. "There is a kind of telepathy between married folks, too, son. You'll see. Mary will be. . . ." I was overcome with emotion. I drove down to the Circumferential again and headed south toward Richmond. At the first pulloff in Virginia, I stopped to use the telephone.

When I returned, Kurt looked at me expectantly. "Don't worry, son," I said. "Everything's fine. Mary will meet us in Richmond. She is very happy. She will call the right people, and they will arrange things for us."

"And the people you work for? And Mr. Gary and the others? What will they think?"

"Mr. Gary, at least, will understand, I think. I will not want them to think you have been captured by the Soviets.

I will send them a telegram in the next few days. I will write: '*Angeln gegangen.*' "

"Ah," said Kurt, struggling to translate into the idiomatic English he would need. "That means 'gone fishing'. . . ."

THE UGUPU BIRD

SLAWOMIR MROZEK

Until I read this story I never saw anything funny about mutualism, commensalism, or ecological interdependency. I do now. This story first appeared in Great Britain in 1968 but had to wait in the file until the American edition of Mrozek's book of short stories appeared this year before it could be anthologized, since BEST SF is published on both sides of the Atlantic at the same time. It was worth waiting for.

Once, when I was a little boy, my big brother seated me on a hot stove. I was immediately seized with a precocious impulse to reflect upon the mysteries of "man and nature." My determination to find answers to great questions did not stop at discovering the influence of temperature changes on our behavior, although this problem did serve as my initial stimulus. What is man's place in the great cycle of nature? What is his role? There on the stove, I was the recipient of a given number of calories, which I in turn passed on to the atmosphere in the form of phonetic energy; this, as I see it, is also kinetic energy, since one's voice is a product of vibrations, or motion. Thus, at a very tender age, I was jolted by the fact that even I was a link in the chain of nature. When is man obliged to become a molecule and join in the play of the elements, and when should he assert his individuality? To be precise, thanks to my brother the divisions, bonds and interaction between man and nature were to become my passion from earliest childhood.

To quench this thirst demanded purely practical efforts toward the mastery of knowledge. In a relatively short time, I concluded that nature's most cryptic mysteries were to be found precisely in her most obvious aspects—botany, and above all, zoology. My persistent struggles, endeavors

and experiments, motivated by the secret passion of which only I was aware, soon attained for me a rather significant measure of wordly renown as a scientist. But far from becoming complacent, I did not let this stand in my way. None of my early discoveries were enough for me. To this insatiability, this eternal feeling that essential questions remained unanswered, I attribute the fact that at age fifty I found myself undertaking yet another scientific expedition into the depths of a forbidding jungle, accompanied by a single assistant.

The climate was hellish, the flora and fauna amazingly luxuriant. A tiny hut built on pilings, deep in the virgin forest near a swamp, provided our only shelter. Together with my assistant, Lieutenant C., I spent endless months battling the thousand and one pestilences of our environment, stubbornly pursuing my investigations into the phenomena which excited me the most: the secrets of coexistence and symbiosis between various species of animals.

Lieutenant C. was a young, businesslike individual. He bore up well under pressure, knew how to look danger in the face, and, most important, proved to be a keen observer.

Ours was a ghastly existence. Amid heat, noxious fumes rising from the nearby swamp, unpredictable torrents of rain, a multitude of poisonous plants and creatures, disease, various beasts of prey and no contact whatever with the civilized world—under such conditions we were required not only to survive but to perform exhaustive research as well.

We soon realized that, like it or not, we would have to adapt ourselves to the reality which surrounded us; to conform, to approximate nature both externally and internally. Our faces were shortly overgrown with matted hair. Our uncut nails came to resemble talons. We spoke in harsh, menacing, unarticulated grunts. We gradually discarded the subtleties of intellect, retaining only the specialized knowledge of our calling. In the hope of tearing secrets from the breast of mother nature, we were often forced to erase the line separating her from us. At first I was unafraid of our temporary compromise. I believed we

would always have time to retreat; that after completing our task, a return to civilization would remain open to us.

We suffered our greatest torment between eleven in the morning and three in the afternoon, when the unbearable heat regularly forced us to interrupt our work. We took to spending these hours apart from one another. Utterly exhausted, I would topple onto the planks which served as my bed, while my young colleague would disappear into the jungle where, he said, it was a little cooler.

As I mentioned already, our research consisted of observing how animals live together. We began to concentrate on a species of rhinoceros which had already been exterminated elsewhere. The only remaining specimen inhabited the swamps near our outpost. He was an enormous, lonely fellow, and, as we knew both from sketchy accounts and our own experience, very wild and dangerous. Therefore we could go about our observations only at a distance, with the aid of field-glasses, taking every possible precaution.

We were quick to note that a certain fox, a small unsightly creature which we had often seen scurrying in the direction of the swamp, had a habit of loitering about near the rhinoceros. Later we saw them together, strolling in the jungle. It took us a good two weeks to unravel the mystery. This fox, running ahead of the giant beast, would point out places where the colossus' favorite delicacy, wild horseradish roots, could be found growing in the earth. With one thunderous stamp of his foot, the rhinoceros would tear the roots from the soil, simultaneously uncovering entrances to underground badger-burrows. The fox would then immediately spring into the tunnel and copulate swiftly with a female badger, taking advantage of the absence of the male, who at that time would be deep in the forest. In this way the rhinoceros was provided with his favorite horseradish, while the fox was able to escape the responsibility involved in establishing one's own family. I was taken aback!

As a zoologist I was familiar with the ruthlessness and shamelessness of nature; but here, under primeval conditions, they assumed an intensity which was hard for me to bear.

I planned our next move carefully: "Further progress depends on our finding out how the fox knows what time the male badgers leave home."

Our first assumption was that field mice were somehow acting as informers for the fox, realizing that their interest lay in the fox's devoting as much time as possible to his sexual life and thus neglecting his nutritional instincts. It is no secret that foxes feed on mice, among other things. But our assumption was false: nature turned out to be more refined. It was none other than female baboons who were passing on the information. These cunning creatures advised him of every suitable opportunity; in this way, aware of the highly developed imitative instincts of their husbands, they gave them a chance to ape the erotic deportment of the fox.

"This is dreadful," I said to my companion that evening. "I am torn between two conflicting emotions. The first is a combination of disgust and terror; the second is an involuntary admiration for the consummate organization of nature."

"The organization is what gets me," the young man replied thoughtfully.

"Someday," I continued, "man will dare to invade nature's chain of interdependencies. He will bring with him into this elemental morass of wanton instincts the seed of moral values. Far from upsetting nature's balance, he will become the conscious link in its chain, and endow it with a new, noble substance."

The next question gave us no end of trouble. Why did the male badgers go to the forest so often, aware that the consequences of their absence provoked such inauspicious results from the point of view of their species' further biological development? The problem was all the more difficult because lately I often had to work alone. The Lieutenant began to complain of headaches and dizziness, often muttering as if in a fever or falling into a deep sleep, interrupted only intermittently by snoring.

But I could not trouble my mind with this matter for long, since we soon made still another shocking discovery. Pythons were profiting from the inattentiveness of the baboons—brought on by the disgraceful behavior of the

fox—and making off with the baboons' babies.

"This is monstrous," I remarked one evening. The Lieutenant was lying on the planks. He had felt especially bad that day, and for the first time spent even the hours he usually devoted to wandering in the jungle—from eleven to three—in our bungalow. "This benighted planet of ours!" I exclaimed. "Oh, if only I knew where, in this world of naked lust and hunger, man will at last find his place! How do you view this matter?"

"Search me . . ." said the Lieutenant dreamily.

Suddenly our hut rocked in a mighty convulsion. I grabbed for my rifle and peered outside: in the pale moonlight I could see the gigantic rhino charging at our pilings, while the entire structure heaved to and fro. There was not a moment to lose. I leveled the gun at it an . . .

"Don't shoot!" cried the Lieutenant wildly, lunging at the gun-barrel and knocking it aside. "Have you ever heard of a little bird called the *Ugupu*?"

"You're out of your mind!"

"The little *Ugupu* bird will die out if you shoot that rhinoceros."

"You're talking nonsense!"

"The pythons will destroy the *Ugupu* bird if we don't keep them busy with the baby baboons!"

"Well what of it?!"

"If the rhinoceros and the fox stop hunting for the wild horseradish, the baboons will have more time for their children, and the pythons will have nothing to eat but the little *Ugupu*."

I had had enough. "Listen here!" I shouted "what do I care about the *Ugupu*? That rhino will have our hut in splinters in another minute!"

"But the little *Ugupu* is no ordinary bird. He lives on special leaves, and after digesting them . . ." His voice broke; ". . . he gives off alcohol," he finished in a whisper. "Half an ounce of dried *Ugupu* excrement to a pint of water."

I began to see the light. "And what do you do for the rhinoceros in return?" I roared, pushing the barrel of my gun into his chest. "Talk and talk fast!"

"I massage him every day from eleven 'till three. After a

massage he always gets an appetite for wild horseradish."

I saw it all. That day the Lieutenant had spent a little too long enjoying himself with the *Ugupu* bird, and consequently neglected the rhinoceros. Deprived of his massage, the rhino had come to remind him. Half an hour later, after receiving his massage from the Lieutenant before my very eyes, he departed contentedly.

The Lieutenant refused to return to civilization. Nature had absorbed him completely.

However, after much time had passed, I was able to learn why the badgers left home for the forest so often. They needed the peace and quiet.

BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

ROBERT SILVERBERG

Speculation about the future is science fiction's domain, and speculation about our social and political future is certainly a legitimate part that has been rather neglected in the past. The future of black Americans is something that is vital to us all. Will integration ever be made to work? Many think it will not. Silverberg gives a glimpse of one possible future.

my nose is flat my lips are thick my hair is frizzy my skin
is black
is beautiful
is black is beautiful
I am James Shabazz age seventeen born august 13 1983 I am black I am afro I am beautiful this machine writes my words as I speak them and the machine is black
is beautiful

Elijah Muhammad's *The Supreme Wisdom* says:

Separation of the so-called Negroes from their slave masters' children is a MUST. It is the only SOLUTION to our problem. It was the only solution, according to the Bible, for Israel and the Egyptians, and it will prove to be the only solution for America and her slaves, whom she mockingly calls her citizens, without granting her citizenship. We must keep this in our minds at all times that we are actually being mocked.

Catlike, moving as a black panther would, James Shabazz stalked through the city. It was late summer, and the pumps were working hard, sucking the hot air out from under the Manhattan domes and squirting it into the suburbs. There had been a lot of grinding about that lately.

Whitey out there complained that all that hot air was wilting his lawns and making his own pumps work too hard. Screw Whitey, thought James Shabazz pleasantly. Let his lawns wilt. Let him complain. Let him get black in the face with complaining. Do the mother some good.

Silently, pantherlike, down Fifth Avenue to Fifty-third, across to Park, down Park to Forty-eighth. Just looking around. A big boy, sweat-shiny, black but not black enough to suit him. He wore a gaudy five-colored dashiki, beads from Mali, flowing white belled trousers, a neat goatee, a golden earring. In his left rear pocket: a beat-up copy of the new novel about Malcolm. In his right rear pocket: a cute little sonic blade.

Saturday afternoon and the air was quiet. None of the hopterbuses coming through the domes and dumping Whitey onto the rooftops. They stayed home today, the commuters, the palefaces. Saturday and Sunday, the city was black. Likewise all the other days of the week after 4 p.m. Run, Whitey, run! See Whitey run! Why does Whitey run? Because he don't belong here no more.

Sorry teach. I shouldn't talk like that no more, huh?

James Shabazz smiled. The identity card in his pocket called him James Lincoln, but when he walked alone through the city he spurned that name. The slave master name. His parents stuck with it, proud of it, telling him that no black should reject a name like Lincoln. The dumb geeps! What did they think, that great-great-grandpappy was owned by Honest Abe? Lincoln was a tag some belching hillbilly stuck on the family a hundred fifty years ago. If anyone asks me today, I'm James Shabazz. Black. Proud of it.

Black faces mirrored him on every street. Toward him came ten diplomats in tribal robes, not Afros but Africans, a bunch of Yorubas, Ibos, Baules, Mandingos, Ashantis, Senufos, Bakongos, Balubas, who knew what, the real thing, anyway, black as night, so black they looked purple. No slave master blood in them! James Shabazz smiled, nodded. Good afternoon, brothers. Nice day! They took no notice of him, but swept right on, their conversation unbroken. They were not speaking Swahili, which he would have recognized, but some other foreign language, maybe

French. He wasn't sure. He scowled after them. Who they think they are, walking around a black man's city, upnosing people like that?

He studied his reflection for a while in the burnished window of a jewelry shop. Ground floor, Martin Luther King Building. Eighty stories of polished black marble. Black. Black man's money built that tower! Black man's sweat!

Overhead came the buzz of a hopter after all. No commuters today, so they had to be tourists. James Shabazz stared up at the beetle of a hopter crossing the dull translucent background of the distant dome. It landed on the penthouse hopter stage of the King Building. He crossed the street and tried to see the palefaces stepping out, but the angle was too steep. Even so, he bowed ceremoniously. Welcome, massa! Welcome to the black man's metropolis! Soul food for lunch? Real hot jazz on 125th? Dancing jigaboo girls stripping at the Apollo? Sightseeing tour of Bedford-Stuyvesant and Harlem?

Can't tell where Bedford-Stuyvesant ends and Harlem begins, can you? But you'll come looking anyway.

Like to cut your guts up, you honkie mothers.

Martin Luther King said in Montgomery, Alabama, instructing the bus desegregators:

If cursed, do not curse back. If pushed, do not push back. If struck, do not strike back, but evidence love and goodwill at all times.

He sat down for a while in Lumumba Park, back of the Forty-second Street Library, to watch the girls go by. The new summer styles were something pretty special: Congo Revival, plenty of beads and metal coils, but not much clothing except a sprayon sarong around the middle. There was a lot of grumbling by the old people. But how could you tell a handsome Afro girl that she shouldn't show her beautiful black breasts in public? Did they cover the boobies in the Motherland? Not until the missionaries came. Christ can't stand a pair of bares. The white girls cover up because they don't got much up there. Or maybe to keep from getting sunburned.

He admired the parade of proud jiggling black globes.

The girls smiled to themselves as they cut through the park. They all wore their hair puffed out tribal style, and some of them even with little bone doodads thrust through it. There was no reason to be afraid of looking too primitive anymore. James Shabazz winked, and some of them winked back. A few of the girls kept eyes fixed rigidly ahead; plainly it was an ordeal for them to strip down this way. Most of them enjoyed it as much as the men did. The park was full of men enjoying the show. James Shabazz wished they'd bring those honkie tourists here. He'd love a chance to operate on a few of them.

Gradually he became aware of a huge, fleshy, exceedingly black man with grizzled white hair, sitting across the way pretending to be reading his paper, but really stealing peeks at the cuties going by. James Shabazz recognized him: Powell 43X Nissim, Coordinating Chairman of the Afro-Muslim Popular Democratic Party of Greater New York. He was one of the biggest men in the city, politically—maybe even more important than Mayor Abdulrahman himself. He was also a good friend of the father of James Shabazz, who handled some of Powell 43X's legal work. Four or five times a year he came around to discuss some delicate point, and stayed far into the night, drinking pot after pot of black coffee and telling jokes in an uproarious bellow. Most of his jokes were anti-black; he could tell them like any Kluxer. James Shabazz looked on him as coarse, vulgar, seamy, out of date, an old-line pol. But yet you had to respect a man with that much power.

Powell 43X Nissim peered over the top of his *Amsterdam News*, saw him, let out a whoop, and yelled, "Hey, Jimmy Lincoln! What you doin' here?"

James Shabazz stood up and walked stiffly over. "Getting me some fresh air, sir."

"Been working at the library, huh? Studying hard? Gonna be the first nigger president, maybe?"

"No, sir. Just walkin' around on a Saturday."

"Ought to be in the library," Powell 43X said. "Read. Learn. That's how we got where we are. You think we took over this city because we a bunch of dumb niggers?" He let out a colossal laugh. "We *smart*, man!"

James Shabazz wanted to say, "We took over the city because Whitey ran out. He dumped it on us, is all. Didn't take no brains, just staying power."

Instead he said, "I got a little time to take it easy yet, sir. I don't go to college for another year."

"Columbia, huh?"

"You bet. Class of '05, that's me."

"You gonna fool with football when you get to college?"

"Thought I would."

"You listen to me," said Powell 43X. "Football's okay for high school. You get yourself into politics instead up there. Debating team. Malcolm X Society. Afro League. Smart boy like you, you got a career in government ahead of you if you play it right." He jerked his head to one side and indicated a girl striding by. "You get to be somebody, maybe you'll have a few of those to play with." He laughed. The girl was almost six feet tall, majestic, deep black, with great heavy swinging breasts and magnificent buttocks switching saucily from side to side beneath her sprayon wrap. Conscious that all eyes were on her, she crossed the park on the diagonal, heading for the Sixth Avenue side. Suddenly three whites appeared at the park entrance: weekend visitors, edgy, conspicuous. As the black girl went past them, one turned, gaping, his eyes following the trajectory of her outthrust nipples. He was a wiry redhead, maybe twenty years old, in town for a good time in boogieville, and you could see the hunger popping out all over him.

"Honkie mother," James Shabazz muttered. "Could use a blade you know where."

Powell 43X clucked his tongue. "Easy, there. Let him look! What it hurt you if he thinks she's worth lookin' at?"

"Don't belong here. No right to look. Why can't they stay where they belong?"

"Jimmy—"

"Honkies right in Times Square! Don't they know this here's our city?"

Marcus Garvey said:
The Negro needs a Nation and a country of his own, where he can best show evidence of his own ability in the

art of human progress. Scattered as an unmixed and unrecognized part of alien nations and civilizations is but to demonstrate his imbecility, and point him out as an unworthy derelict, fit neither for the society of Greek, Jew, or Gentile.

While he talked with Powell 43X, James Shabazz kept one eye on the honkie from the suburbs. The redhead and his two pals cut out in the direction of Forty-first Street. James Shabazz excused himself finally and drifted away, toward that side of the park. Old windbag, he thought. Nothing but a Tom underneath. Tolerance for the honkies! When did they tolerate *us*?

Easy, easy, like a panther. Walk slow and quiet.

Follow the stinking mother. Show him how it really is.

Malcolm X said:

Always bear in mind that our being in the Western hemisphere differs from anyone else, because everyone else came here voluntarily. Everyone that you see in this part of the world got on a boat and came here voluntarily; whether they were immigrants or what have you, they came here voluntarily. So they don't have any real squawk, because they got what they were looking for. But you and I can squawk because we didn't come here voluntarily. We didn't ask to be brought here. We were brought here forcibly, against our will, and in chains. And at no time since we have been here, have they even acted like they wanted us here. At no time. At no time have they ever tried to pretend that we were brought here to be citizens. Why, they don't even pretend. *So why should we pretend?*

The cities had been theirs for fifteen or twenty years. It had been a peaceful enough conquest. Each year there were fewer whites and more blacks, and the whites kept moving out, and the blacks kept getting born, and one day Harlem was as far south as Seventy-second Street, and Bedford-Stuyvesant had slopped over into Flatbush and Park Slope, and there was a black mayor and a black city council, and that was it. In New York the tipping point had come about 1986. There was a special problem there,

because of the Puerto Ricans, who thought of themselves as a separate community; but they were outnumbered, and most of them finally decided it was cooler to have a city of their own. They took Yonkers, the way the Mexicans took San Diego. What it shuffled down to, in the end, was a city about eighty-five percent black and ten percent Puerto, with some isolated pockets of whites who stuck around out of stubbornness or old age or masochism or feelings of togetherness with their black brothers. Outside the city were the black suburbs, like Mount Vernon and Newark and New Rochelle, and beyond them, fifty, eighty, a hundred miles out, were the towns of the whites. It was apartheid in reverse.

The honkie commuters still came into the city, those who had to, quick-in quick-out, do your work and scram. There weren't many of them, really, a hundred thousand a day or so. The white ad agencies were gone north. The white magazines had relocated editorial staffs in the green suburbs. The white book publishers had followed the financial people out. Those who came in were corporate executives, presiding over all-black staffs; trophy whites, kept around by liberal-minded blacks for decoration; government employees, trapped by desegregation edicts; and odds and ends of other sorts, all out of place, all scared.

It was a black man's city. It was pretty much the same all across the country. Adjustments had been made.

Stokely Carmichael said:
We are oppressed as a group because we are black, not because we are lazy, not because we're apathetic, not because we're stupid, not because we smell, not because we eat watermelon and have good rhythm. We are oppressed because we are black, and in order to get out of that oppression, one must feel the group power that one has. . . . If there's going to be any integration it's going to be a two-way thing. If you believe in integration, you can come live in Watts. You can send your children to the ghetto schools. Let's talk about that. If you believe in integration, then we're going to start adopting us some white people to live in our neighborhood. . . .

We are not gonna wait for white people to sanction black power. We're tired of waiting.

South of Forty-second Street things were pretty quiet on a Saturday, or any other time. Big tracts of the city were still empty. Some of the office buildings had been converted into apartment houses to catch the overflow, but a lot of them were still awaiting development. It took time for a black community to generate enough capital to run a big city, and though it was happening fast, it wasn't happening fast enough to make use of all the facilities the whites had abandoned. James Shabazz walked silently through silence, keeping his eyes on the three white boys who strolled, seemingly aimlessly, a block ahead of him.

He couldn't dig why more tourists didn't get cut up. Hardly any of them did, except those who got drunk and pawed some chick. The ones who minded their own business were left alone, because the top men had passed the word that the sightseers were okay, that they injected cash into the city and shouldn't be molested. It amazed James Shabazz that everybody listened. Up at the Audubon, somebody would get up and read from Stokely or Malcolm or one of the other black martyrs, and call for a holy war on Whitey, really socking it to 'em. Civil rights! Equality! Black power! Retribution for four hundred years of slavery! Break down the ghetto walls! Keep the faith, baby! Tell it how it is! All about the exploitation of the black man, the exclusion of the Afros from the lily-white suburbs, the concentration of economic power in Whitey's hands. And the audience would shout amen and stomp its feet and sing hymns, but nobody would ever do anything. *Nobody would ever do anything.* He couldn't understand that. Were they satisfied to live in a city with an invisible wall around it? Did they really think they had it so good? They talked about owning New York, and maybe they did, but didn't they know that it was all a fraud, that Whitey had given them the damn city just so they'd stay out of *his* backyard?

Someday we gonna run things. Not the Powell 43X cats and the other Toms, but *us*. And we gonna keep the city, but we gonna take what's outside, too.

And none of this crap about honkie mothers coming in to look our women over.

James Shabazz noted with satisfaction that the three white boys were splitting up. Two of them were going into Penn Station to grab the tube home, looked like. The third was the redhead, and he was standing by himself on Seventh Avenue, looking up at Uhuru Stadium, which he probably called Madison Square Garden. Good boy. Dumb enough to leave yourself alone. Now I gonna teach you a thing or two.

He moved forward quickly.

Robert F. Williams said:
When an oppressed people show a willingness to defend themselves, the enemy, who is a moral weakling and coward, is more willing to grant concessions and work for a respectable compromise.

He walked up smiling and said, "Hi, man. I'm Jimmy Lincoln."

Whitey looked perplexed. "Hi, man."

"You lookin' for some fun, I bet."

"Just came in to see the city a little."

"To find some fun. Lots of great chicks around here." Jimmy Lincoln winked broadly. "You can't kid me none. I go for 'em too. Where you from, Red?"

"Nyack."

"That's upstate somewhere, huh?"

"Not so far. Just over the bridge. Rockland County."

"Yeah. Nice up there, I bet. I never seen it."

"Not so different from down here. Buildings are smaller, that's all. Just as crowded."

"I bet they got a different looking skin in Nyack," said Jimmy Lincoln. He laughed. "I bet I right, huh?"

The red-haired boy laughed too. "Well, I guess you are."

"Come on with me. I find you some fun. You and me. What's your name?"

"Tom."

"Tom. That's a good one. Lookee, Tom, I know a place, lots of girls, something to drink, a pill to pop, real soul music, yeah? Eh, man? Couple blocks from here. You

came here to see the city, let me show it to you. Right?"

"Well—" uneasily.

"Don't be so uptight, man. You don't trust your black brother? Look, we got no feud with you. All that stuff's ancient history! You got to realize this is the year 2000, we all free men, we got what we after. Nobody gonna hurt you." Jimmy Lincoln moved closer and winked confidentially. "Lemme tell you something, too. That red hair of yours, the girls gonna orbit over that! They don't see that kind hair every day. Them freckles. Them blue eyes. Man, blue eyes, it turn them on! You in for the time of your life!"

Tom from Nyack grinned. He pointed toward Penn Station. "I came in with two pals. They went home, the geeps! Tomorrow they're going to feel awful dopey about that."

"You know they will," said Jimmy Lincoln.

They walked west, across Eighth Avenue, across Ninth, into the redevelopment area where the old warehouses had been ripped down. Signs sprouting from the acreage of rubble proclaimed that the Afro-American Cultural Center would shortly rise here. Just now the area looked bombed out. Tom from Nyack frowned as if he failed to see where a swinging nightclub was likely to be located in this district. Jimmy Lincoln led him up to Thirty-fifth Street and around the hollow shell of a not quite demolished building.

"Almost there?" Tom asked.

"We here right now, man."

"Where?"

"Up against that wall, that's where," said James Shabazz. The sonic blade glided into his hand. He studded it and it began to whir menacingly. In a quiet voice he said, "Honkie, I saw you look at a black girl a little while ago like you might just be thinking about what's between her legs. You shouldn't think thoughts like that about black girls. You got an itch, man, you scratch it on your own kind. I'm gonna fix you so you don't itch no more."

Minister James 3X said:

First, there is fear—first and foremost there is inborn fear, and hatred for the black man. There is a feeling on the

part of the white man of inferiority. He thinks within himself that the black man is the best man.

The white man is justified in feeling that way because he has discovered that he is weaker than the black man. His mental power is less than that of the black man—he has only six ounces of brain and the Original Man has seven-and-a-half ounces. . . . The white man's physical power is one-third less than that of the black man.

He had never talked this long with a honkie before. You didn't see all that many of them about, when you spent your time in high school. But now he stared into those frightened blue eyes and watched the blood drain from the scruffy white skin and he felt power welling up inside himself. He was Chaka Zulu and Malcolm and Stokely and Nkrumah and Nat Turner and Lumumba all rolled into one. He, James Shabazz, was going to lead the new black revolution, and he was going to begin by sacrificing this cowering honkie. Through his mind rolled the magnificent phrases of his prophets. He heard them talking, yes, Adam and Ras Tafari and Floyd, heard them singing down the ages out of Africa, kings in chains, martyrs, the great ones, he heard Elijah Muhammad and Muhammad Ali, Marcus Garvey, Sojourner Truth, du Bois, Henry Garnet, Rap Brown, rattling the chains, shouting for freedom, and all of them telling him, go on, man, how long you want to be a nigger anyhow? Go on! You think you got it so good? You gonna go to college, get a job, live in a house, eat steak and potatoes, and that's enough, eh, nigger, even if you can't set foot in Nyack, Peekskill, Wantaugh, Suffern, Morristown? Be happy with what you got, darkie! You got more than we ever did, so why bitch about things? You got a city! You got power! You got freedom! It don't matter that they call you an ape. Don't matter that they don't let you near their daughters. Don't matter that you never seen Nyack. Be grateful for what you got, man, is that the idea?

He heard their cosmic laughter, the thunder of their derision.

And he moved toward Tom the honkie and said, "Here's where the revolution gets started again. Trash like you fooling with our women, you gonna get a blade in the balls.

You go home to Nyack and give 'em that message, man."

Tom said lamely, "Look out behind you!"

James Shabazz laughed and began to thrust the blade home, but the anesthetic dart caught him in the middle of the back and his muscles surrendered, and the blade fell, and he turned as he folded up and saw the black policeman with the dart gun in his black fist, and he realized that he had known all along that this was how it would turn out, and he couldn't say he really cared.

Robert Moses of SNCC was questioned in May 1962 on the voter registration drive in Mississippi:

Q. Mr. Moses, did you know a Herbert Lee?

A. Yes, he was a Negro farmer who lived near Liberty.

Q. Would you tell the Committee what Mr. Lee was doing and what happened?

A. He was killed on September 25th. That morning I was in McComb. The Negro doctor came by the voter registration office to tell us he had just taken a bullet out of a Negro's head. We went over to see who it was because I thought it was somebody in the voting program, and were able to identify the man as Mr. Herbert Lee, who had attended our classes and driven us around the voting area, visiting other farmers.

Powell 43X Nissim said heavily, folding his hands across his paunch, "I got you off because you're your daddy's son. But you try a fool thing like that again, I gon' let them put you away."

James Shabazz said nothing.

"What you think you was doing, anyway, Jimmy? You know we watch all the tourists. We can't afford to let them get cut up. There was tracers on that kid all the time."

"I didn't know."

"You sit there mad as hell, thinking I should have let you cut him. You know who you really would have cut? Jimmy Lincoln, that's who. We still got jails. Black judges know the law too. You get ruined for life, a thing like that. And what for?"

"To show the honkie a thing or two."

"Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy! What's to show? We got the whole city!"

"Why can't we live outside?"

"Because we don't *want* to. Those of us who can afford it, even, we stay here. They got laws against discrimination in this country. We stay here because we like it with our own kind. Even the black millionaires, and don't think there ain't plenty of 'em. We got a dozen men, they could *buy* Nyack. They stay."

"And why do you stay?"

"I'm in politics," said Powell 43X. "You know what a power base means? I got to stay where my people are. I don't care about living with the whites."

"You talk like you aren't even sore about it," James Shabazz said. "Don't you hate Whitey?"

"No. I don't hate no one."

"We all hate Whitey!"

"Only you hate Whitey," said Powell 43X. "And that's because you don't know nothin' yet. The time of hating's over, Jimmy. We got to be practical. You know, we got ourselves a good deal now, and we ain't gon' get more by burning nobody. Well, maybe the Stock Exchange moved to Connecticut, and a lot of banks and stuff like that, but *we run the city*. Black men. Black men hold the mortgages. We got a black upper crust here now. Fancy shops for black folk, fancy restaurants, black banks, gorgeous mosques. Nobody oppressing us now. When a mortgage gets foreclosed these days, it's a *black* man doin' the foreclosin'. Black men ownin' the sweatshops. Ownin' the hockshops. Good and bad, we got the city, Jimmy. And maybe this is the way it's meant to be: us in the cities, them outside."

"You talk like a Tom!"

"And you talk like a fool." Powell 43X chuckled. "Jimmy, wake up! We all Toms today. We don't do revolutions now."

"I go to the Audubon," James Shabazz said. "I listen to them speak. They talk revolution there. They don't sound like no Toms to me!"

"It's all politics, son. Talk big, yell for equality. It don't make sense to let a good revolution die. They do it for show. A man don't get anywhere politickin' in black New York by sayin' that everything's one hundred percent all

right in the world. And you took all that noise seriously? You didn't know that they just shoutin' because it's part of the routine? You went out to spear you a honkie? I figured you for smarter than that. Look, you all mixed up, boy. A smart man, black or white, he don't mess up a good deal for himself, even if he sometimes say he *want* to change everything all around. You full of hate, full of dreams. When you grow up, you'll understand. Our problem, it's not how to get out into the suburbs, it's how to keep Whitey from wanting to come back and live in here! We got to keep what we got. We got it pretty good. Who oppressing you, Jimmy? You a slave? Wake up! And now you understand the system a little better, clear your rear end outa my office. I got to phone up the mayor and have a little talk."

Jimmy Lincoln stumbled out, stunned, shaken. His eyes felt hot and his tongue was dry. The system? The *system?* How cynical could you get? The whole revolution phony? All done for show?

No. No. No. No.

He wanted to smash down the King Building with his fists. He wanted to see buildings ablaze, as in the old days when the black man was still fighting for what ought to be his.

I don't believe it, he thought. Not any of it. I'm not gonna stop fighting for my rights. I'm gonna live to see us overcome. I won't sell out like the others. Not me!

And then he thought maybe he was being a little dumb. Maybe Powell 43X was right: there wasn't anything left worth fighting for, and only a dopey kid would take the slogans at face value. He tried to brush that thought out of his head. If Powell 43X was right, everything he had read was a lot of crap. Stokely. Malcolm. All the great martyrs. Just so much ancient history?

He stepped out into the summer haze. Overhead, a hopterbus was heading for the suburbs. He shook his fist at it; and instantly he felt foolish for the gesture, and wondered why he felt foolish. And knew. And beneath his rebellious fury, began to suspect that one day he'd give in to the system too. But not yet. Not yet!

time to do my homework now

machine, spell everything right today's essay is on black power as a revolutionary force I am James Lincoln, Class 804, Frederick Douglass High School put that heading on the page yeah

the concept of black power as a revolutionary force first was heard during the time of oppression forty years ago, when

crap on that, machine we better hold it until I know what I going to say

I am James Shabazz age seventeen born august 13 1983 I am black I am afro I am beautiful

black is beautiful

let's start over, machine

let's make an outline first

black power its origin its development the martyrdoms and lynchings the first black mayors the black congressmen and senators the black cities and then talk about black power as a continuing thing, the never-ending revolution no matter what pols like 43X say, never give in never settle for what they give you never sell out

that's it, machine

black power

black

black is beautiful

THE LOST FACE

JOSEF NESVADBA

Nesvadba is a jolly man who writes with tongue-in-cheek joy. Almost all of his stories are set in Czechoslovakia, in the past, which might at first appear to be a very restricted stage. It is not, for his stories are timeless allegories about the nature of man. Such as this one.

A TRACT ON THE PARTICULARITIES OF MAN

There was a police cordon down either side of Huss Street; it was said that tanks had been called in. The murderer had barricaded himself inside the church and from there he could command the entire surroundings. They said he had got plenty of arms and ammunition in the choir loft. Only a while before he had scattered the police as they closed in on him; he had fired a heavy machine gun of the latest type—only a few weeks previously the Bren factory had submitted the weapon to the Ministry of Defense for approval. How had this new weapon got into the Dominican church? How had the murderer got hold of it—they said he had started by shooting down some of the poor brothers. Was this a political crime, or someone trying to steal the church treasures? Nobody really knew. The street was quiet now, and the police stationed down both sides thought the better of leaving their positions. Behind them the crowd grew thicker. People were expecting tanks to come, but there was no sound of them yet; everything was quiet, because the dead were no longer groaning.

He was sitting in the organist's seat; he had discovered that the choir loft had been so built that it could serve as a little fortress if need be—perhaps they had expected street fighting in Prague. He found loopholes cut through the

thick medieval masonry, and carried weapons up to them, ready. They were all up-to-date types, and he had enough ammunition for a couple of days. He could easily keep a whole army at bay, for he had even found bundles of hand grenades, under the steps—anti-tank grenades. He could easily keep a whole army at bay, but that was not in his mind. From time to time he glanced toward the side altar which had been destroyed by the explosion. He knew that was where danger might threaten. From time to time he sent a shot in the direction of the secret passage that ended there. He wanted to break the silence in the church; it was all around him, and it seemed all the more horrible because it was the silence that always surrounded you when you left the busy street and came inside, it was the ordinary everyday silence of the church.

He was writing. He was not fighting for his life here because he wanted to make a get-away, or because he wanted to start a revolution. He was fighting for the last few hours of his life because he wanted to write down his testimony before he gave up his life. A tract on the particularities of man. He was writing in pencil on the rough paper wrapped round the guns, because he could find no other. Sometimes his elbow came to rest on the keyboard of the organ, and the momentous squeak startled him. He gave a cursory glance over the street and down the nave, and reassuring himself that he was alone, he bent over his paper again. Fifteen men had already met their death that day. Was it worth it? Was his opinion on the particularities of man really so important?

Originally his name was Bartos, and while still a student he had spent a lot of time in the surgical wards. He was interested in plastic surgery, the patching up and changing of faces, the problems of regeneration. He did not bother his head much about the particularities of human beings in those days. In fact he hardly knew what he was like himself. He wanted to do his own work, to do the work that fascinated him, and to earn money. He needed money because he was poor. He had got to the Medical School on an Abyssinian scholarship. All those five years he believed he would be able to buy himself out of the bargain, and then there he was, graduated, and without the money to go

and celebrate the fact. It really looked as though he would have to go off to Africa; it was common knowledge that the young Czech doctors working in Abyssinia had a hard time of it. The Professor of Surgery lent him enough money to pay for deferment for one year. He hoped to earn enough in private practice to be able to pay it off by that time. He left the hospital and settled in the suburbs, in Vrsovice; there were a couple of rows of small houses built by a speculative builder for sale on easy installments. If you couldn't pay he turned out to be anything but easy, though, and turned you out in the street without a penny back. Things were going from bad to worse, and so the houses changed hands more and more frequently. Still, these people were better off than their neighbors, over the brook; those were slums where people fainted from hunger in broad daylight—and that was where Bartos' first patients came from. Of course they couldn't afford to pay. The doctor became a Good Samaritan and his debts grew. At night he would dream of scorpions, pythons, alligators, tse-tse flies and other horrible tropical pests.

There was a gang that used to meet in a corrugated iron pub run by a Chinaman on Thieves' Patch, and they lived in this slum, too. They talked not of unemployment and poverty, but of money and riches to be had for the taking by the bold. Their boss was one Urban, alias the Slasher, a man whose skull had been broken twice, with a crooked nose and two scars down his cheek—the most feared of all. Even the police on their beat round the Thieves' Patch preferred to keep out of his way. They did not want to provoke him unnecessarily. They hoped he would settle down, now he was going with Marion, as Molly Novotny called herself since she had opened her house for young ladies. A brothel-owner would not bother to go staging robberies, thought the police. They stopped keeping their eye on Slasher and when they reached the Industrial Bank they found they were too late.

The masked bandits had got in through the ceiling and silenced the burglar alarm; then they knocked the cashiers cold and dashed out into a dairyman's van they had waiting for them. They had stolen it that morning and turned it into an armored tank. They shot their way down the main

streets and somewhere in a quiet square changed over to two limousines, and disappeared. Prague had never seen such a bank robbery. It was obvious from the start who was responsible, without any investigation. Who else in the country had learned his trade in the Chicago underworld, but Urban-Slasher? Next morning posters bearing his photograph were plastered on all the hoardings and the papers all printed it too. It was so remarkable a face that everybody wondered why he bothered to run away at all. Even a child would recognize a face like that, without having it described to him. The same day the police threw a cordon round the Vrsovice slum and combed through every house and every shed. The gang wasn't born yesterday, though; they disappeared from Marion's place and there was no trace of them anywhere else. As if the earth had swallowed Urban up.

"He won't get far," people said to each other, "with a face like that."

AN OPERATION

That was what Dr. Bartos thought too, on his way home that evening. They had stuck one of the poster photographs of Urban on his wall, right under the notice saying Surgery Hours nine to four. The doctor had brought a new plate with him, having observed that high-class professional modesty made no impression in these parts. It was a large white plate with his name on it in bright red letters.

"It's got to make them think of blood," said the signwriter, and would have been happy to paint a broken arm in bandages, or a young doctor battling with a skeleton, or something striking like that, to catch prospective patients' eyes. Bartos felt the whole business was disgusting. He still couldn't get used to thinking of his profession as business. Anyway, he needed money to buy instruments for his surgery, and couldn't waste it on idiotic advertisements. For the moment all he had was a sofa for his patients, a stethoscope, and a small set of surgical instruments. He felt sad as he went in. Then he stopped dead. Behind his desk sat Urban the Slasher, and his pistol

was pointed at the doctor's waistline. Marion shut the door behind him quickly; she was a lanky blonde with eternally untidy hair and her language was that of the underworld.

"Not a squeak out of you. Mind your step or you'll be flat out."

She dug her revolver between his shoulder blades and he moved toward Urban. The gangster got to his feet and smiled; his attempt at politeness was even more menacing.

"You gotta help us, Doc, you won't be the worse off for it. We pay well for what we want . . ." He put down a few of the banknotes stolen from the Industrial Bank. "I need a new face . . ."

"What sort of a face?" Bartos asked, and squinted to see how much the gangster had put down.

"A completely new mug."

"Nobody will take these notes now. The numbers will have been noted. I suppose you want to try them out, and if they swipe me on the spot you'll know they're on the watch for the series, is that it?" Urban laughed.

"You can put the guns away, Marion. Doc's on our side." He shoved the banknotes back into his case. "If you don't like the look of those notes you can have gold." He took out a casket and placed it on the table. "Get an eyeful of this. You can change this stuff anywhere in the world you like, and no risk involved. As long as they don't catch me, of course—you'd have to share any holiday they gave me . . ." Bartos bent over the casket, and as he straightened up he looked the gangster over.

"I could lift your nose up a bit, smooth the wrinkles out and pull your ears in a bit closer to the head . . ."

"You must be mad!" Marion yelped. "That's what he used to look like five years ago. We're glad he *has* got ears like bats' wings and a hooked nose. Do you know what it cost?" and she took out a photograph of Urban as he looked originally. "There's a reward out for this fellow, all over the Balkans. Sofia post office robbery . . ."

"What do you suggest yourself, then?"

"That's just the trouble," Urban answered. "I've had nine plastic operations already. There's a complete underworld clinic for gangsters in Chicago, in Hamburg there are at least four famous surgeons working for us, and

Paris is full of 'em. They've all had a go at me. D'you think I let anyone break my nose for me in a fight? Me? Just take a look at this!" and he pulled up his sleeve and bent his arm to show biceps that looked like an advertisement for Alpa skin tonic. "I'm not letting anybody touch my face who's not first class. I've heard a lot about you in that line . . ."

"I haven't got the instruments or the stuff or anybody to help . . ."

"Don't let that worry you, I'm a midwife," said Marion.

"You don't even know what you want the face to look like. That's asking too much," and Bartos gave a longing look at the casket of gold.

"We know you've been experimenting. You can try your ideas out."

"Who told you about me?"

"We've got our informants. We wouldn't have come here without knowing what we were about."

"It's true." Bartos began to walk about the room uneasily. "I was working on a special method of face surgery for cases of fatal burns. We had a certain amount of success, too, because we discovered a liquid in which it was possible to preserve alive the face of a dead man, and place it on a different body, like a mask . . ."

"The eyes as well?" Urban asked eagerly.

"Perhaps. Certainly it can be done with the whole of the forehead, the jaws, nose and throat—even the voice changes a little in timbre. Of course it was all just beginning, and then I had to leave the hospital."

"We know all about that. That's why we came to you," said Urban. "I can tell you now that if it hadn't been for what we knew about your work on changing faces we'd never have made up our minds to have a go at the Industrial. Everybody knows you don't want to go to Africa, though, and so we said . . ."

"You are remarkably well informed. I'm afraid I can't do it with the few instruments I've got here, though. It goes against my conscience even to lance a boil with them."

They showed him the new equipment they had brought, waiting ready in the next room; there was even a portable spotlight.

"Good. But what about the new face? I need a corpse."

"We'll look after that. It's been held up a bit, but it will be here soon after midnight."

FATHER HOPSKIP

The Vrsovice slum was not the only one in Prague those days; you could find just the same sort of thing in Pankrác and Krč, in Kosire and Zlíchov and all around the edge of the town. All round the big towns of Europe these proofs of a crisis in our civilization were growing up, hovels where men and women of the twentieth century lived on a lower level than their forefathers in the Stone Age. In fact, here and there around Prague unemployed families did live in quarries and sandpits and caves, like prehistoric man.

There was an iron band of hungry and discontented men encircling the city and giving a headache to the powers that were; it was a band that it would take more than charity and a public Christmas Tree to break through.

The fathers of the church decided it would be dangerous to leave the care of the poor in untutored lay hands, and sent their own special missionaries to all these slum colonies, pastors to take charge of this strange, discontented flock. The best known of them was Father Hopskip, a Franciscan.

"A sad saint is a poor show. A poor show is but a sad saint," he used to say; Father Hopskip was a smiling middle-aged monk with his own idea of mission work. Before that he had worked in Africa in a part where cannibalism still flourished, and so he thought he was ready for anything he might find in a suburb of the capital. He got up football matches before mass and dances afterward, himself conducting a jazz band that used to play for church processions on saints' days. They christened him Father Hopskip when he composed a religious song in jazz style, to the words of a hymn to Mary.

He was faced with two important and powerful enemies in his godly work. There was the Hawks' organization, to which patriotic young men flocked in the hopes of making a career for themselves among the middle classes, and there were the Bolsheviks. Father Hopskip soon found how

to deal with the Hawks; he founded his own Eagles, which did everything the Hawks did and in addition were allowed to wear their blue shirts (the Hawks wore red) at church processions and ceremonies as well. It was more of a problem to cope with the Bolsheviks. At first he used to go to their meetings and preach about eternal bliss, Give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and so on, and then he started trying to beat them at their own game. He thought he could use the same methods as he had with the Hawks. So he founded his own Christian trade union and began to inquire into working conditions in the Vysočany factories. When the next strike broke out his demands were even higher than those of the Communists.

The factory owners were of course religious-minded men, some of them even went to church and a few might go to confession. It was a shock to them to see a priest in the Strike Committee among the reds. They hurried to the telephone.

Father Hopskip was called back to his monastery and taken to task; his superiors did not realize that he had really done his best, according to his lights, to care for the souls committed to his charge; they thought he had gone over to the church's worst enemy and intended to send him back to his cannibals in Africa. This time, however, Hopskip refused obedience, the shining virtue of the Franciscan order. He felt he had become too much at home in the slum, and he knew nobody else would look after his friends there as he had; he was convinced it was his duty to stay there, and back there he went, with a sadder smile and without his cassock, in ordinary ready-made clothes that were a bit too small for him, because when he entered the Order he had been a skinny young man. He wrote petitions for the oppressed poor, he took care of their sick, helped the sorrowing and demanded that the injured be given their rights. That was his work. He lived on scraps from the teashop, like the poorest of his flock. That was the life he wanted to live. He lived in a little hovel that might have been a dogkennel once, and instead of crockery he had a biggish empty tin; he ate every other day. Soon he was thin enough for his old suit, his face changed and aged; but one thing never changed—his smile; it was his smile that made

some people think of him as a saint.

He wanted to be near his flock in all things, and so he went with them on political demonstrations and was even brought to the police station three times, where they shouted at him like at any other unemployed rioter. The priest was not afraid of them, though; he asked no more of life than to be able to help people. He owned nothing and so he feared nobody. Not even the police or the gangsters.

He forgot that his smiling face might be worth something on its own account.

The corpse they brought to Bartos' surgery after midnight was nobody else but Father Hopskip.

A CAREER

When he got to Vienna, he took the name Bartosch. And he was successful. He had barely been at Professor Kirchenbruch's hospital six months when he published his first papers in the medical press. Women fell for him, his colleagues praised him, and he seemed to have no enemies. Why should he? A man as rich as he was had no need to fight for his position and try ot outdo the others. He took no pay for what he did at the Hospital, and in addition sent charming little gifts to the Professor, the matron and the instrument nurse after one of his difficult operations. He had the latest model in cars and a luxury flat in a fashionable part of the city. After one of the meetings of the Surgeons' Society Kirchenbruch invited him to supper. There he met the professor's daughter Daffodil, who differed from her father in being beautiful, never swearing, and never chewing dead cigars. She was a young lady brought up to expect a wealthy suitor. Even in Vienna Bartosch never forgot that his aim in life was to perfect his epoch-making idea; he was working out a new method of regeneration, but he made the discovery that it is better to do one's research work in comfort than in poverty. Marriage to Daffodil would ensure that comfort and that career in the future too. Her mother was not too pleased, she had hoped for an aristocrat or an American millionaire, but the Professor recalled that he himself had

begun life as an army surgeon doing the dirtiest work, and declared that the main thing was money and talent, and the young man appeared to have plenty of both; he did not care two hoots for the young man's family tree. Bartosch was an orphan from the back of beyond and there was hardly anyone in Vienna who could even pronounce the name of his birthplace. That was all the more reason for dressing with elegance and buying the most expensive presents. After receiving a ring adorned with a large pearl, Mrs. Kirchenbruch began to smile at him. Daffodil had been smiling at him from the very first.

One afternoon he took her straight from a game of tennis to his flat; a week later all Vienna knew of their engagement. The papers published his photograph alongside Daffodil's, thought up a family tree for him, and made so much of the engagement that it put the news of the persecution of opposition parties in Germany right into the shade. He had a new dinner jacket made, of dark blue; and yet he almost came late that evening. Marion delayed him, managing to get into his flat to see him.

"I beg your pardon, madam, I really am in a hurry . . ."

She stood still in the doorway, terrified and hunted.

"You've got to help us. You've got to save us. A dreadful thing has happened. The Slasher is changed beyond all recognition!" she practically screamed.

"That's what you wanted, isn't it? That's what you paid me so much for."

"He behaves different, though. He's quite a different man. You know, we had no idea how famous that priest was."

"What priest?"

She told him all about the corpse.

"You can't imagine it—everybody in the slums knows him, all round Prague. The kids and the old women start kissing his hands when they see him. Just think of it—a robber and a murderer and they start kissing his hands. He doesn't half take to it too. The men are always inviting him to their meetings and he's gone and got himself mixed up in their troubles with the bosses. A shareholder in three Chicago brothels fighting for the betterment of humanity! He's always visiting the sick and cripples and giving alms

to the beggars. It's getting dreadfully noticeable. Where would a poor mutt like Hopskip get so much money from? You sewed that face on to him so well that I can't even recognize him in bed! Anyway, he'd like to spend the time playing with his rosary instead of me. He won't have anything to do with the old gang, keeps on telling us we ought to reform and repent of our old sins. It's awful, Doc, you can't think . . ."

"I didn't choose the corpse." Bartosch was impatient. He'd have to get rid of her by force if she wouldn't go of her own accord. What would his future mother-in-law say if she could see the company he was in!

"I can see now that we ought to have asked you about it first, but Urban picked on the sky-pilot himself. They'd had a few words, Hopskip wanted to save Slasher's soul and wouldn't leave him alone. He even preached to me one day, all about Mary Magdalene. I thought we couldn't find a more innocent mug in the place. And look how he's getting his own back on us!"

"What d'you mean? He isn't threatening anyone, is he?"

"You call that nothing when he's always on at us to go and give ourselves up? And when he hands over the whole of the loot to the blind? One of these days he'll be giving the whole lot of us up to the police for the sake of our souls' salvation . . ."

"I shouldn't think so," Bartosch replied, pushing her out of the place in front of him. "I've never heard of a new face changing a grown man's character like that. Things like character and tastes and inclinations are the result of the environment in which a man grows up and can't be affected by his face."

He left her standing there on the pavement and during the evening he forgot all about her. There was champagne to drink and Daffodil was beautiful to look upon. She had an angelic smile. In an hour Kirchenbruch had drunk the whole lot of them under the table. He did it in the grand manner. He managed to guzzle down most of the food himself, too. Bartosch sat at his right hand and had to keep up with him in everything. It was a great honor for him; the Professor called him "My dear Bartosch" and after midnight began calling him "Son." Earlier on he had

introduced the young doctor to the woman Minister of Health, but she was the first to get drunk. Bartosch thought that day marked the beginning of his career, but he was wrong. It was the end.

Next morning the Professor began operating himself without waiting for his assistant as he usually did. His secretary could not understand it and kept giving Bartosch puzzled looks. In his consulting room he found the ring with the large pearl. Returned without explanation. All the gifts he had ever presented to the Professor or to Daffodil were there too. He hurried into the operating theater and did not notice the two men in bowlers sitting modestly in a corner. He thought they were relatives of the patient being operated on.

The Professor had a mask on, looking fixedly at his work, and answered Bartosch shortly.

"I will have no thieves in my hospital, young man. Nor will I have an adventurer in my family. The engagement is broken off. It serves me right. It won't make me any less good at removing people's appendices. Take your things and get out. They're waiting for you out there . . ." He was hurt, miserable and angry. The instruments seemed blunt and he threw them about the room. The nurse's eyes were full of tears.

"There must be some mistake . . ." Bartosch ventured.

"You can explain that to the police. And you can explain how you happen to be in possession of jewelry that came from a bank robbery. They thought it was a professional thief and they found out it was you. Now get out or I'll call the detectives in here myself and I shan't mind in the least if they infect the sterility of the operating theater. You've infected my honor, you blackguard." He turned his back on the young man.

Bartosch went out in a daze. For a moment he sat down on a stretcher in the vestibule; the outline of his pursuers could be seen against the ground glass of the door. They were waiting for him, sure that he could not escape. He thought hard. That meant that Slasher had really changed and that Marion had been right. He had given up his boon companions to the police. He had declared the corpse of the dead priest was his too, so that he made on it twice

over. Whether his motives were cunning or pious, he could only save himself. Nobody would believe fairy tales about new faces sewn on a man, not even Kirchenbruch knew anything about Bartosch's method, yet. Naturally. The only one who had gone round spending the loot from the Industrial Bank was he, Bartosch. How careless he had been! He had no alibi for that evening, either. He really had been under the same roof with Urban and Marion, and he obviously had some of the loot on him. He would be convicted and go to jail and that would be the end of his career. Then a fit of anger came over him. He was not a rabbit to be caught so easily. He would find a way of holding his own against that international crook whose face he saw before him every evening, because he had brought it with him to Vienna preserved in the special fluid, for further experiment. He told the operating theater attendant that he felt unwell and asked him to wheel him back to the consulting room.

"That's what comes of celebrating your engagement," the old man grinned. "Nobody ought to drink more than they can carry, Doctor. Like animals. They've got more sense . . ." and he wheeled Bartosch past the unsuspecting detectives. He covered his face with the sheet, and then alone in his room jumped off the trolley and presented the old man with everything the Professor had returned to him. He fled down the fire escape with the pearl ring in his pocket. It was all he possessed now. He knew that he must not go back to his flat. He wanted to ring up Daffodil but the moment she heard his voice she rang off. She was too much of a fool to understand, the goose. Who could he turn to? Who would help him? Where could he run away and hide? Everyone in Vienna knew him from the evening papers; there were plenty who envied him his wealthy bride; and they would all recognize him now the police were after him.

He thought of Rosen, a young doctor who had come from Cracow. From time to time they worked together; Kirchenbruch was always rude to him. He lived in cheap lodgings somewhere on the edge of the city.

"I knew you'd come," Rosen said in Polish, in case the landlady was listening. "You can rely on me . . ."

Of course he had heard the whole story already—all about the bandit who had wormed his way into the Professor's hospital and his home—it was all over the town. There was even talk of questions in Parliament; the authorities would be asked to exercise closer control over foreign doctors.

"They look at me as though I were a murderer too . . ." Rosen laughed. "The same goes for anybody with a Slav accent today."

"But I'm innocent, I tell you . . ." Bartosch said desperately and unconvincingly. So he told Rosen the whole story; he told him the secret of his experiments and the regenerative fluid. Everything.

"Can you prove it?"

"Of course not. Everybody will say I've invented it. It's too fantastic and unheard of and unproven. If Slasher declares things are the other way round there's no way I can prove it. They can't find a scar on his face, it was a wonderful piece of work I did on him. Call the police, but not yet—in the morning. I'd like to get some sleep first. Why, oh why didn't I go to Abyssinia and shoot lions! Now I'll swing for it."

"You won't." Rosen gave a mysterious smile. "You can get away."

"How?"

"Let me have the key to your flat."

"What for?"

"You'll see," said Rosen as he took the keys out of the other's pocket himself. "Where have you put that crook's face?"

"No, not that!" Bartosch sprang up in horror, remembering what the man had looked like.

"It's the only way out," said Rosen and slipped away. He was right. It was the only way. The radio had already broadcast the description of Bartosch and asked the public to help in the capture of a dangerous criminal. Careful! He may be armed. In the next room he could hear the landlady spreading the previous day's newspaper out in front of her for a good read; it was full of his engagement. She was gazing in horror at his photograph. If only she guessed that the dangerous criminal was here in her own flat, the other

side of that glass door. He hurried into a corner of the room and turned the light off. There he sat in the darkness facing a mirror. He gazed at his face in the shadows. A high brow and small chin, a gentle, polite expression; that face was no good to him now. He was almost glad to hear Rosen coming in again. He took the bag containing Urban's face from him almost lovingly. Then the two of them hurried out to a taxi which was waiting. Bartosch pulled his hat down over his former face.

A CRIMINAL

Even his voice was different. It had become rougher and deeper. His old face had crumbled away; Rosen was not so good at the job as he was, and had to do the best he could in the conditions at his disposal in the little operating room of an abortionist on the outskirts of the town. The pearl ring was barely enough to pay for the use of it, even so. His convalescence was slow, and it took Bartosch a long time to get used to his new face. Rosen just could not get used to it at all. Bartosch could see his friend was cooler and cooler toward him, and it made him sad.

"We ought not to have done it," he said one evening when the face was completely healed. "Forgive me."

"I ought to thank you, not forgive you . . ." Bartosch gave him one of his horrible smiles and held out his hand.

"No, I can't . . ." said Rosen and went out as though he were afraid of his friend. He did not shake hands.

Nor was he the only one. The next few weeks Bartosch found people avoiding him. Four times a day he had to produce his false papers and show them to the suspicious police. He could hear the names children called after him and the whispers of the woman.

"He looks like a murderer."

He could not get a job. Not even on a building site. All the foremen were afraid to take him on.

"I don't like brawls among the men," was the frequent excuse, and they showed him out. He spent the night under bridges and in dosshouses, got infested with lice and came near to starving. He was coming to the end of the money

Rosen had given him. Once, when he did not know what to do next, he tried to see Daffodil. She would not let him in, but gave him a bowl of hot soup on the doorstep. He stood outside the hospital and watched them all pass him by, the nurses, his former colleagues, Kirchenbruch in his car, even Rosen passed by without recognizing him now. Bartosch must have fitted his face, now. He went sadly back to the slums. Perhaps it had been a mistake to try the better suburbs, the decent jobs. He ought to try his luck in the underworld, try to find the local Thieves' Patch. He felt he was retreating, that he was giving in to his face, giving up his bourgeois prejudices. He went into a beerhouse he'd heard men talk about under the bridges. It had a bad reputation, there were brawls there two or three times a night, and only the bravest would show themselves there.

That lot didn't hang me, maybe these will stick a dagger through me, he thought to himself desperately.

Nobody insulted him in the pub. They greeted him politely and attentively. In the last few weeks Bartosch had taken to walking with swinging gait and his hands in his pockets; his cap was pushed low over his eyes.

"A pint and some rum to wash it down with," he said as roughly as he knew how. There was a woman at his side in a moment.

"You aren't from around here, are you?" she cuddled up to him.

He pushed her roughly away; he could see he was being watched from all the tables round. The young fellows there had faces as murderous as his own; some of them were wearing brown shirts with red armbands and a funny crooked cross on them.

"A Nazi or a bolshie?" One of them came to sit by him. "We need chaps like you. Join us and save the world!"

"Save your own bellies, you mean," a chap by the bar shouted, a thin bony blonde with reddened eyes. He got a tankard at his head, but there must have been some of his friends at the table by the window, and a full-scale fight was on. The pubman turned the lights off and it was a free for all until the Black Maria was heard drawing up outside. Then everybody started running. Bartosch ran alongside the brown-shirt who had come to sit by him. He must have

been in command of the others, because they got hold of a car for him at once and wanted to take him to hospital when they saw he was bleeding from a wound.

"Where to, though? He came from Nuremberg yesterday and nobody is to know he is in Vienna." Meanwhile the commander lost consciousness. Someone had stabbed him with a pocket knife, in the shoulder, right up to the handle. The blood was soaking through his sleeve.

"I can take care of him, I'm a doctor," Bartosch said firmly. The Aesculapean vow binds you to save every life, even that of the worst murderer. Not that Bartosch had any idea of politics then.

The drove him to where they were staying. They behaved toward him with respect, clicking their heels and raising their arms in salute as though he was a high officer. Judging from his face he ought to be. So that was how Bartosch became an SA doctor.

A few weeks later Hitler occupied Austria. Rewards were handed out where they were deserved. Once more Bartosch was presented to the woman Minister of Health. This time he was wearing a brown shirt and the nonsensical badge. She nearly fainted when she had to shake hands with him. At the Kirchenbruch's party after his engagement had been announced she had ignored him.

This world belongs to the Slashers, thought Bartosch, as he was led through the noble halls of the Ministry. The Slashers who have gone in with the right party. He still could not get used to his adventure, or think about it very consequently. He had been hungry and destitute; now he was sitting in a comfy job, he was powerful as he had never been in his life; people trembled before him, and Jews got off the pavement as he approached.

He could see there must be something wrong somewhere. He had not grown up in order to kill, but for something very different; he could never stand killing and looting, torture and violence. But he had not chosen this party himself. Was everyone the toy and puppet of their own faces, the creature of a pick of development in the embryo, a caprice of nature, due to some injury or toxemia in his mother during pregnancy? Or were they the result of inherited characteristics from both sides? That it could be

possible to transform a man by putting another mask on him, as if life were a masked ball, was after all impossible, unthinkable.

"I'm not an evil man," Bartosch would say to himself in his office. "I don't want to have anything to do with these people, even if they want me. I must get back to my friends, to Rosen and Daffodil and . . ." he suddenly realized how few friends he had. Even so, he wasn't going to fall in with these brownshirts with their torturing and killing of prisoners.

"Inspection of Professor Kirchenbruch's hospital," one of his bodyguard announced, standing at the door with his arm up in salute. "A Jewish-Bolshevik plutocrat who supports our enemies," the man added confidentially.

"I don't know so much about that," said Bartosch more to himself, as he took his seat in the car. He decided that the time had come to show his true face, his real character. He would save Kirchenbruch and clear his reputation, throw his Nazi colleagues out of the place, make a grand gesture—perhaps some of them would recognize him. Of course, he had not been one for grand gestures in the old days when they had worked together. None of them had much of an idea of what Bartosch really was like. He realized it now, and the thought hurt him. In those days his life had been dull and ordinary, unremarkable and no good to anybody. His gangster existence had done that much for him. He would stand up against the gangsters, side by side with Kirchenbruch, Rosen and his friends in Prague.

The Professor received him with right arm raised, a badge on his coat. He did not recognize his former assistant. He took him round the hospital as though it were a barracks.

"Providence has sent the Führer to us . . ." he said, and took Bartosch home with him for a glass of French brandy. He was not allowed to drink himself. "Gallstones, I get attacks all the time."

"The new era is not to your taste, I suppose. You are simply finding excuses for not drinking the Führer's health . . ." Bartosch heard himself say. He humiliated his former chief and it gave him pleasure to do it.

"God forbid! The Führer above all. To the Führer!"

Kirchenbruch exclaimed and poured himself a full glass. His wife brought Daffodil in to be introduced. They were both scared stiff. Bartosch went on proposing toasts and made Kirchenbruch drunk because he had to keep up with his guest. They had exchanged roles and now Bartosch was on top. He enjoyed it. "To the Führer!" he said for the umpteenth time, and a few questions about operating earned him the professor's respect. "You won't be inviting the Minister to supper again," he said, "we had to arrest her last night, along with a few others," and he named several of the people who had been invited to the famous engagement party. They were more and more afraid of him. How had he found out everything about them? Mrs. Kirchenbruch sat wringing her hands and unable to get to her feet. After the twentieth toast the professor wheeled away on the trolley he rememberd so well. Then he sent Mrs. Kirchenbruch to her husband.

"That's not what we expect of our professors in the new era," he said roughly. "Our men must be real men. They must be able to carry their drink . . ." He was alone with Daffodil. "Well, when is our wedding to be?" he asked again. He wanted to say it in his old voice, gently and softly, he wanted to play the lover and surprise her with all the details he and only he remembered. The day they had first kissed and where they went to play tennis and how she had behaved when he carried her off home with him that day. He wanted to tell her everything and unburden his troubles, ask her advice. But he could not say anything but another: "Now then, when's it to be?" He shouted it as though he was in the barrack yard. When he moved closer to her Daffodil fainted. He left the place, knowing now that he was the prisoner of his own face.

A LAST ATTEMPT

In the months that followed there was no more conscientious and sterner commissar. He enjoyed ordering the famous Viennese professors about, men whose names were God to doctors all over the world. Bartosch yelled at them, and they trembled before him even if he said

nothing. You could tell who he was from the way he looked. There were few petitioners to be found in his office; he was notorious for having them all arrested. That was the shortest way to deal with complaints. He was surprised to find one day he had an unusual visitor.

"A Jewish swine . . ." his Tyrolese adjutant said loudly.

Rosen, thin and emaciated, stepped into the room. There was a plaster on his forehead and his arm was in a sling.

"Rosen?"

"My name is Rosenzweig," his old friend said, not daring even to sit down. "I was forced to call myself Rosen for professional reasons." Bartosch could not help laughing. Well, well, so the great humanist Kirchenbruch had been as much of a racist as Hitler!

"What do you want," he asked sternly.

"I did not think you would speak to me like that. I want to get away. I've been held for interrogation twice, I've been attacked in the street, I've no job, no money and nowhere to live . . ."

"Just like me when you'd finished with my face."

"I'd helped you, though . . ." Rosen was begging him.

"Don't expect gratitude." Bartosch shouted at him. "Nobody's going to believe your fairy tales. I've grown out of gratitude, along with all the other things that went with my old face." He found he was no longer capable of speaking normally and quietly. "I've changed, Rosenzweig, I'm a different man, now."

"That's nonsense, that's impossible nonsense. The surgeon's knife cannot change a man. If our character is to be formed by our outward appearance we might just as well all be killed at birth. What would be the good of will, talent, effort? The best people would be the aristocrats, there'd be superior and inferior races, hunchbacks would be shot, everything would be inherited, talent, intelligence, character, tastes. Humanity would come to a standstill, there could be no progress. Man would be the plaything of fate. That's impossible."

"You're a Communist!" Bartosch yelled at him, for he had begun to learn the political ABC.

"That's still a long way from Communism. But if I admit

that society and environment, which are things we can change, are without influence on my development, then I am forced to believe the Fascists . . ."

"And you don't like the idea of that, do you, you dirty Jew?" Bartosch rang his bell. "Well, I do." The guards came running in.

"No, you are wrong. You have as much strength of will as any other man, you can take your stand against your lot, you can stand up against . . ." A kick in the belly brought him down. He writhed on the floor for a moment, then dashed away from the door and leaped out of the window. His skull was smashed on the pavement.

That was not what Bartosch had intended to achieve. His old face spoke up again. He told them to bring him all the literature about genetics, heredity and acquired characteristics; a problem he had always thought of as remote, and which he suddenly realized was the most important thing in the lives of all of us. His Gruppenführer broke in on his thoughts.

"Congratulations, comrade," said the Nazi, whom he recognized as the man who had sat by him in the pub that day. "We listened to everything you said to that Rosenzweig. You behaved loyally and you have our confidence." His superior sat down and offered him a cigarette. "Now I can tell you the decision that has been taken at the very top. You have a new and secret mission. You will be going to Prague."

Bartosch was given diplomatic papers and set off next morning. He was no longer in a brown shirt, but for the first time for months he was dressed in a dark suit and in his suitcase he had evening dress. His secret mission was a simple one. He was to commit a murder. There was an engineer hiding out in the Sázava woods, who had a transmitter that he used to rouse the Czechs against the Germans and the Führer. He had to be silenced. Besides evening dress Bartosch was also equipped with a pistol and silencer, and a list of trusted collaborators. Bohemia touched him to the heart and there were tears in his eyes as they passed through Tábor. Nobody spoke to him, though; nobody even came to sit in his carriage.

Now I must finally make up my mind, Bartosch said to

himself. I've just let myself be carried along, I've questioned people and shouted at people. Now I'm supposed to start killing. I didn't kill Rosen myself. It was suicide. There's not a drop of blood on my hands. I have never approved of murder. I even took part in a petition campaign against capital punishment when I was a student. And now I'm supposed to murder an innocent man. No! It is out of the question. I simply shall not turn up at the office in Prague. I shall run away and hide—maybe I could hide around Thieves' Patch. I do not believe that I cannot overcome my face. The Slasher has certainly got his pious face under control by now and become an ordinary collection-plate thief, if he's not in jail for stealing church treasures. His saintly appearance has certainly not reformed him, and my criminal face must not be allowed to ruin me.

He got out of the train on Smíchov station and put his suitcase in the Left Luggage Office. He took a tram to Vrsovice. There were new houses there now, and the old slum looked much improved. The armaments race had helped to heal the wounds of the economic crisis. Bartosch went straight to Marion's place without pausing to think that it would frighten the life out of her to see the face of her former lover. She no longer lived in her establishment, though; it was being run by a fat elderly woman with one of her upper teeth missing.

"Novotny? She's in jail, didn't you know? Twelve years she got, for that Industrial Bank robbery; they all got it good and proper—the leader got away to Vienna they say. And where might you have come from?" she asked with coquettish suspicion, and called the best of her bunch of girls forward; she did not even look too dirty.

"Berlin," said Bartosch, "I'm from the Franciscan Congregation and I'm looking for the priest they call Father Hopskip." The young lady moved away with a squeal.

"Father Hopskip? He doesn't come here anymore." The lady manager crossed herself. "The man's an absolute saint. He has nothing but bread and water, in the monastery, and sleeps on the floor and prays day and night. They say he works miracles; some of the women

around here have touched things he's laid his hands on, and their prayers have been answered. A real saint, he is."

"Don't they know that in Berlin?" the not-too-dirty young lady asked in surprise.

"Probably not," replied Bartosch and hurried away. He knew he was no longer safe there; the women would pass on all they knew about him to the plainclothesmen within two hours. He made for the tram, hurrying past the pleasant houses on the other side of the brook, where the fathers of families were watering their gardens as though the slum were not right there under their noses and as though Jews were not jumping out of windows in Vienna.

There was nothing to be done, he thought as he sat in the tram. There was no getting away from your own face. If his new face had turned the Slasher, professional murderer and bandit that he was, into a saint, then the crook's face he had got now would make Bartosch a murderer. There was no way out; everything worked together to convince him, there was nothing to give him hope and nobody to join forces with. There was nobody else he could turn to in Prague but the Nazi boss, nowhere to go but toward his first crime.

"We've brought off everything in the country," the Nazi smiled complacently. "Our friends are sitting pretty in the War Ministry. Not a mouse stirs without someone coming to report it to us. They're afraid of the Bolsheviks, that's what we make capital out of. Of course we've got the right lads for more delicate tasks; we're keeping them in readiness when the day comes. We have to keep them completely secret, of course. You will have one of our best workers to help you in the job you're going to do now. He doesn't know the first thing about Nazism, but he's capable of anything. He's already got rid of several awkward people for us. Nothing was discovered, of course. Absolutely trustworthy."

Of course it was the Slasher. They took him out to the monastery to meet him. He had made good use of his new face to cover what he was doing, but his old self, twisted and deformed by a life of crime, had been the stronger influence; he had joined the new gangsters.

"I don't blame you," Bartosch explained when he saw

the priest could not get a word out as he looked at his own old face.

"Just look round you—how many people are fighting evil and injustice, in no better straits than you; they're fighting to change life, to save it. And you shoot them for that. You are the worst of all criminals. I should never have said I was against capital punishment . . ." Slasher in his monk's habit wanted to shout for help, and tried to hide the maps and plans he had been taking out of a folding prayerstool. Bartosch shot first, from the brand-new pistol he had brought across the frontier hidden in the folds of his evening dress. Others came running in, and the shooting spread. He ran along a secret passage linking the monastery with the nearby church, and came out in front of the high altar just as an explosion blocked the passage behind him. They must be an important lot, if they went to such lengths, he thought. Then he saw them coming toward him up the nave; from the cover of the pillars they shot at him, and the praying women screamed. He ran toward a confessional and hid by the side altar. He saw two bullets whizz past and scratch the face of a wooden angel of vengeance. He found a door leading upward, and shut it behind him. That gained him some time. The stairs were narrow and his pursuers did not dare to follow him. Up in the choir loft he found a civilian, who put his hands up timidly, handed him a key and motioned toward the arms dump with his eyes. The shooting started again, from below. They must have brought a light machine gun in. They got the civilian in the back and he toppled over into the body of the church. Bartosch carefully unlocked the hiding place; he was in the choir loft, but it had obviously been turned into a little fortress, perhaps they had expected street fighting in Prague. The police called up to him, speaking through a megaphone, asking him to surrender. He scattered them with a heavy machine gun of the latest type—only a few weeks previously the Bren factory had submitted the weapon to the Ministry of Defense for approval; it was to have been sent to Berlin next day. The agents knew all about things like that. He found loopholes cut through the thick medieval masonry, and carried weapons up to them, ready. They were all up-to-date types,

and he had enough ammunition for a couple of days. He could easily keep a whole army at bay, for he had even found bundles of hand grenades, under the steps—anti-tank grenades. He could easily keep a whole army at bay, but that was not in his mind. From time to time he glanced toward the side altar which had been destroyed by the explosion. He didn't want to be taken by surprise from the monastery. He knew that was where danger might threaten. From time to time he sent a shot in the direction of the secret passage. He wanted to break the silence in the church; it was all around him, and it seemed all the more horrible because it was the silence that always surrounded you when you left the busy street and came inside; it was the ordinary everyday silence of the church.

He was writing. He was not fighting for his life here because he wanted to start a revolution. He was fighting for the last few hours of his life because he wanted to write down his testimony before he gave up his life. A tract on the particularities of man.

MARY AND JOE

NAOMI MITCHISON

Lady Mitchison is a woman of great talent who carries her years lightly. Sister of J. B. S. Haldane, daughter of J. S. Haldane, adopted mother of a chief of the Botswana, member of the Highland Council, author of fact and fiction—and a fine cook. Daughter of the nineteenth century, she is a spokesman of the twentieth. Author of one fine science fiction novel, Memoirs of a Spacewoman, *she is working on another novel that develops some of the concepts of this taut, grim but beautiful story.*

Her husband looked up from his newspaper. "Jaycie seems to be getting into trouble again," he said.

She nodded. "Yes. I had a short letter from her. I wish—oh, Joe, I do wish she could take things a bit more lightly!"

"Get herself married," said Joe.

Mary didn't exactly answer that, but went on: "I know so well what she feels about politics. After all, we both had liberal sympathies in our time—hadn't we, Joe? But—it's more than politics to her. Much more. And when she's feeling like that she seems to forget all about human relationships."

Her husband grinned a bit. "Not like Simon. Nor yet my little Martha! What time did that kid get back from her date? Oh, well . . ." He finished his coffee. "I must be off, Mary. I'll take the car—right? How's your stuff going?"

"Not bad," she said. "We've got all the routine tests for the new skin grafts to check before we can get on. These internal ones are a bit tricky."

"Poor old rabbits!" said Joe lightly and shrugged himself into his coat. He respected Mary's work, knew about it, but somehow didn't care much for it.

Mary, however, was thinking about the next series of

experiments and checks while she cleared up the breakfast dishes. Dear Joe, couldn't he ever learn to put his stubs into the ashtray! She left a tidy place for Martha, who was running the bath upstairs and singing to herself, saw that there was plenty of cereal left in the packet, and all the time the shape of the work was clear in her mind.

The basic genetics were reasonably simple, though not as simple as they had seemed ten years earlier. But then, nothing was! At its simplest, blood from two different blood groups, with all that this implies, cannot live together in the same body. Equally, cells of one genetic constitution will not accept cells of another—and are all genetically different, except for identical twins and (if we happen to be laboratory mice) pure-line strains. If living tissue is grafted onto a host animal, the grafted cells produce antigens and the host cells in reply produce antibodies which destroy the grafter cells. As long as the cells come from genetically different individuals, this natural process goes on. But it can be checked; this had to be done for surgical transplants. The host cells producing the antibodies could be killed by radiation, or checked by a series of drugs which most hospitals of that period called XQ, or else could be, in a sense, paralyzed by certain methods of presentation.

All this meant a long series of experiments, often involving the death of the host animal; yet they had to go on before the essential knowledge was complete and could be used on humans without dangerous reactions. Grafts from a genetically different individual can take in certain favored situations, such as the cornea of the eye and in bone structure; some organs transplanted better than others. The choice of donor mattered a lot; Mary was working on this, especially on the possibility of using an anti-lymphatic serum. In practical terms, to delay rejection by the antibodies was important; but this involved a series of experiments, mostly during the last year or two on rabbits *in utero*, with typed donors. Naturally, the parent-to-child transfer was not likely to be successful, even at a very immature stage, since there was necessarily a great difference between the genes of one parent and the genes of the child which were mixed with another quite different set.

Sometimes, too, she worked with individual graft hosts, not only *in utero*, but at a still earlier stage, in the egg. One experiment, with all the apparatus which it involved, and which Mary rather enjoyed devising, led to another. This was the field in which she had worked for a couple of decades, exchanging views with other workers in the same field and occasionally going to conferences when the family could spare her. It was an absorbing and in many ways a happy life.

On her way to the big teaching hospital where she worked she bought another newspaper. It looked as if these strikes were going to develop the way Jaycie had said they would in her letter. It is odd, she thought to herself, how often things do work out the way Jaycie says. But if they bring in troops. . . . She couldn't really think about it sensibly. She hadn't got the data. Jaycie hadn't been home for six months; it wasn't that she didn't get on with the others, and dear Joe always going out of his way to be nice and welcoming, but—well, sometimes it seemed as if nothing they did at home was worth her attention. She would try, especially with Martha, yes, she would try, but it was like a clumsy grown-up talking to kids! Jaycie could be annoying. Yes. And yet—people followed her. A great many people really. And whatever happened her mother loved her.

The newspapers were beginning to get on to Jaycie now. They had ignored her at first. Put things down to anyone and everything else. After all, it was a bit awkward for them having to do with a woman who was beautiful but apparently had no sex life; they didn't know what to try and smear her with. But now—Mary wished she knew, wished she could read between the lines. Were they frightened? She had been too busy these last ten years or so to think much about politics. When Jaycie turned up: yes. But when she left, Mary went back to her work thankfully as though to something simple and relatively clean—though some people wouldn't think so! Back to thinking about problems of genetics and immunology. And an undertow in her mind always busy on the other children and dear Joe and something especially nice for supper and perhaps a show at the weekend and the new hyacinth bulbs

to plant. But now it looked as if all Jaycie had said last time was going to develop into something she would need to think about, something real. And dangerous.

But this was the hospital stop. She had come by bus, for it was an easy journey and she didn't care for driving herself. She was apt to get abstracted and slow down, so that people hooted at her, but here in the bus she could work. She knew the conductor would call to her, amused if she was deep in calculations when it came to her stop: "This is you, doctor!"

She got out, nodded to a colleague, and walked a bit abstractedly along the corridor with the marble bust of the Founder, on which young Bowles had, as usual, hung his hat. There was a lot of routine work and checking. She could do it with half her mind. But instead of concentrating on the next phase she kept on thinking about Jaycie. Had she done the right thing to tell her? Had she? Had she? Or would it have been better to let her believe the same thing dear Joe believed, the story about a sudden overwhelming fascination—women's magazine stuff really. But easy to make up and equally easy to believe. Much easier than—whatever the truth was. You couldn't expect anyone to believe that and still remain normal. And she had so wanted that: the lovely solid, warm, normalness of dear Joe. If she hadn't told Joe the lie to which he never afterward referred they mightn't have had their life together, they mightn't have had Simon and darling naughty Martha. No. No. Any other way didn't bear thinking about.

Yet perhaps she should have told Jaycie the same—lie. If she had done that, Jaycie too might have grown up to be a normal girl. She might have fallen in love and married, and then there would have been grandchildren, lovely normal babies and the happiness that goes with them. Or if Jaycie hadn't felt like that she could have done some absorbing professional job. She could have been a scientist like her mother perhaps or an architect like Simon, one of the thousand satisfying things which are open to modern men and women alike.

Why had she told Jaycie? Mary thought back, frowning. It was that time when Jaycie was so depressed about being

a woman, about the undoubted fact that there were rather fewer females than males of undoubted genius. That it is so much harder for a woman to take the clear, unswerving line toward—whatever it might be—because women are ordinarily more pliable, more likely to be interrupted, more aware of other people's feelings and apt to be deflected by them: especially if they are loved people. She remembered Jaycie sitting curled up on the sofa, her chin dropped on her hand; and she herself had been standing beside the fire, so much wanting to help, but knowing that Jaycie needed more than the comfort of a mother's arm around her.

Jaycie had said: "I suppose, Mother, that's what it means to be a Son of God, as they used to say. You go straight to the light. You know." And Mary had said yes and had felt something gripping at her, a rush of adrenaline no doubt! Jaycie had said: "No daughters of God, of course!" and had laughed a little. And then she had stood up and looked straight toward her mother and said: "But I too, I know. Directly."

And then Mary had to speak, had to tell her. It was, after all, true. And since then Jaycie had never curled up again on the sofa. Never seemed to want the comforting arms. And Mary had hardly liked to touch her. Only on the rare nights when Jaycie slept at home Mary used to go up to her room when she was asleep, so deeply and peacefully it seemed, and stand there and want to take the one who had been her baby into her arms and share and share and comfort. But luckily she had managed the self-control never to do anything of the kind. Because if she had tried it Jaycie wouldn't ever have come home again. She was fairly sure of that.

Mary had forgotten to make her own sandwiches, so she went down to the canteen for lunch. There were rather more newspapers than usual being read. Young Bowles was having an argument with another of the lecturers; they frowned at her, but perhaps not deliberately. The Professor made some sympathetic remark to her about Jaycie. Nice old bird, the Prof. But who did *he* think Jaycie's father was? Simple enough: that wasn't the kind of thing he thought about.

Things looked worse in the headlines of the evening

editions. Mary seldom bought an evening paper, but this time she felt she had to. "Look, old girl, don't worry," said Joe. "They—they always write this sort of bilge. Makes people buy their rotten old papers. Nobody takes it seriously."

"It's so childish of them—calling names!" she said, and stupidly found herself crying.

"Jaycie wouldn't give a damn for that, would she now?" said Joe cheerfully. But all the same, he thought, if only she and her crowd knew when to stop!

"I bet Jaycie likes it!" Martha chipped in and, of course, in a way that hit the nail on the head.

Three days. And suddenly the headlines got bigger, blotting out any other news. Now she was stuffing things into a small bag and Joe beside her was talking. "I won't try and stop you, Mary, if you feel you must." And she wasn't listening to him, wasn't thinking about him. She was only thinking about Jaycie.

They hadn't done anything really out of the ordinary to Jaycie. And the police as a matter of fact hadn't been the worst. But nobody who wants things to go on as they are—and that goes for most of us—cares for someone who is intent on changing them and looks likely to succeed. An agitator is bad enough; a successful agitator is not to be borne. There was something about Jaycie that made her audiences believe her; she never lied to them, not even at a big meeting with the lights on and the voices clamoring, the time when lies come easy to most people. But Jaycie stayed steady and unmoved by that temptation. You couldn't catch her out.

But it was not during the actual arrest that most of the damage had been done, nor even when she was questioned. At first the police had been rather inhibited at doing their worst on a woman. But—she got them annoyed. Not reacting the way they wanted. Then they let go a bit. But the really nasty thing was the accident—at least they said afterward that it was an accident—with the petrol. Apart from everything else, Jaycie had lost considerable areas of superficial tissue and skin, including some on the face. Too much for safety. Very much too much.

It had perhaps not been intended that she should get to

an ordinary hospital. But Jaycie had more friends than was usually supposed, and in some curious places. Someone took fright and reversed an order. The body of Jaycie was bundled into an ambulance; she might well die before getting to hospital. That was to be hoped. But she didn't.

At the hospital they knew Mary by reputation; most of them had read one or two of her papers at least. But someone who has been a printed name at the end of a scientific paper looks different when she is the mother of a young woman who is probably dying of shock and what have you and who has been considerably disfigured. Who will be up for trial if she recovers. But she won't. Even in the hospital some of them felt that this would be just as well. Doctors and surgeons no less than other citizens have a considerable interest in the preservation of the existing order of things. They were, of course, extremely busy in Casualties. That was to be expected after the last few days. But it did account for the fact that the house surgeon paid little attention to what was happening at this particular screened bed. Mary got the ward sister to agree. Then she took the skin grafts off her own thighs under a local anesthetic. It was not really at all difficult. She had often worked with this type of scalpel like an old-fashioned cutthroat razor. It took the strips off neatly, though it is always a rather peculiar feeling to do such things to oneself. The slight reluctance of the skin to the blade and then the curious ease of the shaving off of the strips can be felt by the operating hand but not by the anesthetized tissue. The sister brings the necessary dressings. The new, still living skin is in place over the cleaned burns on the young woman's thin, partly broken body.

The ward sister couldn't help noticing the extreme care with which the mother was laying on the skin grafts over burned cheek and neck and forehead, above all the corner of the mouth.

"I couldn't have done it," she said afterward over a nice cup of tea. "Not on my own child. My own daughter. Nice-looking she must have been, you could tell that. And there was the mother going straight ahead, not batting an eye. And bound to be in pain herself. And all for nothing! Those grafts'll never take, and that poor thing will look a

proper mess if she lives. And that's not likely. In a proper surgical transplant, we'd either do radiation or at least we'd type the patient up and give her a shot of XQ. Well, you know how things are this week. Couldn't be done. And the mother must have known." She shook her head.

"Well, I for one wouldn't have bothered to do it!" said another nurse who had been reading the papers.

"And what wouldn't you have done, may I ask?" said the ward sister, standing up with the finished cup in her hand.

"I wouldn't have bothered myself to take any trouble to type up an agitator like her! Anyway, even if she lives, this'll stop her speaking at those meetings!"

"We'll keep her, all the same. I'm not having deaths in my ward. That mother of hers, well, there was something about her, there sure was, the way she went about it. Kind of cool. But the scar tissue's going to twist that girl's face." The ward sister put down her cup and prepared to go back on duty. "Remember that woman we had in after the big Palladium fire? Shocking, wasn't it? This'll be worse. But mind, agitator or no agitator, she gets proper nursing!"

The morphia was wearing off. Jaycie was whispering in half-sleep, arguing and refusing. Even like this, her voice kept much of its strange persuasive beauty. The ward sister was whispering to the house surgeon: "I know these skin grafts can't take; you don't have to tell me! They'll slough off. If she doesn't die first. Do more harm than good. Too late now for radiation or for XQ. But the mother—well, she's kind of distinguished; I couldn't very well say no, could I now? Besides she had some theory—oh, I can't remember now—yes, yes, it'll be worse for her when she sees her daughter's face the way it's bound to be. I know. But don't you fuss now! Haven't we all got our hands full these days!"

After that there was rather less scope for fussing about any individual patient. The wards were jammed with temporary beds. Mary waited beside Jaycie as she gradually awoke into pain and mastered it. They were getting short of analgesics by now, and besides Jaycie had said quite firmly that she needed none. Mary did not ask for much herself; the pain, though at times severe, was

bearable. On her own thighs the skinned strips were healing by first intention; all had been aseptic from the start, competently done. She helped the ward sister when she could. It kept her mind off what might be happening at home. For the usual channels of communication were no longer functioning. The military had taken over successfully. Or had they. . . ? Perhaps not.

Days and nights went by. In the third week the ward sister, still surprised that Jaycie went on living when so many had died, said to herself that now those skin grafts were lifting, would slough off like a dead scab, leaving everything worse. "They can't do anything else," she said. Then you'd begin to see the mess the scarring was bound to make of her face. And that wouldn't be nice for the mother.

But the new skin didn't lift off, didn't die. The edge of it visibly and redly lived and grew on to the damaged flesh in healthy granulations. The thin scar lines would be there, but not the hideous twisting and lumping of raw flesh. You took off the dressings and there was the undeniable fact: the skin grafts had taken. The area of damage, the hideous wounds were covered in. No wonder Jaycie lived.

The ward sister shook her head. It shouldn't have happened. But it had. In a way, however, Sister was rather pleased; the doctors were wrong again. Them and their theories that they were always having to change! And it just showed how, in spite of all the troubles and difficulties of overcrowding and medical shortages, good nursing—her pride, the thing she insisted on in her ward—had somehow done the trick.

The house surgeon looked too. He wouldn't commit himself and he hadn't time just then to look it all up in the textbooks. Later on he'd mention the matter to his chief. But after a while, with Jaycie getting stronger every day, he and Sister decided on a few tactful questions. The odd thing was that Mary found it comparatively easy telling them. She didn't mind what the effect on them might be of what she was telling. Indeed, she hardly noticed. She had plenty of other things to worry about. It was much less easy telling Joe.

For he came at last, bless him, bringing all sorts of delicious things to eat. Yes, they were all rather hungry at the hospital; supplies had been cut off. There hadn't been much news either. "Oh Joe," she said, "dear, dear Joe, is everything all right?"

"Yes," he said, "and my little Martha turned up trumps. We never guessed what a head that kid had! And I got Simon on long distance. Naturally he couldn't say much, but he's okay. Now, Mary, what's all this story about skin grafts?"

Mary said: "Jaycie had a very large area of skin torn and burned off. On purpose. Joe, they—they were so horrible to her. Some of her friends told me. They didn't mean her to live. I didn't realize people could be like that about politics in this country. Though I suppose they really are everywhere when it gets serious. You know, she was very nearly dead when I got here."

She stopped for a moment and dabbed her eyes. It came fleetingly through Joe's mind that this might have been the best thing. For the world, for things as they are. For himself and Simon and Martha. Maybe for Mary herself in the long run. But he wasn't going to let himself think that just now, not with his wife sobbing on to the edge of his waistcoat. He stroked her hair, a bit sticky and unwashed and the white collar of her dress all mucked up, poor sweet.

She looked up a little and said: "So it seemed to me that the best chance was a skin graft."

"But Mary," he said, "a skin graft's no good from someone else. Even I know that!"

"It's all right from someone identical: genetically the same."

"But Mary, you aren't, you can't be. . . ." Joe had an uncomfortable feeling, though he didn't quite know why.

"Because of the father. His genes make the child different from the mother. I know. Joe, I told you a long time ago that Jaycie had a father. Joe, dear, dear Joe, I only told you that because I thought it would upset you more to think she hadn't a father. There now, you are upset—"

"Mary darling, don't worry about me. I just don't understand."

"She didn't have a father, Joe. I—I never had a lover. I was—well, I suppose there is nothing else for it, I was a virgin, Joe."

"But you had a baby. Sweet, you can't have been."

"I was. You see, something started one of my ova developing. That's all. Oh, that's all! It doesn't sound too odd that way, does it?"

"But what could start it? What's the stimulus?"

"It might be anything I expect. Some—metabolic change."

"What was it with you?"

She did not answer. Even now she could not think quite calmly. It might have been imagination. It must have been. Lower than far thunder, higher than the bat's squeak, the whispering of a million leaves. Sometimes the murmur of wind-shifted leaves in summer reminded her. It couldn't possibly have been what she was certain it was. She took a breath: "Whatever the stimulus was, the ovum developed normally. The child had to be a female, an identical female. Without the *y* chromosome that comes from the male and goes to a male. I don't know what happened in the process of chromosome division. Of course, there was the possibility—perhaps the probability—of a haploid. Of the chromosomes splitting unevenly. You see what I mean, Joe? But they didn't."

"That—that was odd," said Joe, looking away from his wife's face. "There must have been—some kind of pattern-making machinery behind it—"

"You could call it that," said Mary; "yes, of course, Joe, you could call it that. But the way things worked out, Jaycie and I are genetically identical."

Joe swallowed: "Did you—did you know this from the start, Mary?"

"Not for sure," she said. "But—when she was a baby I started by taking the tiniest pinch-graft from her to me. That took. But it wasn't certain. I mean, it was almost sure that my antibodies wouldn't affect her graft. But it wasn't sure the other way round. So, when she was a little older, I tried it that way too."

"But if you were genetically identical, Mary, you—you'd have been as alike as—identical twins."

"We are, physically. But there's a big difference in nurture, Joe, as well as age. I'm going gray and wrinkled."

Gallantly he said "No!" but she only smiled a little.

"You see, my dearest, there's a different best treatment for babies every generation. And then—we started thinking about different kinds of things. Using the same brain perhaps, but—"

"I'd have thought I'd have noticed," Joe muttered, "seeing you both all the time."

"You were used to me, Joe. And besides, by the time she was adult, you thought of her as herself. Though you've always thought she was like me. You were pleased she was like me and not—like someone else. Weren't you? And I always had a different hairdo from hers. On purpose, Joe."

"And all that time, you never told me, Mary."

"I—I couldn't. Not by then. The other thing—we'd got used to it, you and I—as a story. Oh, Joe, you wouldn't have liked it!"

"No," said Joe, "no, I suppose I wouldn't." He looked across the crowded ward at the bed; one of Jaycie's friends was sitting there with a notebook, questioning and taking down the answers. Jaycie's friends were going about openly now. Beginning to take over here and there, to put Jaycie's ideas into practice. Bad, bad. At least, that was what one had to suppose. The alternative—the military alternative—had not succeeded. There would be no trial for Jaycie. Instead, there were going to be changes. Changes he knew he was going to hate. Even if they were supposed to be going to be good in the end. A lot of people were sold on that, but not Joe. Changes—everything changed before it was done! His own whole life: set another way, not the way he wanted! But all the same, he thought, this was the baby he had accepted when he got Mary to say she would marry him all that long while back. She was a sweet baby right enough. Pretty. Those great eyes. There was always something about babies that got you. Maybe, he thought, I shall have to accept Jaycie's changes and not say a word. Because of Mary.

Mary went on: "Perhaps that's why she's always been a bit different. Why she's been—single-hearted." She wasn't going to let Joe know—not ever—that she had told Jaycie

before she told him. That would hurt him, and she couldn't bear to hurt him any more. She was Joe's Mary as much as she was Jaycie's. Almost as much.

"So you don't know what the stimulus was," Joe said half aloud. "You don't know. It's—yes, it's a bit scaring, Mary."

"I know. That's why I told you the other thing. The easy thing. And you were so sweet. Forgive me, Joe."

"That's all right, Mary. Funny, I sometimes wondered what the other chap was like. Whether Jaycie took after him. Whether you ever thought about him. And now there isn't another chap."

"No," said Mary. "No."

"And you got the doctor here to take this skin graft—"

"I took it myself," said Mary. "There's nothing to it if it's done in good conditions."

"Didn't it hurt?"

"Just a bit afterward. But not nearly as much as thinking she was going to die. Goodness, Joe, any mother would do it for her child; jump at the chance of doing it if it was to be any use. But of course it wouldn't be any use—normally."

"Yes," said Joe. "Yes. But you've always liked normal things, haven't you, Mary?"

"For everything but this, Joe," she said, and held on tight to his hand. Deliberately and with a slow effort he made the hand respond, warmly, gently, normally. For the hand left to itself had wanted to pull away, not to touch her. Not to touch.

GORMAN

JERRY FARBER

In academia they say things like "publish or die" and speak of tenure being a life or death matter. Perhaps there is more to this than empty rhetoric. Jerry Farber might have the correct answer in this wickedly funny glimpse at the ivy covered halls of learning as they have never been seen before.

There were several taps at the door. Gorman finished printing "2ND QUIZ" at the top of a blue-lined column. He closed the record book and called out:

"Who is it?"

"Chuck Fernandez."

"From my eight o'clock?"

"Yes, sir."

"Just a sec. I'm on the phone."

Gorman moved quietly to a filing cabinet by the door. He eased open the top drawer a few inches and took out a revolver. Then, holding the revolver in his right hand, he stepped up on Ferguson's desk, which was next to the filing cabinet. From the desk he lifted himself on top of the cabinet and kneeled on its narrow summit, his head almost touching the ceiling. Turning his face away from the door, he called out:

"Come in."

The door flew open, slamming against the steel cabinet. Gorman peered down over the top of the door. It was Grunewald, of course. Grunewald's right hand was stuffed in his coat pocket; his head pivoted wildly from side to side as he scanned the empty room. He froze when he heard Gorman's voice coming from almost directly over his head.

"Don't move or I'll shoot you, Grunewald. Not the slightest move. Good. Now do exactly what I say. Take your empty right hand out of that coat pocket. Now reach your left hand in there and take that gun by the barrel. OK.

Shut the door behind you with your right hand. All right, now hand the gun up to me. Thank you."

Gorman dropped Grunewald's pistol into his own left coat pocket; then he stepped down and sat on Ferguson's desk, watching the other man all the while.

"Take my chair and sit in it facing me."

Grunewald sat. "So I'm sitting. Congratulations. What are you going to do, shoot me, Gorman?"

Gorman was silent.

"Look, figure you picked yourself up a pistol on the deal. Good-bye. Good luck."

"Don't get out of that chair."

"Gorman, think! Plan ahead. Hold me here and you miss the meeting, too. What have you gained?"

"Don't worry about it, Grunewald. Now pick up my Trilling from the desk and read it—quietly."

"Shoot me, Gorman. I won't read Trilling."

Gorman reached into the open file drawer again, took out a silencer and began to fit it on his pistol. Grunewald, meanwhile, had located the Trilling. He began to read. It was quarter to three. The next fifteen minutes passed in silence punctuated by Grunewald's ostentatious sighs, snorts and tongue clickings. A minute or two after three there was another knock on the door. Gorman waited.

"Professor Gorman?"

He waited.

"Marshall, are you all right?"

"It's OK, Pam. Are any of Grunewald's people out there?"

"Yes, that clod, McGriff. Oh, and I passed Dr. Peaster in the hall but he's gone now."

Gorman whispered to Grunewald, motioning with the gun. "Tell McGriff to go away."

"McGriff, go away."

They heard McGriff call softly just outside the door: "Dr. Grunewald? Listen, if there's anything wrong . . ."

"McGriff, just go."

After a few moments Pam spoke from the corridor. "Marshall? He's gone."

"OK, come in."

She opened the door and shut it behind her as she looked at the two men. Without stepping between them, she walked over to Gorman and kissed him on the cheek.

"Ciao, Marshall. Hello, Dr. Grunewald. Marshall, aren't you going to your meeting? It's after three."

"That's all right. Look, I want you to stay here and watch Dr. Grunewald while I'm gone. When I leave, lock the door and don't open it till I get back. OK?"

"OK. Don't worry about it."

He gave her his revolver. "If he gets out of that chair, shoot him. Can you do it?"

"Shoot him! Oh, my God, Marshall. Ask me something difficult why don't you!"

"Pam." He looked at her for a moment. "We're voting on curriculum today."

She nodded soberly. "I'm sorry, hon. I'll be all right. Just take care of yourself."

"Sorority girls, Gorman?" Grunewald asked. "Are we going to see you at the prom?"

Pam leveled the gun icily. "I'm *not* in a sorority, Dr. Grunewald."

Gorman reached for his briefcase and opened the door. "Listen, Pam. McGriff or Professor Peaster or one of the others will be back. Make Grunewald send them away. Off campus somewhere. In the meantime, Grunewald, be quiet—and read."

He crossed the corridor into the men's room, patted his hair in front of the mirror and entered an empty stall, shutting and latching the door. He checked Grunewald's pistol to make sure that it was loaded. Then he put it in his right coat pocket. A swinging door had opened and shut. Gorman lowered his head below the top of the stall door.

"Marsh, it's Joel Peaster. I saw you come in. I'd like to talk to you for a minute."

"Just a minute, Peaster. I'm coming out." Gorman sank to his hands and knees and crawled silently under the partition into the next stall and then into the one beyond. One more partition brought him into the end stall. Its door was open a few inches, enough to reveal Peaster standing in front of the stall Gorman had been in. Peaster gripped a

heavy glass ashtray in his right hand, which was poised at shoulder height. Gorman reached into his right coat pocket and spoke softly:

"Freeze, Peaster."

Several minutes later, his briefcase bulging with Peaster's clothes, Gorman raced up the escalator to the second-floor men's room. He dropped Peaster's underwear, shirt and tie in one toilet, his trousers in another and his coat in a third. He stepped on the flush pedal in each stall, then left the men's room and hurried down the corridor toward Lecture Hall 5. A few other latecomers were approaching the door. He entered with them and chose a seat on the aisle in the back row. About forty department members were already seated in front of him, scattered throughout the descending rows of padded, permanent seats.

They were winding up Old Business: allocation of out-of-state travel funds. When it was done, Gorman rose and introduced a motion to eliminate the second semester of the two-semester literary criticism requirement, and to substitute for it a required senior course in Chaucer. As Gorman stated his motion, the chairman, Wainwright, was scanning the rows of seats intently. When Gorman concluded, the chairman left his rostrum and walked over to the side wall where Roger, the departmental clerk, was standing. He spoke with the clerk briefly and then returned to the rostrum and addressed Gorman.

"Marshall, I wonder if you'd mind holding off on that motion for a few minutes. I notice that we're still missing several department members who have expressed particular interest in curriculum matters. Joel Peaster, for example, and Sid Grunewald . . ."

Wainwright was interrupted by shouts from the floor. Someone called out, "That's their problem!" A number of others, however, agreed with the chairman. Gorman spoke out over the hubbub.

"As a matter of fact, neither Professor Peaster nor Professor Grunewald will be able to attend at all. They both asked me to relay their apologies."

The shouted remarks from the floor, as well as a number of whispered conversations, continued. When they had

subsided slightly, Gorman, still standing, reintroduced his motion to substitute Chaucer for second-semester Criticism. The chairman, Wainwright, however, ruled Gorman's motion out of order on the grounds that proper written notice had not been given ten days in advance. Gorman appealed this ruling of the chair; from his briefcase he produced and distributed xeroxed copies of an affidavit from Donna, the departmental secretary, affirming that a notice of intent had been placed in each professor's box two weeks previously. Nevertheless, Gorman's appeal, though it won a majority vote, narrowly missed obtaining the necessary two-thirds' approval.

Gorman waited. A few minutes later he found an opportunity to reintroduce his motion as an amendment. Van Pelt had moved to add a new lower-division requirement: Great Issues in Criticism. Gorman's amendment stipulated that no more than one semester of criticism be required for the major, and it added as requirements a senior course in Chaucer and a lower-division survey of Middle English poetry. Before Gorman had completed his amendment, there were a number of shouts of "Point of order!" Wainwright quieted the meeting and ruled Gorman's amendment out of order on the grounds that its thrust ran counter to the thrust of the Van Pelt motion.

At this point, however, Ronceval, the parliamentarian, slipped his right hand into a coat pocket which was already heavily weighted and sagging, and slouched from his seat in front to converse with Wainwright behind the rostrum. He stood partially behind Wainwright and whispered in his left ear. Wainwright listened to Ronceval for a minute or so. Then he addressed the meeting:

"I have decided, on advice of the parliamentarian, to reverse my own ruling. Professor Gorman's amendment, which would limit our criticism requirements to one semester and would add required courses in Chaucer and Middle English poetry, is a proper amendment and may stand. Is there any debate on the amendment?"

"What do you mean debate?" Van Pelt was on his feet, shouting. "That's not an amendment. It's sabotage! What is this?"

Wainwright spoke, almost whispering. "Stanley, I have ruled it a proper amendment." Wainwright's glance slid to the far left corners of his eyes, then rolled back to focus intently on Van Pelt. "I hope you can understand my position."

"You're damn right I understand your position. Tell Ronceval to get his hand out of his pocket."

There was an outbreak of murmuring and whispered discussion. Ronceval remained where he was standing. The chair called again for debate on Gorman's amendment.

Three speakers on each side had been heard and Wainwright had already asked for ayes when Schlemmer rose and requested a secret ballot. Gorman stood up in opposition, pointing out that the vote was already in progress; he called for a ruling from the chair. Ronceval, who was still standing behind Wainwright, whispered a few words in the chairman's ear. Wainwright ruled in Gorman's favor. There were a number of calls for the parliamentarian to sit down and to take his hand out of his coat pocket. Then Roger, the departmental clerk, who had moved over against the back wall of the lecture hall, plunged his own right hand into his own sagging coat pocket and moved swiftly up behind Ronceval, where he whispered something in the parliamentarian's ear. Ronceval listened for a moment, then slowly raised his hands in a theatrical yawn and let them come to rest casually behind his head, where they remained. Elbows up, back arched, apparently frozen in mid-yawn, Ronceval in turn whispered to Wainwright, who promptly announced that he was reversing his ruling and would allow a secret ballot after all. He called for Van Pelt and Schlemmer to count ballots.

Schlemmer, however, announced, after a brief whispered exchange with Gorman, who was seated behind him, that one of his contact lenses had popped out, rendering him incapable of counting ballots. He insisted that Gorman take his place.

Someone called out, "Schlemmer, what is this? Since when . . ." He was interrupted by Van Pelt, who was racing up the aisle toward Schlemmer. Van Pelt ran awkwardly. His right hand was stuffed in his coat pocket and his left

was waving above his head, with the thumb and forefinger pressed together at the fingertips making a circle. He shouted:

"I've found your lens, Schlemmer. Get moving. Never mind Gorman."

However, Gorman had already sprinted down to the rostrum and had taken a position behind Roger, the departmental clerk. He whispered to the clerk, who jerked promptly and convulsively into Ronceval's frozen-yawn position and walked, elbows still in the air, back to the side wall. Ronceval, in turn, dropped his arms and whispered to Wainwright.

Wainwright announced that Gorman and Ferguson would count ballots. Donna, the departmental secretary, prepared the ballots and was distributing them when one of the doors of the corridor burst open and Grunewald entered. He apologized for his tardiness, conferred briefly and softly with Van Pelt and took a seat in the back row. A minute or two later, after the ballots had been handed out, Grunewald lurched to his feet and clawed at the air, shrieking unintelligibly. After a moment, he fell back against the wall, stared blankly at his colleagues, mumbled, "It's my heart" in a cracked whisper and pitched forward over the row of seats in front of him. The department members remained immobilized, all but Gorman, who was at Grunewald's side in an instant. He bent over Grunewald briefly, then looked up and spoke:

"He's all right, actually. Call for the question."

At this point a number of things happened.

Grunewald, still collapsed over the seats, screamed, "What the hell do you mean all right? I'm dying here. Stop the meeting!" Then an explosion reverberated in the lecture hall, followed after a momentary hush by perhaps a dozen more, as faculty members scrambled in various directions over the seats and through the aisles. Van Pelt, his right hand bloody, scooped up a pistol from the floor with his left and dived behind the rostrum, shouting "Second-semester criticism, *over here!*" Ferguson and Fowler were standing toe to toe in the fourth row, battering each other in the face and head with briefcases. Peaster, who had been absent from the meeting, appeared striding

down the right aisle, barefoot, in cap and gown, and bellowing, "Where IS that son of a bitch?" Gorman meanwhile was crouched in the last row of seats, Grunewald's pistol in his hand. Schlemmer was sprawled face down near the rostrum, as were Ronceval and Roger, the departmental clerk. Grunewald, holding Gorman's gun with the silencer attached, stood in the doorway, screaming "McGriff! McGriff!"

OIL-MAD BUG-EYED MONSTERS

HAYDEN HOWARD

Science fiction is the meat that covers the bones of known fact. Fact: we are consuming irreplaceable fossil oil at an ever-increasing rate, and incidentally polluting our environment at the same time. There has been some speculation about putting this complex hydrocarbon source to a better use, perhaps as a source of food, a possibility that Hayden Howard considers here in all *its ramifications.*

The Pacific Ocean seemed to be burning, adding to the smog. From the upper level of the piggyback freeway, as he swerved his little electric car down the off-ramp to her beach suburb, he glimpsed the fiery finger flickering where the offshore oil drilling platform had stood.

The immense gas flame made him think of a certain nebula and he winced because he'd been Here for eighteen years. By now he ought to be reminded of something mundane, Earthly, like the gas pilot light in an unlit stove. All the way to the horizon the ocean was darkening with wasted oil from the undersea gusher.

He swallowed. Waves of oil were lapping the beach with gleaming layers like oily—chocolate. The thought made his left stomach rumble hungrily. His right stomach contracted around the olives from the uncounted martinis he'd gulped in the metropolitan bar while he was getting her husband's signature on the oil lease.

"She'll never shine-sign," her husband had crooned drunkenly, laying his head to rest on the quaint mahogany. "She'll never shine-sign. You're not man enough to make her sign. Nobody is."

Legally the couple owned the attractive suburban home in joint tenancy, so he needed her signature, too. He was anxious to rescue the oil underneath.

But he felt unsure of his motives. He remembered her

huge eyes gleaming with an exciting anger. To his loneliness they had appeared as sensuously hard as the carapaces of twin black beetles. As beautifully hard-shelled as . . . His emotions became more confused.

His hearts beat even faster as he drove along her street.

His right stomach squirmed. The alcohol had contained quick energy but was too insubstantial for his inner organism. It lacked the essential hydrocarbons necessary for his innermost distillations. He attempted a grin but merely grimaced. Here most humor seemed distorted, unhappy anomaly, as if these people felt alien on their own planet. So what did that make him, doubly alien?

At least he was trying to save their oil. He glanced at the sky as if he could see twenty-two more years into the future and rammed a wooden barricade in the street. He parked. People were evacuating the seashore neighborhood as if they feared an oily holocaust.

He put the half-signed lease in his comfortingly hard-shelled attaché case. On its plastic carapace, with his own daring brand of humor, he displayed new initials in debonair fourteen-carat gold italics: *B. E. M.*

These people seemed—stupid—wasting their most vital natural resource. He thought they deserved their future. The woman made him feel altruistic. He wanted to preserve her future.

He strode along the oil-slick sidewalk, inhaling the rich scent of oil. Delicious! Now that he had her husband's signature he thought she should at least let him inside. He winked as the sea-breeze sprayed aerosol-fine oil droplets against his baby-blue eyes. Rubbing them made his hand shiny from all the oil droplets smeared together on his skin. He sneaked a lick.

Yeah!

The estate-type tract house had an embattled look. She'd pulled the drapes together. Last Sunday, here on the asphalt driveway, her husband had told him to go to hell. But the old bluffer had been merely showing off his neighborhood integrity in front of his wife and hulking son.

Today, at high noon in the bar, that old hero had whined: "Neighbors signed. So I'm forced to get mine." His shaking hand had accepted the extra five hundred in

folding money under the bar. He wouldn't report that to his wife or the I.R.S. "Now I should buy you a drink—because you won't be able to make her sign. Impossible! You been suckered."

He knocked on her door. He was afraid he would appear too boyish for her. In his conservative business suit he still resembled the snub-nosed young radio operator from the oil tanker that had gone to the bottom eighteen years ago. Although he had negotiated hundreds of oil leases since then, he still felt hampered by that young man's startled blue eyes and wispy blond hair. Even after eighteen years he felt vulnerable without his body-shell.

He imagined her standing on the other side of the door, obstinately letting him wait. She was hard-boiled. Then he heard her steel-heeled footsteps. For a moment his hearts thudded. He pretended he was himself, safely back inside his carapace but his perverse urge toward her increased. She didn't open the door.

Finally, in his frustration, he tapped on it with his attaché case. She and the Smiths were the only ones on this block who hadn't signed. The Smiths were trying to hold him up for more money than their neighbors had received—but this one was an idealist who wouldn't sell out at any price. However, she was human. She might be waiting to get more than the Smiths?

His blond eyebrows rose as he glanced into her open three-car garage. It contained an outboard motorboat and two empty stalls. He realized the garage might be a clue to her weaknesses. She didn't have a car? Her husband had driven an expensively wasteful gasoline-burner to the city. Last Sunday the garage had held a four-wheel-drive dune-buggy with a racing stripe and a high-school parking lot permit on its windshield.

He felt surprised that such a formidable woman didn't have a car of her own. Apparently both of the men in her family were able to take advantage of her. This was encouraging.

He smiled. From the corner of his eye he'd noticed a movement at the dining-room window. Between the dark drapes her fiercely beautiful face glared at him. He nodded, trying to look suave while he opened his hard-

shelled attaché case. He held up the lease-option against the glass, confronting her with her husband's signature.

Her expression changed from startled to pained to puzzled to enraged. She looked down at him so haughtily, he remembered the gloriously hard face of that Italian actress gleaming through the transparent carapace of his TV. Her eyes, glittering behind the window-glass, made him excited and disturbed. He was becoming willingly attracted to these angry ones. More and more often it was his feeling that these seductively fierce old ones were encased in invisible, chitinous exoskeletons.

In his frustration and guilty hope he had even conjectured that he was receiving emanations from their gleaming, hardened minds. He smiled wryly. He felt so lonely. Under her shiny glare through the glittering glass he imagined himself light-years away. Their shells would be gleaming. In passionate recognition, their hard carapaces would begin banging together with the ferocity of their love.

One of them would crack, he thought. Even his human heart was pounding. He heard her hard heels crossing the floor. She was coming to the front door. He turned again to face it.

The door opened but not enough. He saw a gleaming security chain. Above it in the darkness of the hall hung her glittering eyes. She glared as if he were to blame for the underwater oil gusher and everything else wrong with her world. He felt innocent. Inhuman. For a joyous instant he felt as if he had regrown his carapace. He was handsomely shiny, virilely armored. But even in his excitement he remembered not to stridulate. He lowered his attaché case.

He said, "Hi," as if he had forgotten the unpleasantness on Sunday.

Her voice had a hard, rasping edge.

"I was afraid you'd talk him into—"

"Bought him a Tom Collins," he interrupted brightly, trying to deflect even more of her anger onto her husband. "Slipped him an extra hundred for signing but I'm—wasn't supposed to—tell." He imitated a laugh. Their native games of false truthfulness seemed to him as absurdly

useful as their humor. "But he's got it."

"Get off our porch."

The harshness of her voice reminded him of the stridulations preceding love and he glanced at the sky.

In his frustration and loneliness he felt even worse than shell-less. He had wanted to remain faithful. He had only twenty-two more years to wait. But he needed to bang against something. He glanced shyly at this weird creature who was repeatedly emitting repetitious stridulations.

"I won't sign. Not even if we're the last family on this block."

"You are," he said. "Did your husband telephone you like he told me he would?"

"All of you—you're running everything."

It was like a love song. He fought to keep his head.

"I don't have anything to do with that mess." He glanced toward the ocean. "Believe me, I'm trying to help you save your property values. This oily fog is soaking into my suit. If you'd let me inside—"

"Get out!"

He blinked. He wasn't even in, yet she was telling him to get out. He decided to force entry via his guilt-by-accusation approach. Because they lacked shells, many of these creatures were so vulnerable they acted as if the sins of others were their own. He had noticed they usually surrendered to any authoritarian or priestly voice.

"You're to blame," he said wildly. "You're all to blame. You didn't try hard enough a year ago when you could have prevented offshore drilling. Now look what's happened because of self-centered people like you." He added loudly as if broadcasting to her neighbors: "Is it because your husband works for—"

"Shut up. He's not much more than a bookkeeper," she hissed, peeking out of the doorway but not unhitching the chain. "He wasn't involved in any way."

"Ah, but his clients—" he retorted, having no idea whose accounts her husband serviced. "You know as well as I do that their incomes are dependent on transportation and other vital parts of the economy which need oil. It's your lifeblood and mine. Ours?"

He stepped toward her but she started to close the door in his face.

"At least you're not afraid," he bleated, hurriedly redirecting his approach. "You're not afraid of anything, are you?" he murmured humbly as if she'd defeated him, as if he were no threat to fair womanhood because he was so endearingly boyish and weak. "Could I come inside and rest for a moment?"

"Get off my porch!"

He shrugged. He straightened sternly. Like a process-server, supported by the commanding power of a government, he flashed his lease option.

"Better read the fine print."

"I won't sign it."

"Read it." In his business he'd discovered the best way to convince women was to confuse them.

She reached for it. He yanked it away.

"Everybody in your block will be getting his or her rightful share. Are you too proud to accept yours?"

"Mine?" she shrilled. "You've ruined our town."

"Not our company." He hoped a few argumentative maneuvers would lead him into her house. She might let him in while trying to get the last word. He thrust: "You're trying to blame us for wanting to help you."

She retorted, "You're trying to force us to permit drilling in our town."

"We're trying to preserve your natural resources," he exclaimed. "I don't work for an incompetent drilling company. Here, look at our brochure."

His present truthfulness was preordained by the ultimate lie.

"I don't care who you work for."

She pressed outward against the door so the security chain strained and he began to think of it as the chastity belt to her house.

"Listen," he said, "what I care about is conservation and decency and freedom. I'm trying to help you save something from your property value before it drops below what you owe on your mortgage and you end with nothing while the people across the street become millionaires." He pointed a finger across the street. "They've all signed up

except for one old lady who's in Europe and they're trying to contact her today. If they package that block as a drilling site, we won't need yours. And we won't need your neighbors' lots we've optioned." He pointed his finger at her. "Because you waited too long we won't be able to take up any of our options in this block. Your neighbors' last chance for wealth and happiness will be gone because of you. They'll blame you."

Her eyes glinted from the darkness. She did not unhitch the security chain. He felt baffled.

He was unable to judge the effect of his greed-fright technique but he added ominously: "Your block won't even be a truck parking site if you don't sign. The leasers will tap your oil pool from across the street and toss you a few dollars. They'll paint their derricks green and plant a couple of trees. They'll park their big trucks where those houses used to be. Those people will have moved away—rich. Their oil pumps will be so loud that you won't be able to sleep. No one will buy your house at any price—except me—now."

"We bought our house with rights and covenants. Zoning—"

"It's cracked wide open," he interrupted. "Your own Town Council is selling the dump for a drilling site after the Planning Board designated it as a future park and our latest survey after the"— he jerked his head toward the ocean— "shows the people know they're licked. Because of the continuous mess offshore, seventy-six percent of the voters now are in favor of controlled drilling within the town limits. Then the town will begin collecting some oil taxes. Unfortunately, the state and Federal Governments have been getting all the bonuses and royalties from the offshore leases. You've been getting nothing," he finished triumphantly, "except more and more oil on your beach."

"We marched in protest," she blurted.

"And gave up because you know you can't win," he said holding out the lease. "You and your neighbors will be getting fair recompense if you sign this."

She glanced from the maze of small print to his face and handed the paper back to him. At least she hadn't torn it up. He let his voice smile.

"Now if we could go inside so you can study this—"

"No." But oddly she laughed. "I could call the police."

"Their telephone number is nine-nine-nine," he said and she shrugged.

Although she did not unchain the door, neither did she close it. He started his penultimate maneuver.

"Your husband said you wouldn't be able to understand any of this anyway." He turned away but did not put the lease back into his attaché case. He heard a metallic sound and knew it was the door chain. In his excitement he imagined there were hard shells between himself and the woman and that they would bang together as he entered.

Her eyes glistened, retreating. He took a deep breath as she let him into the dark hallway. He guessed a bedroom was at the end. With his human heart thudding, he followed her into the living room, laughing, feeling out of breath.

Sometimes he wondered if the radio operator's body were gradually capturing him. If so, the female ones should seem beautiful to him. He looked at her grim face. It was her shield, he thought, but such an inadequate shell. Her resentment and weaknesses seemed nakedly exposed. He toyed with them, watching her features, savoring the hardness he detected.

"Your husband told me not to tell," he laughed, "which topless bar I left him in."

Her expression became even more rigid. He established himself on the couch, spreading the pages of the lease option on the coffee table.

"You're wasting your time," she grated, not sitting down. "I won't sign. What did my husband—"

"It was a dating bar," he said imaginatively, reaching up and switching on a standing lamp to illuminate the splendors of the lease. Its parchment and engraving were the best. "We agree to pay you a thousand a month until we drill. You can't lose a thing because you keep living here until we pay you twice its appraised value as a residence. When this block goes into production you'll begin receiving your share of royalties and tax advantages just like the other millionaires."

"What was the name of the bar? He was calling me from his office."

"You thought." He laughed. "The important thing is —we pay you in stock and stock options. You'll be in the oil business too. You help yourself tax-wise by your share of future exploration expense write-offs. You'll even have your own depletion allowance. That's how millionaires are made. Why don't you phone your husband's office. You'll find out he's not there."

"Get out." She glared down at him. "I won't believe anything you say. You're the oil company my husband told me appeared out of nowhere. Fly-by-night."

"Right." He acted as if this were praise—and it was. "Actually we've been growing for eighteen years. Your husband understands the growth advantages of the oil biz. He knows we've been building a beautiful corporate structure. We find oil, pump oil, store oil—we may never need to sell any." He laughed and what he said was almost true. "As our worth increases, we're able to issue more stock. Next time you're on the freeway, look down at View Point. It overlooks our tank farm." His human face smiled seductively at her. "Domestically produced oil has become better than money in the bank since the controls on foreign oil imports. In the interests of national security and to stimulate domestic oil exploration, oil and gasoline prices are rising. By simply storing our oil and never selling any our company is doing more than its part to improve the price of domestically produced crude. Do you follow me? Our oil in storage is constantly increasing in value, so that we're able to issue growing amounts of stock to finance ever-expanding operations—we drill and pump more oil and build more storage tanks and our growth stocks are like money in the bank—only better. You see? You understand as much about the oil business as your husband does. Sit down and read the fine print."

"I don't care what you're promising me. There's oil all over our beach."

"Not our oil," he insisted. "We're very careful about waste."

But she was listening to her feelings rather than to his voice.

She murmured, "We moved to this town because it's nearer the beach. Now it's ruined."

"True," he agreed somberly. "The truth is, this town is ruined as a good place to live. And I'm trying to help you save yourself."

"Like rats leaving the sinking ship?"

"We're helping conservation," he replied. "When we buy your house you'll receive enough to move to another beautiful town where there are no underlying oil strata. The value of your stock certificates will keep going up—and you must appreciate that we're rescuing oil for future generations."

"That doesn't make sense. Get out."

"By increasing the domestic cost of oil," he pleaded, becoming a supplicant, "we're truly encouraging the development of better sources of power, atomically powered electric generator plants, battery-electric cars. I don't sound like other oil company men because my thinking—our thinking is far ahead of theirs."

"Then go out and drill for foreign oil. Allow us to burn theirs, not ours. Get out of our town."

"And let our nation's oil needs become dependent on foreign whims? Our national security—"

"Get out or I'll phone my husband to throw you out."

He managed to keep a straight human face, though he could not believe she was serious. His voice became soothing.

"Phone him? If you find him he'll say to sign the lease. He's a man, so he understands that by pumping oil into tanks we're conserving it. He knows irreplaceable oil mustn't be destroyed by fire and end as smog. He knows it should produce more important things, such as petrochemicals and plastics and pharmaceuticals and food. Your husband drank—"

He didn't know why she was laughing but her gleaming teeth made him imagine a seductive carapace of glossy chitin and he listened raptly to the harshness of her voice.

"I know what you want." She pointed at the lease. "Get out." Her voice sagged. "Don't just sit there."

He spread five one-hundred-dollar bills on the excitingly hard coffee table. "No need to tell your husband," he

laughed. "Start your own Swiss bank account. Buy yourself a little green—"

"Get out. What do you think I am?"

She was looking at him instead of the money and he felt more confused.

He began to wonder whether her expression was haughtiness or stupidity. Money might be too abstract. She needed something more tangible, he thought.

"Why don't you choose a car," he began. "For yourself." He laughed, watching her expression. "Your husband and your son race around in theirs, leaving you trapped at home. Listen—you'll look beautiful in a little sports car with your hair streaming in the wind. I'll—we'll buy you a cute car, your bonus for signing. It'll be yours, all yours."

Watching her grim expression, he began describing an electric sports car like his own. There was such fondness in his voice he might have been describing a baby and she—smiled.

"I had an accident," she murmured, "a few years ago but—" She sat down on the other end of the couch while he described its wire wheels.

"Electrics are so easy to drive," he said.

"You mean you're only offering me an electric car?" she complained. "Like thanks—but I don't feel I'm an old lady yet."

"You're quoting oil company propaganda." He laughed. "Not my oil company. We're financing research for better electrics—our subsidiary builds them. Ninety miles an hour fast enough for you?"

She squinted. "I thought they weren't allowed on thruways."

"They are this year—we've been buying politicians too." He sobered. "I'll show you my runabout. It's yellow with a vinyl top. You'll have your choice of interchangeable fiberglass bodies." He spread out a sales brochure. "Cute, huh? Picture your hair streaming back." He couldn't really. As she looked down at the pictures of electric cars he imagined her encased in fiberglass. Then she was invisible in an excitingly shiny chitinous carapace, drumming and clacking with passion.

He moved toward her shimmering carapace.

"Think of yourself encapsulated," he murmured, "in your cute little car. You'll be giving of yourself patriotically by conserving irreplaceable oil and gliding electrically and soundlessly and smoglessly"—he paused for a long, quivering breath—"while future generations revere you." He had learned whatever he said to women during his sales pitch was less important than his tone of voice. "Your oil is too wonderful to be burned while millions are starving. Sign here if you believe in conservation. The anciently formed molecules of oil must not be burned, because millions of years are needed for oil to be born again. Oil doesn't regenerate during one man's lifetime like a pine forest. It can't renew itself every year like a field of wheat. Yet it can provide protein for the starving—that is, there are bacteria that feed on oil—an intermediate step." He sighed, moving nearer to her. "Anaerobic bacteria, needing no air, are able to do this deep in the Earth—they sometimes clog oil wells. Here's my pen."

He moved closer, making soothing noises. "You'll be saving oil for starving babies. On the surface, airy—aerobic—bacteria can be fed oil if air and moisture are bubbled through with infinitely small quantities of salts essential to growth. How fast they grow! You'll be glad to know that every pound of aerobic bacteria multiplies so fast that every day it produces ten more pounds of nutritious protein. The lives of millions of malnourished children can be strengthened if you'll sign on this line."

He grimaced, inwardly hating children and feeling that anaerobic and aerobic bacteria were equally disgusting little competitors, less efficient than he was—but at least their oil wasn't wasted as smoky exhaust fumes. These people were insane!

He watched her unpleasantly flexible fingers moving the pen. Above her lengthening signature gleamed the pen's plastic hardness, arousing him so that he imagined again a shiny round carapace, so chitinously beautiful that he wanted to bang—

"Hey, what's the matter with you?" Her voice rasped, although he had barely touched her distressing softness.

She lurched up from the couch. She laughed uneasily. "Am I supposed to be flattered or feel grateful at my age? You're—don't get any ideas just because you've promised to buy me a car."

Her eyes gleamed so confusingly as he rose that he saw her encased in transparent chitin. She sidled away, trying to watch him while she lit a cigarette with trembling hands. Although he flinched from the flash of flame, her silvery lighter made him think of a beautifully metallized carapace and he advanced. The proper approach would have been a couple of quick symbolic taps of his carapace against hers. Then they could begin banging until one of them cracked. But she dodged and he kept glimpsing her distractingly human face. She seemed ready to scream. He realized he'd better start with a ritual more familiar to her. Whichever way he twisted his head, as she backed away, his lips were confronted by the dangerously hot tip of her cigarette.

As he bumped her against the wall, she gasped and shoved back. This seemed encouraging. But she elbowed his unshielded right stomach and he felt a hydrogen gas bubble rising from his earlier conversion of martinis. Like a balloon it pressed against his throat's biway valve. For an instant he feared ignition from her cigarette. As he turned his head away to eructate discreetly she ducked under his arm and escaped through the dining room.

Muttering apologies, he pursued her into the kitchen. She jerked open a drawer. He glimpsed her hand gripping something attractively metallic. His amorous excitement converted it to a shiny, protective carapace and he continued his advance.

"Keep away," her human voice gasped.

But she glittered.

In his passionate confusion he was unable to decide whether he was seeing a steely-bright carapace where she had been or a stainless-steel carving knife in her human hand. He clacked inquiringly.

His legs weakened as he advanced. It was as if some conscious remnant of the young radio operator were aware of the knife—he hardened his human stomach muscles. She gleamed so gorgeously that he began to stridulate with fierce joy. He felt invulnerable to the thrust of steel within

his handsomely gleaming shell, even though his body was quivering. If he turned out not to be knife-proof the autopsy would expose everything. He reached for her.

Across space, separated by light-years from the carapaces of their oil-hungry wives, he and his kind had come. Their little twelve-carapacer had scouted an oil slick. In their excitement they had rammed the tanker, splattering delicious oil.

Belatedly they had recovered comatose bodies of its crew. Because he was the youngest Shieldwiper he had been relegated to the smallest body—that of the snub-nosed young radio operator.

That had been eighteen years ago. He lunged at her. As she dodged she seemed to fluctuate between a breast-heaving woman with a knife and a beautifully gleaming carapace clacking so passionately that she resembled his wife.

It would be twenty-two more years before the breeding fleet could arrive in this solar system. He clacked imploringly as he groped for her. They had removed his carapace surgically. Concealed in seamen's bellies he and the other eleven had managed to infiltrate this outrageous world. They had seen its shell-less bipeds squandering irreplaceable oil. Oil had to be saved for posterity—his.

He grabbed at her as if he were a man.

Pooling the first meager earnings of their new identities, all twelve had bought oil stocks. They had operated shrewdly. When they had learned more about being men they incorporated, leased some desert land, issued stock and, joy and calamity, struck oil.

He heard her screaming for help.

They were trying to save oil, not sell it—and the answer was the tank-farm gimmick. Paying for the erection of more storage tanks by issuing more growth stocks, they discovered tax angles so acute that they purchased an electric car manufacturing company in order to acquire its paper losses. As the years passed they became a conglomerate.

He cornered her between the gleaming dishwasher and the glittering refrigerator and heard her human voice

gasping: "Don't look at me like that."

By this time the other eleven had become remote chairmen of boards of directors. Because he was the only one who continued direct contact with the public as a lease-man the unfriendly eleven had accused him of un-shell-like urges. They were afraid he might crack before they controlled the planet's oil, before the breeding fleet arrived. They said he took human risks, even driving on the freeway. If he were killed in an accident his autopsy might lead to their exposure.

He heard her gasp.

He felt the soft struggling of her body. Her carving knife clattered to the floor with an excitingly hard sound.

Her human voice was saying, "Damn—damn—I can't stick you like a pig. So kiss me if that's what you're trying to do."

With his eyes closed he tried. She was so soft—the opposite of truly armored love—so horribly soft. He shrank back in normal revulsion. He opened his eyes. She had no shell at all. She opened hers.

As he fled through the dining room he heard her pursuing him. In the living room he snatched up his reassuringly hard attaché case and held it in front of himself like a carapace which was too small. To his dismay, she advanced.

Smiling oddly she said, "Either I'm sorry or you're—what about my car—"

"Not as sorry as I am," he gasped and grabbed the lease from her coffee table. "I'll authorize delivery of your car—"

Desperately needing his, he rushed outside. He scuttled along the slippery sidewalk toward the shell-like security of his car. Shrilly stridulating—he felt so humiliated. He tried to assure himself that her signature on the lease was the only important thing. He had that. But tears were trickling down his hideously human cheeks.

At least he had seduced another drilling site, he thought as he drove ninety miles an hour along the freeway. He couldn't wait twenty-two more years for his wife's hard carapace. He pounded his forehead against the glinting

steering wheel. His car swerved. He turned into the parking area above View Point, as if the sight of his oil tanks could give him some relief.

He parked at the brink and tried sublimating, pouring himself an abstemious reward for getting her signature. With trembling hands, he opened another can of an adequate little 30-weight, non-detergent oil and sipped, attempting to restrain himself. Then he drank desperately. But the act only stimulated his loneliness.

He looked up at the empty gray sky, then glared out at the ocean, dark with wasted oil. At least he was more intelligent than humans, he thought, and glanced into his car's mirror at his obscenely huge, blue-eyed reflection. These monsters were raping their own world.

Those bulging eyes stared back at him like a madman's from the mirror. But he clacked quietly and more confidently to himself because he knew who he was. He felt as if he were armored again, secure and restrained. He knew he could wait twenty-two more years for his wife and the breeding fleet. It would be so heavily armored that—

He regained his poise. His gaze shifted between the oil-blackened ocean, jagged with human drilling platforms, and those bulging mad-blue eyes in the mirror.

He felt thankful he wasn't human.

A PEDESTRIAN ACCIDENT

ROBERT COOVER

Robert Coover is an outsider who belongs inside. He writes Coover-style stories that are good science fiction; his last novel The Universal Baseball Association, J. Henry Waugh, Prop. *was nominated for the Nebula Award that is given for the best SF novel of the year by the Science Fiction Writers of America.*

Paul stepped off the curb and got hit by a truck. He didn't know what it was that hit him at first, but now, here on his back, under the truck, there could be no doubt. Is it me? he wondered. Have I walked the earth and come here?

Just as he was struck, and while still tumbling in front of the truck and then under the wheels, in a kind of funhouse gambado of pain and terror, he had thought: this has happened before. His neck had sprung, there was a sudden flash of light and a blaze roaring up in the back of his head. The hot—almost fragrant—pain: that was new. It was the *place* he felt he'd returned to.

He lay perpendicular to the length of the truck, under the trailer, just to the rear of the truck's second of three sets of wheels. All of him was under the truck but his head and shoulders. Maybe I'm being born again, he reasoned. He stared straight up, past the side of the truck, toward the sky, pale blue and cloudless. The tops of skyscrapers closed toward the center of his vision; now that he thought about it, he realized it was the first time in years he had looked up at them, and they seemed inclined to fall. The old illusion; one of them anyway. The truck was red with white letters, but his severe angle of vision up the side kept him from being able to read the letters. A capital *K*, he could see that—and a number, yes, it seemed to be a "14." He smiled inwardly at the irony, for he had a private

fascination with numbers: fourteen! He thought he remembered having had a green light, but it didn't really matter. No way to prove it. It would have changed by now, in any case. The thought, obscurely, troubled him.

"Crazy goddamn fool he just walk right out in fronta me no respect just burstin for a bustin!"

The voice, familiar somehow, guttural, yet falsetto, came from above and to his right. People were gathering to stare down at him, shaking their heads. He felt like one chosen. He tried to turn his head toward the voice, but his neck flashed hot again. Things were bad. Better just to lie still, take no chances. Anyway, he saw now, just in the corner of his eye, the cab of the truck, red like the trailer, and poking out its window, the large head of the truckdriver, wagging in the sunshine. The driver wore a small tweed cap—too small, in fact: it sat just on top of his head.

"Boy I seen punchies in my sweet time but this cookie takes the cake God bless the laboring classes I say and preserve us from the humble freak!"

The truckdriver spoke with broad gestures, bulbous eyes rolling, runty body thrusting itself in and out of the cab window, little hands flying wildly about. Paul worried still about the light. It was important, yet how could he ever know? The world was an ephemeral place, it could get away from you in a minute. The driver had a bent red nose and coarse reddish hair that stuck out like straw. A hard shiny chin, too, like a mirror image of the hooked nose. Paul's eyes wearied of the strain, and he had to stop looking.

"Listen lays and gentmens I'm a good Christian by Judy a decent hardworkin fambly man earnin a honest wage and got a dear little woman and seven yearnin younguns all my own seed *a responsible man* and goddamn that boy what he do but walk right into me and my poor ole truck!"

On some faces Paul saw compassion, or at least a neutral curiosity, an idle amusement, but on most he saw reproach. There were those who winced on witnessing his state and seemed to understand, but there were others—a majority—who jeered.

"He asked for it if you ask me!"

"It's the idler plays the fool and the workingman's to hang for it!"

"Shouldn't allow his kind out to walk the streets!"

"What is the use of running when you are on the wrong road?"

It worsened. Their shouts grew louder and ran together. There were orations and the waving of flags. Paul was wondering: had he been carrying anything? No, no. He had only—*wait!* a book? Very likely, but . . . ah well. Perhaps he was carrying it still. There was no feeling in his fingers.

The people were around him like flies, grievances were being aired, sides taken, and there might have been a brawl, but a policeman arrived and broke it up. "All right, everybody! Stand back, please!" he shouted. "Give this man some air! Can't you see he's been injured?"

At last, Paul thought. He relaxed. For a moment, he'd felt himself in a strange and hostile country, but now he felt at home again. He even began to believe he might survive. Though really: had he ever doubted it?

"Everybody back, *back!*" The policeman was effective. The crowd grew quiet, and by the sound of their sullen shuffling, Paul guessed they were backing off. Not that he got more or less air by it, but he felt relieved just the same. "Now," said the policeman, gently but firmly, "what has happened here?"

And with that it all started up again, same as before, the clamor, the outrage, the arguments, the learned quotations, but louder and more discordant than ever. I'm hurt, Paul said. No one heard. The policeman cried out for order, and slowly, with his shouts, with his nightstick, with his threats, he reduced them again to silence.

One lone voice hung at the end: "—for the last time, Mister, *stop goosing me!*" Everybody laughed, released.

"Stop goosing her, sir!" the policeman commanded with his chin thrust firmly forward, and everybody laughed again.

Paul almost laughed, but he couldn't, quite. Besides, he'd just, with that, got the picture, and given his condition, it was not a funny one. He opened his eyes and there was the policeman bent down over him. He had a notebook in his hand.

"Now, tell me, son, what happened here?" The policeman's face was thin and pale, like a student's, and he wore a trim little tuft of black mustache under the pinched peak of his nose.

I've just been hit, Paul explained, by this truck, and then he realized that he probably didn't say it at all, that speech was an art no longer his. He cast his eyes indicatively toward the cab of the truck.

"Listen, I asked you what happened here! Cat got your tongue, young man?"

"Crazy goddam fool he just walk right out in fronta me no respect just burstin for a bustin!"

The policeman remained crouched over Paul, but turned his head up to look at the truckdriver. The policeman wore a brilliant blue uniform with large brass buttons. And gold epaulettes.

"Boy I seen punchies in my sweet time but this cookie takes the cake God bless the laboring classes I say and preserve us from the humble freak!"

The policeman looked down at Paul, then back at the truckdriver. "I know about truckdrivers," Paul heard him say.

"Listen lays and gentmens I'm a good Christian by Judy a decent hardworkin fambly man earnin a honest wage and got a dear little woman and seven yearnin younguns all my own seed *a responsible man* and goddamn that boy what he do but walk right into me and my poor ole trike. Truck, I mean."

There was a loose tittering from the crowd, but the policeman's frown and raised stick contained it. "What's your name, lad?" he asked, turning back to Paul. At first, the policeman smiled, he knew who truckdrivers were and he knew who Pauls were, and there was a salvation of sorts in that smile, but gradually it faded. "Come, come, boy! Don't be afraid!" He winked, nudged him gently. "We're here to help you."

Paul, Paul replied. But, no, no doubt about it, it was jammed up in there and he wasn't getting it out.

"Well, if you won't help me, I can't help you," the policeman said pettishly and tilted his nose up. "Anybody

here know this man?" he called out to the crowd.

Again a roar, a threatening tumult of words and sounds, shouts back and forth. It was hard to know if none knew him or if they all did. But then one voice, belted out above the others, came through: "O God in heaven! It's Amory! *Amory Westerman!*" The voice, a woman's, hysterical by the sound of it, drew near. "Amory! What . . . *what* have they *done* to you?"

Paul understood. It was not a mistake. He was astonished by his own acumen.

"Do you know this young man?" the policeman asked, lifting his notebook.

"What? Know him? Did Sarah know Abraham? Did Eve know Cain?"

The policeman cleared his throat uneasily. "Adam," he corrected softly.

"You know who you know, I know who I know," the woman said, and let fly with a low throaty snigger. The crowd responded with a belly laugh.

"But this young man—!" the policeman insisted, flustered.

"Who, you and Amory?" the woman cried. "I can't believe it!" The crowd laughed and the policeman bit his lip. "Amory! What new persecutions are these?" She billowed out above him: old, maybe even seventy, fat and bosomy, pasty-faced with thick red rouges, head haloed by ringlets of sparse orangish hair. "My poor Amory!" And down she came on him. Paul tried to duck, got only a hot flash in his neck for it. Her breath reeked of cheap gin. Help, said Paul.

"Hold, madame! Stop!" the policeman cried, tugging at the woman's sleeve. She stood, threw up her arms before her face, staggered backwards. What more she did, Paul couldn't see, for his view of her face was largely blocked by the bulge of her breasts and belly. There were laughs, though. "Everything in order here," grumped the policeman, tapping his notebook. "Now, what's your name, please . . . uh . . . miss, madame?"

"My name?" She twirled gracelessly on one dropsied ankle and cried to the crowd: *"Shall I tell?"*

"Tell! Tell! Tell!" shouted the spectators, clapping rhythmically. Paul let himself be absorbed by it; there was, after all, nothing else to do.

The policeman, rapping a pencil against his blue notebook to the rhythm of the chant, leaned down over Paul and whispered: ("I think we've got them on our side now!")

Paul, his gaze floating giddily up past the thin white face of the police officer and the red side of the truck into the horizonless blue haze above, wondered if alliance were really the key to it all. What *am* I without them? Could I even die? Suddenly, the whole world seemed to tip: his feet dropped and his head rose. Beneath him the red machine shot grease and muck, the host rioted above his head, the earth pushed him from behind, and out front the skyscrapers pointed, like so many insensate fingers, the path he must walk to oblivion. He squeezed shut his eyes to set right the world again—he was afraid he would slide down beneath the truck to disappear from sight forever.

"My name—!" bellowed the woman, and the crowd hushed, tittering softly. Paul opened his eyes. He was on his back again. The policeman stood over him, mouth agape, pencil poised. The woman's puffy face was sequined with sweat. Paul wondered what she'd been doing while he wasn't watching. "My name, officer, is Grundy."

"I beg your pardon?" The policeman, when nervous, had a way of nibbling his mustache with his lowers.

"Mrs. Grundy, dear boy, who did you think I was?" She patted the policeman's thin cheek, tweaked his nose. "But you can call me Charity, handsome!" The policeman blushed. She twiddled her index finger in his little mustache. "Kootchy-kootchy-koo!" There was a roar of laughter from the crowd.

The policeman sneezed. "Please!" he protested.

Mrs. Grundy curtsied and stooped to unzip the officer's fly. "Hello! Anybody home!"

"*Stop that!*" squeaked the policeman through the thunderous laughter and applause. Strange, thought Paul, how much I'm enjoying this.

"Come out, come out, wherever you are!"

"The story!" the policeman insisted through the tumult.

"Story? What—?"

"This young fellow," said the policeman, pointing with his pencil. He zipped up, blew his nose. "Mr., uh, Mr. Westerman . . . you said—"

"Mr. *Who*?" The woman shook her jowls, perplexed. She frowned down at Paul, then brightened. "Oh yes! Amory!" She paled, seemed to sicken. Paul, if he could've, would've smiled. "Good God!" she rasped, as though appalled at what she saw. Then, once more, she took an operatic grip on her breasts and staggered back a step. "O mortality! O mischief! Done in! A noble man lies stark and stiff! Delenda est Carthago! *Sic transit glans mundi!*"

Gloria, corrected Paul. No, leave it.

"Squashed like a lousy bug!" she cried. "And at the height of his potency!"

"Now, wait a minute!" the policeman protested.

"The final curtain! The last farewell! The journey's end! Over the hill! The last muster!" Each phrase was answered by a happy shout from the mob. "Across the river! The way of all flesh! The last roundup!" She sobbed, then ballooned down on him again, tweaked his ear and whispered: ("How's Charity's weetsie snotkins, enh? Him fall down and bump his little putsy? Mumsy kiss and make well!") And she let him have it on the—well, sort of on the left side of his nose, left cheek, and part of his left eye: one wet enveloping sour blubbering kiss, and this time, sorrily, the policeman did not intervene. He was busy taking notes. Officer, said Paul.

"Hmmm," the policeman muttered, and wrote. "*G-R-U-N-* ah, ahem, Grundig, Grundig-*D*, yes, *D-I-G*. Now what did you—?"

The woman labored clumsily to her feet, plodded over behind the policeman, and squinted over his shoulder at the notes he was taking. "That's a *Y* there, buster, a *Y*." She jabbed a stubby ruby-tipped finger at the notebook.

"Grundigy?" asked the policeman in disbelief. "What kind of a name is that?"

"No, no!" the old woman whined, her grand manner flung to the winds. "Grundy! Grundy! Without the '*-ig*,'

don't you see? You take off your—"

"Oh, *Grundy!* Now I have it!" The policeman scrubbed the back end of his pencil in the notebook. "Darned eraser. About shot." The paper tore. He looked up irritably. "Can't we just make it Grundig?"

"Grundy," said the woman coldly.

The policeman ripped the page out of his notebook, rumpled it up angrily, and hurled it to the street. "All right, gosh damn it all!" he cried in a rage, scribbling: "Grundy. I have it. Now get on with it, lady!"

"Officer!" sniffed Mrs. Grundy, clasping a handkerchief to her throat. "Remember your place, or I shall have to speak to your superior!" The policeman shrank, blanched, nibbled his lip.

Paul knew what would come. He could read these two like a book. *I'm* the strange one, he thought. He wanted to watch their faces, but his streetlevel view gave him at best a perspective on their underchins. It was their crotches that were prominent. Butts and bellies: the squashed bug's-eye view. And that was strange, too: that he wanted to watch their faces.

The policeman was begging for mercy, wringing his pale hands. There were faint hissing sounds, wriggling out of the crowd like serpents. "Cut the shit, mac," Charity Grundy said finally, "you're overdoing it." The officer chewed his mustache, stared down at his notebook, abashed. "You wanna know who this poor clown is, right?" The policeman nodded. "Okay, are you ready?" She clasped her bosom again and the crowd grew silent. The police officer held his notebook up, the pencil poised. Mrs. Grundy snuffled, looked down at Paul, winced, turned away and wept. "Officer!" she gasped. *"He was my lover!"*

Halloos and cheers from the crowd, passing to laughter. The policeman started to smile, blinking down at Mrs. Grundy's body, but with a twitch of his mustache, he suppressed it.

"We met . . . just one year ago today. O fateful hour!" She smiled bravely, brushing back a tear, her lower lip quivering. Once, her hands clenched woefully before her face, she winked down at Paul. The wink nearly convinced

him. Maybe I'm him after all. Why not? "He was selling seachests, door to door. I can see him now as he was then—" She paused to look down at him as he was now, and wrinkles of revulsion swept over her face. Somehow this brought laughter. She looked away, puckered her mouth and bugged her eyes, shook one hand limply from the wrist. The crowd was really with her.

"Mrs. Grundy," the officer whispered, "please . . ."

"Yes, there he was, chapfallen and misused, orphaned by the rapacious world, yet pure and undefiled, there: there at my door!" With her baggy arm, flung out, quavering, she indicated the door. "Bent nearly double under his impossible seachest, perspiration illuminating his manly brow, wounding his eyes, wrinkling his undershirt—"

"Careful!" cautioned the policeman nervously, glancing up from his notes. He must have filled twenty or thirty pages by now.

"In short, my heart went out to him!" Gesture of heart going out. "And though—alas!—my need for seachests was limited—"

The spectators somehow discovered something amusing in this and tittered knowingly. Mainly in the way she said it, he supposed. Her story in truth did not bother Paul so much as his own fascination with it. He knew where it would lead, but it didn't matter. In fact, maybe that *was* what fascinated him.

"—I invited him in. Put down that horrid seachest, dear boy, and come in here, I cried, come in to your warm and obedient Charity, love, come in for a cup of tea, come in and rest, rest your pretty little shoulders, your pretty little back, your pretty little . . ." Mrs. Grundy paused, smiled with a faint arch of one eyebrow, and the crowd responded with another burst of laughter. "And it *was* pretty little, okay," she grumbled, and again they whooped, while she sniggered throatily.

How was it now? he wondered. In fact, he'd been wondering all along.

"And, well, officer, that's what he did, he *did* put down his seachest—alas! sad to tell, right on my unfortunate cat Rasputin, dozing there in the day's brief sun, God rest his

soul, his (again, alas!) somewhat homaloidal soul!"

She had a great audience. They never failed her, nor did they now.

The policeman, who had finally squatted down to write on his knee, now stood and shouted for order. "Quiet! *Quiet*!" His mustache twitched. "Can't you see this is a serious matter?" He's the funny one, thought Paul. The crowd thought so, too, for the laughter mounted, then finally died away. "And . . . and then what happened?" the policeman whispered. But they heard him anyway and screamed with delight, throwing up a new clamor in which could be distinguished several coarse paraphrases of the policeman's question. The officer's pale face flushed. He looked down at Paul with a brief commiserating smile, shrugged his shoulders, fluttering the epaulettes. Paul made a try at a never-mind kind of gesture, but, he supposed, without bringing it off.

"What happened next, you ask, you naughty boy?" Mrs. Grundy shook and wriggled. Cheers and whistles. She cupped her plump hands under her breasts and hitched her abundant hips heavily to one side. "You don't understand," she told the crowd. "I only wished to be a mother to the lad." Hoohahs and catcalls. "But I had failed to realize, in that fleeting tragic moment when he unburdened himself upon poor Rasputin, how I was wrenching his young and unsullied heart asunder! Oh yes, I know, I know—"

"This is the dumbest story I ever heard," interrupted the policeman finally, but Mrs. Grundy paid him no heed.

"I know I'm old and fat, that I've crossed the Grand Climacteric!" She winked at the crowd's yowls of laughter. "I know the fragrant flush of first flower is gone forever!" she cried, not letting a good thing go, pressing her wrinkled palms down over the soft swoop of her blimp-sized hips, peeking coyly over one plump shoulder at the shrieking crowd. The policeman stamped his foot, but no one noticed except Paul. "I know, I know—*yet*: somehow, face to face with little Charity, a primitive unnameable urgency welled up in his untaught loins, his pretty little—"

"*Stop it!*" cried the policeman, right on cue. "This has gone far enough!"

"And *you* ask what happened next? I shall tell you, officer! For why conceal the truth . . . from *you* of all people?" Though uneasy, the policeman seemed frankly pleased that she had put it this way. "Yes, without further discourse, he buried his pretty little head in my bosom—" (Paul felt a distressing sense of suffocation, though perhaps it had been with him all the while) "—and he tumbled me there, yes he did, there on the front porch alongside his seachest and my dying Rasputin, there in the sunlight, before God, before the neighbors, before Mr. Dunlevy the mailman who is hard of hearing, before the children from down the block passing on their shiny little—"

"Crazy goddamn fool he just walk right out in fronta me no respect just burstin for a bustin!" said a familiar voice.

Mrs. Grundy's broad face, now streaked with tears and mottled with a tense pink flush, glowered. There was a long and difficult silence. Then she narrowed her eyes, smiled faintly, squared her shoulders, touched a handkerchief to her eye, plunged the handkerchief back down her bosom, and resumed: "—Before, in short, the whole itchy eyes-agog world, a coupling unequaled in the history of Western concupiscence!" Some vigorous applause, which she acknowledged. "Assaulted, but—yes, I confess it—assaulted, but *aglow*, I reminded him of—"

"Boy I seen punchies in my sweet time but this cookie takes the cake God bless the laboring classes I say and preserve us from the humble freak!"

Swiveling his wearying gaze hard right, Paul could see the truckdriver waggling his huge head at the crowd. Mrs. Grundy padded heavily over to him, the back of her thick neck reddening, swung her purse in a great swift arc, but the truckdriver recoiled into his cab, laughing with a taunting cackle. Then, almost in the same instant, he poked his red-beaked head out again, and rolling his eyes, said: "Listen lays and gentmens I'm a good Christian by Judy a decent hardworkin fambly man earnin a honest wage and got a dear little woman and seven yearnin younguns all my own seed *a responsible*—"

"I'll responsible your ass!" hollered Charity Grundy and let fly with her purse again, but once more the driver ducked nimbly inside, cackling obscenely. The crowd,

taking sides, was more hysterical than ever. Cheers were raised and bets taken.

Again the driver's waggling head popped out: "—*man* and god—" he began, but this time Mrs. Grundy was waiting for him. Her great lumpish purse caught him square on his bent red nose—*ka*-RAACKK!—and the truckdriver slumped lifelessly over the door of his cab, his stubby little arms dangling limp, reaching just below the top of his head. As best Paul could tell, the tweed cap did not drop off, but since his eyes were cramped with fatigue, he had to stop looking before the truckdriver's head ceased bobbing against the door.

Man and god! he thought. Of course! terrific! What did it mean? Nothing.

The policeman made futile little gestures of interference, but apparently had too much respect for Mrs. Grundy's purse to carry them out. That purse was big enough to hold a bowling ball, and maybe it did.

Mrs. Grundy, tongue dangling and panting furiously, clapped one hand over her heart and, with the handkerchief, fanned herself with the other. Paul saw sweat dripping down her legs. "And so—*foo!*—I . . . I—*puf!*—I reminded him of . . . of the—*whee!*—the cup of tea!" she gasped. She paused, swallowed, mopped her brow, sucked in a deep lungful of air, and exhaled it slowly. She cleared her throat. *"And so I reminded him of the cup of tea!"* she roared with a grand sweep of one powerful arm, the old style recovered. There was a general smattering of complimentary applause, which Mrs. Grundy acknowledged with a short nod of her head. "We went inside. The air was heavy with expectation and the unmistakable aroma of catshit. One might almost be pleased that Rasputin had yielded up the spirit—"

"Now just stop it!" cried the policeman. "This is—"

"I poured some tea, we sang the now famous duet, *'Ciérrate la bragueta! La bragueta está cerrada!,'* I danced for him, he—"

"Enough, I said!" screamed the policeman, his little mustache quivering with indignation. "This is absurd!"

You're warm, said Paul. But that's not quite it.

"Absurd?" cried Charity Grundy, aghast. "*Absurd?* You call my dancing *absurd?*"

"I . . . I didn't say—"

"Grotesque, perhaps, and yes, a bit awesome—but *absurd!*" She grabbed him by the lapels, lifting him off the ground. "What do you have against dancing, you worm? *What do you have against grace?*"

"P-please! Put me down!"

"Or is it, you don't believe I *can* dance?" She dropped him.

"N-no!" he squeaked, brushing himself off, straightening his epaulettes. "No! I—"

"Show him! Show him!" chanted the crowd.

The policeman spun on them. "Stop! In the name of the law!" They obeyed. "This man is injured. He may die. He needs help. It's no joking matter. I ask for your cooperation." He paused for effect. "That's better." The policeman stroked his mustache, preening a bit. "Now, ahem, is there a doctor present? A doctor, please?"

"Oh, officer, you're cute! You're *very* cute!" said Mrs. Grundy on a new tack. The crowd snickered. "*Is there a doctor present?*" she mimicked, "*a doctor, please?*"

"Now just cut it out!" the policeman ordered, glaring angrily across Paul's chest at Mrs. Grundy. "Gosh damn it now, you stop it this instant, or . . . or you'll see what'll happen!"

"Aww, you're *jealous!*" cried Mrs. Grundy. "And of poor little supine Rasputin! Amory, I mean." The spectators were in great spirits again, total rebellion threatening, and the police officer was at the end of his rope. "Well, *don't* be jealous, dear boy!" cooed Mrs. Grundy. "Charity tell you a weetsie bitty secret."

"*Stop!*" sobbed the policeman. Be careful where you step, said Paul below.

Mrs. Grundy leaned perilously out over Paul and got a grip on the policeman's ear. He winced, but no longer attempted escape. "That boy," she said, "*he humps terrible!*"

It carried out to the crowd and broke it up. It was her big line and she wambled about gloriously, her rouged mouth

stretched in a flabby toothless grin, retrieving the pennies that people were pitching (Paul knew about them from being hit by them; one landed on his upper lip, stayed there, emitting that familiar dead smell common to pennies the world over), thrusting her chest forward to catch them in the cleft of her bosom. She shook and, shaking, jangled. She grabbed the policeman's hand and pulled him forward to share a bow with her. The policeman smiled awkwardly, twitching his mustache.

"You asked for a doctor," said an old but gentle voice.

The crowd noises subsided. Paul opened his eyes and discovered above him a stooped old man in a rumpled gray suit. His hair was shaggy and white, his face dry, lined with age. He wore rimless glasses, carried a black leather bag. He smiled down at Paul, that easy smile of a man who comprehends and assuages pain, then looked back at the policeman. Inexplicably, a wave of terror shook Paul.

"You wanted a doctor," the old man repeated.

"Yes! *Yes!*" cried the policeman, almost in tears. "Oh, thank God!"

"I'd rather you thanked the profession," the doctor said. "Now what seems to be the problem?"

"Oh, doctor, it's awful!" The policeman twisted the notebook in his hands, fairly destroying it. "This man has been struck by this truck, or so it would appear, no one seems to know, it's all a terrible mystery, and there is a woman, but now I don't see—? and I'm not even sure of his name—"

"No matter," interrupted the doctor with a kindly nod of his old head, "who he is. He is a man and that, I assure you, is enough for me."

"Doctor, that's so good of you to say so!" wept the policeman.

I'm in trouble, thought Paul. Oh boy, I'm really in trouble.

"Well, now, let us just see," said the doctor, crouching down over Paul. He lifted Paul's eyelids with his thumb and peered intently at Paul's eyes; Paul, anxious to assist, rolled them from side to side. "Just relax, son," the doctor said. He opened his black bag, rummaged about in it, withdrew a flashlight. Paul was not sure exactly what the

doctor did after that, but he seemed to be looking in his ears. I can't move my head, Paul told him, but the doctor only asked: "Why does he have a penny under his nose?" His manner was not such as to insist upon an answer, and he got none. Gently, expertly, he pried Paul's teeth apart, pinned his tongue down with a wooden depresser, and scrutinized his throat. Paul's head was on fire with pain. "Ahh, yes," he mumbled. "Hum, hum."

"How . . . how is he, Doctor?" stammered the policeman, his voice muted with dread and respect. "Will . . . will he. . . ?"

The doctor glared scornfully at the officer, then withdrew a stethoscope from his bag. He hooked it in his ears, slipped the disc inside Paul's shirt and listened intently, his old head inclined to one side like a bird listening for worms. Absolute silence now. Paul could hear the doctor breathing, the policeman whimpering softly. He had the vague impression that the doctor tapped his chest a time or two, but if so, he didn't feel it. His head felt better with his mouth closed. "Hmmm," said the doctor gravely, "yes . . ."

"Oh, please! What *is* it, Doctor?" the policeman cried.

"What is it? *What is it?*" shouted the doctor in a sudden burst of rage. "I'll tell you *what is it!*" He sprang to his feet, nimble for an old man. "I cannot examine this patient while you're hovering over my shoulder and mewling like a goddamn schoolboy, *that's* what *is* it!"

"B-but I only—" stammered the officer, staggering backwards.

"And how do you expect me to examine a man half buried under a damned truck?" The doctor was in a terrible temper.

"But I—"

"Damn it! I'll but-I you, you idiot, if you don't remove this truck from the scene so that I can determine the true gravity of this man's injuries! *Have I made myself clear?*"

"Y-yes! But . . . but wh-what am I to *do*?" wept the police officer, hands clenched before his mouth. "I'm only a simple policeman, Doctor, doing my duty before God and count—"

"Simple, you said it!" barked the doctor. "I *told* you

what to do, you God-and-cunt simpleton—*now get moving!*"

God and cunt! Did it again, thought Paul. Now what?

The policeman, chewing wretchedly on the corners of his notebook, stared first at Paul, then at the truck, at the crowd, back at the truck. Paul felt fairly certain now that the letter following the *K* on the truck's side was an *I*. "Shall I . . . shall I pull him out from under—?" the officer began tentatively, thin chin aquiver.

"*Good God, no!*" stormed the doctor, stamping his foot. "This man may have a broken neck! Moving him would *kill* him, don't you see that, you sniveling birdbrain? Now, goddamn it, wipe your wretched nose and go wake up your—your accomplice up there, *and I mean right now!* Tell him to back his truck *off* this poor devil!"

"B-back it off—! But . . . but he'd have to run *over* him again! He—"

"Don't by God run-over-him-again *me*, you blackshirt hireling, *or I'll have your badge!*" screamed the doctor, brandishing his stethoscope.

The policeman hesitated but a moment to glance down at Paul's body, then turned and ran to the front of the truck. "Hey! Come on, you!" He whacked the driver on the head with his nightstick. Hollow *thunk!* "Up and at 'em!"

"—dam that boy what," cried the truckdriver, rearing up wildly and fluttering his head as though lost, "he do but walk right into me and my poor ole trick! Truck, I mean!" The crowd laughed again, first time in a long time, but the doctor stamped his foot and they quieted right down.

"Now, start up that engine, you, right now! I mean it!" ordered the policeman, stroking his mustache. He was getting a little of his old spit and polish back. He slapped the nightstick in his palm two or three times.

Paul felt the pavement under his back quake as the truckdriver started the motor. The white letters above him joggled in their red fields like butterflies. Beyond, the sky's blue had deepened, but white clouds now flowered in it. The skyscrapers had grayed, as though withdrawing information.

The truck's noise smothered the voices, but Paul did overhear the doctor and the policeman occasionally, the

doctor ranting, the policeman imploring, something about mass and weight and vectors and direction. It was finally decided to go forward, since there were two sets of wheels up front and only one to the rear (a decent kind of humanism maintaining, after all, thought Paul), but the truckdriver apparently misunderstood, because he backed up anyway, and the middle set of wheels rolled up on top of Paul.

"Stop! Stop!" shrieked the police officer, and the truck motor coughed and died. "I ordered you to go *forward,* you pighead, not backward!"

The driver popped his head out the window, bulged his ping-pong-ball eyes at the policeman, then waggled his tiny hands in his ears and brayed. The officer took a fast practiced swing at the driver's big head (epaulettes, or no, he had a skill or two), but the driver deftly dodged it. He clapped his runty hands and bobbed back inside the cab.

"What oh *what* shall we ever do *now?*" wailed the officer. The doctor scowled at him with undisguised disgust. Paul felt like he was strangling, but he could locate no specific pain past his neck. "Dear lord above! There's wheels on each side of him and wheels in the middle!"

"Capital!" the doctor snorted. "Figure that out by yourself, or somebody help you?"

"You're making fun," whimpered the officer.

"And you're murdering this man!" bellowed the doctor.

The police officer uttered a short anxious cry, then raced to the front of the truck again. Hostility welling in the crowd, Paul could hear it. "Okay, okay!" cried the officer. "Back up or go forward, *please,* I don't care, but hurry! Hurry!"

The motor started up again, there was a jarring grind of gears abrading, then slowly slowly slowly the middle set of wheels backed down off Paul's body. There was a brief tense interim before the next set climbed up on him, hesitated as a ferris wheel hesitates at the top of its ambit, then sank down off him.

Some time passed.

He opened his eyes.

The truck had backed away, out of sight, out of Paul's limited range of sight anyway. His eyelids weighed closed.

He remembered the doctor being huddled over him, shreds of his clothing being peeled away.

Much later, or perhaps not, he opened his eyes once more. The doctor and the policeman were standing over him, some other people too, people he didn't recognize, though he felt somehow he ought to know them. Mrs. Grundy, she was there; in fact, it looked for all the world as though she had set up a ticket booth and was charging admission. Some of the people were holding little children up to see, warm faces, tender, compassionate; more or less. Newsmen were taking his picture. "You'll be famous," one of them said.

"His goddamn body is like a mulligan stew," the doctor was telling a reporter.

The policeman shook his head. He was a bit green. "Do you think—?"

"Do I think what?" the doctor asked. Then he laughed, a thin raking old man's laugh. "You mean, do I think he's going to *die*?" He laughed again. "Good God, man, you can see for yourself! There's nothing left to him, he's a goddamn gallimaufry, and hardly an appetizing one at that!" He dipped his fingers into Paul, licked them, grimaced. "Foo!"

"I think we should get a blanket for him," the policeman said weakly.

"Of course you should!" snapped the doctor, wiping his stained hands on a small white towel he had brought out of his black bag. He peered down through his rimless spectacles at Paul, smiled. "Still there, eh?" He squatted beside him. "I'm sorry, son. There's not a damn thing I can do. Well, yes, I suppose I can take this penny off your lip. You've little use for it, eh?" He laughed softly. "Now, let's see, there's no function for it, is there? No, no, there it is." The doctor started to pitch it away, then pocketed it instead. The eyes, don't they use them for the eyes? "Well, that's better. I'm sure. But let's be honest: it doesn't get to the real problem, does it?" Paul's lips tickled where the penny had been. "No, I'm of all too little use to you there, boy. I can't even prescribe a soporific platitude. Leave that

to the goddamn priests, eh? Hee hee hee! Oops, sorry, son! Would you like a priest?"

No thanks, said Paul.

"Can't get it out, eh?" The doctor probed Paul's neck. "Hmmm. No, obviously not." He shrugged. "Just as well. What could you possibly have to say, eh?" He chuckled dryly, then looked up at the policeman who still had not left to search out a blanket. "Don't just stand there, man! Get this lad a priest!" The police officer, clutching his mouth, hurried away, out of Paul's eye-reach. "I know it's not easy to accept death," the doctor was saying. He finished wiping his hands, tossed the towel into his black bag, snapped the bag shut. "We all struggle against it, boy, it's part and parcel of being alive, this brawl, this meaningless gutterfight with death. In fact, let me tell you, son, it's *all* there is to life." He wagged his finger in punctuation, and ended by pressing the tip of it to Paul's nose. "That's the secret, *that's* my happy paregoric! Hee hee hee!"

KI, thought Paul. *KI* and 14. What could it have been? Never know now. One of those things.

"But death begets life, there's *that*, my boy, and don't you ever forget it! Survival and murder are synonyms, son, first flaw of the universe! Hee hee h—oh! Sorry, son! No time for puns! Forget I said it!"

It's okay, said Paul. Listening to the doctor had at least made him forget the tickle on his lip and it was gone.

"New life burgeons out of rot, new mouths consume old organisms, father dies at orgasm, mother dies at birth, only old Dame Mass with her twin dugs of Stuff and Tickle persists, suffering her long slow split into pure light and pure carbon! Hee hee hee! A tender thought! Don't you agree, lad?" The doctor gazed off into space, happily contemplating the process.

I tell you what, said Paul. Let's forget it.

Just then, the policeman returned with a big quilted comforter, and he and the doctor spread it gently over Paul's body, leaving only his face exposed. The people pressed closer to watch.

"Back! *Back!*" shouted the policeman. "Have you no respect for the dying? *Back, I say!*"

"Oh, come now," chided the doctor. "Let them watch if they want to. It hardly matters to this poor fellow, and even if it does, it can't matter for much longer. And it will help keep the flies off him."

"Well, doctor, if you think . . ." His voice faded away. Paul closed his eyes.

As he lay there among the curious, several odd questions plagued Paul's mind. He knew there was no point to them, but he couldn't rid himself of them. The book, for example: did he have a book? And if he did, what book, and what had happened to it? And what about the stoplight, that lost increment of what men call history, why had no one brought up the matter of the stoplight? And pure carbon he could understand, but as for light: what could its purity consist of? *KI.* 14. That impression that it had happened before. Yes, these were mysteries, all right. His head ached from them.

People approached Paul from time to time to look under the blanket. Some only peeked, then turned away, while others stayed to poke around, dip their hands in the mutilations. There seemed to be more interest in them now that they were covered. There were some arguments and some occasional horseplay, but the doctor and policeman kept things from getting out of hand. If someone arrogantly ventured a Latin phrase, the doctor always put him down with some toilet-wall barbarism; on the other hand, he reserved his purest, most mellifluous toponymy for small children and young girls. He made several medical appointments with the latter. The police officer, though queasy, stayed nearby. Once, when Paul happened to open his eyes after having had them closed some while, the policeman smiled warmly down on him and said: "Don't worry, good fellow. I'm still here. Take it as easy as you can. I'll be here to the very end. You can count on me." Bullshit, thought Paul, though not ungratefully, and he thought he remembered hearing the doctor echo him as he fell off to sleep.

When he awoke, the streets were empty. They had all wearied of it, as he had known they would. It had clouded

over, the sky had darkened, it was probably night, and it had begun to rain lightly. He could now see the truck clearly, off to his left. Must have been people in the way before.

MAGIC KISS LIPSTICK
IN
14
DIFFERENT SHADES

Never would have guessed. Only in true life could such things happen.

When he glanced to his right, he was surprised to find an old man sitting near him. Priest, no doubt. He had come after all . . . black hat, long grayish beard, sitting in the puddles now forming in the street, legs crossed. Go on, said Paul, don't suffer on my account, don't wait for me, but the old man remained, silent, drawn, rain glistening on his hat, face, beard, clothes: prosopopoeia of patience. The priest. Yet, something about the clothes: well, they were in rags. Pieced together and hanging in tatters. The hat, too, now that he noticed. At short intervals, the old man's head would nod, his eyes would cross, his body would tip, he would catch himself with a start, grunt, glance suspiciously about him, then back down at Paul, would finally relax again and recommence the cycle.

Paul's eyes wearied, especially with the rain splashing into them, so he let them fall closed once more. But he began suffering discomforting visions of the old priest, so he opened them again, squinted off to the left, toward the truck. A small dog, wiry and yellow, padded along in the puddles, hair drooping and bunching up with the rain. It sniffed at the tires of the truck, lifted its legs by one of them, sniffed again, padded on. It circled around Paul, apparently not noticing him, but poking its nose at every object, narrowing the distance between them with every circle. It passed close by the old man, snarled, completed another half-circle, and approached Paul from the left. It stopped near Paul's head—the wet-dog odor was suffocating—and whimpered, licking Paul's face. The old man did nothing, just sat, legs crossed, and passively

watched. Of course . . . not a priest at all: an old beggar. Waiting for the clothes when he died. If he still had any. Go ahead and take them now, Paul told him, I don't care. But the beggar only sat and stared. Paul felt a tugging sensation from below, heard the dog growl. His whole body seemed to jerk upwards, sending another hot flash through his neck. The dog's hind feet were planted alongside Paul's head, and now and again the right paw would lose its footing, kick nervously at Paul's face, a buffeting counterpoint to the waves of hot pain behind his throat and eyes. Finally, something gave way. The dog shook water out of its yellow coat, and padded away, a fresh piece of flesh between its jaws. The beggar's eyes crossed, his head dipped to his chest, and he started to topple forward, but again he caught himself, took a deep breath, uncrossed his legs, crossed them again, but the opposite way, reached in his pocket and pulled out an old cigarette butt, molded it between his yellow fingers, put it in his mouth, but did not light it. For an instant, the earth upended again, and Paul found himself hung on the street, a target for the millions of raindarts somebody out in the night was throwing at him. There's nobody out there, he reminded himself, and that set the earth right again. The beggar spat. Paul shielded his eyes from the rain with his lids. He thought he heard other dogs. How much longer must this go on? he wondered. How much longer?

TRAFFIC PROBLEM

WILLIAM EARLS

The irony of black humor is not new. Candide *reminds us of that, but it is a way of writing that is becoming more relevant to our times. Perhaps this is because we seem to be living in the midst of a galactic sick joke where people, like that U.S. Army captain in Vietnam, can kill other people in order to save them. The black comedy is a way of talking about the untalkable;* Catch-22 *faces the idiocy of war by being idiotic. Now—what about the war on our highways, the ever-increasing web of roads and machines that are so vital to our lives?*

Davis took the third expressway from Forty-second Street to the site of the old Rockefeller Center, dropped down through the quadruple overpass and braked to a halt in the fourth level lot. He paused a moment before alighting from the car, trying to catch his breath—even in the car, with the CO filters on over-duty, the air was terrible. He donned his gas mask before he stepped into the lot, slammed the left-hand door into the unprotected door of the Cadillac parked next to him.

"Serve him right for crossing a parking line," he growled. He jumped aside quickly as a Mustang Mach V whistled past him, slammed around a corner, hurtled down the ramp to the street. He flung a curse after it.

He eased his head out between the parked cars before sprinting across the traffic lane of the parking lot to the elevator on the other side. The attendant rushed to him, tried to demand the $30 daily fee, stepped back when Davis flashed his Traffic Manager's badge at him. The attendant dropped to his knees in salute, stayed down while Davis rushed past.

His office was on the ground level of the Roads and Traffic Building and when he came off the elevator, the

hall was full of dust and a jack hammer was going crazily at one end of it. The man behind it was wearing the light blue of Road Construction Unlimited. Davis remembered the spur route of the second level, Fifty-seventh Street West that was going through the building's corner. He hadn't expected construction to start this soon.

One wall had been ripped out of the office and the derricks were swinging the steel girders for the spur route into place. More men were driving them into the concrete of the floor, slamming them into place with magn-gun rivets. One of the drivers kept walking to the water cooler and Davis stopped him.

"That stuff is three dollars a gallon, buddy," he said.

"Road crew, Mac." The big man tried to push him aside and Davis flashed the badge.

"This is still my office," he said. He crossed to the control board, buzzed the Director.

"Davis in," he said.

I suppose the old bastard will want a report already . . .

"Right," the Director's secretary said, "I'll tell him."

Leingen waved at him from the casualty table and he trotted over, flashed the badge and Leingen nodded. He was off duty now, officially relieved—and he looked relieved.

Lucky bastard will be home in three hours—if he makes it . . .

The casualty report was horrendous, up 4.2 percent over the day before—with seventeen dead on the United Nations area overpass alone. He dialed Road Service.

"Road," the voice on the other end said.

"Traffic Manager. Send a bird. I'm going up for a look." He checked some of the other reports—two breakdowns on the fifth level of the Tappan Zee bridge, both '79 Fords. Goddam people had no right driving two-year-old cars on the roads anyway. He buzzed Arrest Division.

"All 'seventy-nine Fords off the roads," he said.

"Rog." On the board he watched the red dots that were the Fords being shuttled off to the waiting ramps, clogging them. He flipped a visual to one of them, saw the cars jamming in and the bulldozers pushing them closer. The din around him was increasing and pieces of plasta-plaster

were starting to fall from the ceiling.

"Slap up a privacy screen," he ordered. He received no answer and looked at one of the workmen driving the rivets for the girders. Jones wasn't there, he thought suddenly. Of course not, that girder is where his desk was. He'd miss Jones.

"That ain't a priority job, buddy," the workman said. "You want materials, get 'em from Construction."

Davis growled, checked his watch. 0807. Things were just moving into the third rush period. Almost on cue the building began to quiver as the lower echelon office workers hurtled by in their Lincolns and Mercuries to obscure little jobs in obscure little offices.

A short buzz came from the main phone. The Director.

"Yes, sir," Davis said.

"Davis?" the palsied voice said. *Die, you old bastard,* Davis thought. "Casualties are up all over."

"The roads are jammed, sir."

"You're Manager. Do something."

"We need more roads. Only you can authorize em."

"We don't have any more roads. But that traffic must move. Do what you have to." The voice went into a coughing spasm. "When you're Director, you build roads."

"Yes, sir." He punched off. All right, he'd move the traffic. Say this for the Director—he'd back a Manager all the way.

"The bird's here," the intercom said.

"Smith," Davis said. His assistant looked up from the main board. "You're in charge. I'm going up." He moved to the elevator, bounced up, flipped his telecorder to audio, caught the information as he hurtled toward the tenth floor.

"Major pileup at Statue of Liberty East," the speaker barked. "Seventeen cars and a school bus. Ambulance on the scene. Structural damage on Fifth level East, Yankee Stadium Speedway. More accidents on Staten Island One, Two, Four, Ten, Thirteen, and Twenty-Two; Eastside Four, Nine, and Eleven—" Davis punched off. Matters were worse than he had thought.

On the fifth floor he changed elevators to avoid the ramp

from the exact-change lanes to the fourth level, zipped to the roof and the waiting helicopter.

"Fifty-car pileup on Yankee Stadium Four," the helicopter radio screamed and he punched the button to Central.

"Davis."

"Yes, sir?"

"What's the time on next of kin identification?" he asked.

"Twenty-three minutes, sir."

"Make it nineteen. Inform all units."

"Yes, sir."

"Lift off," he growled at the pilot. He threw his eyes out of focus, watching the cars hurtling by the edge of the roof.

I could reach out and touch them—*and have my arm torn off at 100 miles an hour . . .*

He coughed. He always forgot to don his gas mask for the short trip from the elevator to the bird and it always bothered his lungs.

The smog was fortunately thin this morning and he could see the gray that was Manhattan below him. Southward he could make out the spire of the Empire State Building rising forty stories above the cloverleaf around it and beyond that the tower of the Trade Center and the great hulk of the parking lot dwarfing it.

"Hook right," he ordered the pilot, "spin down along the river."

There was a pile-up at the Pier 90 crossover and he saw a helicopter swooping down to pick up the mangled cars at the end of a magnet, swing out across the river to drop them into the New Jersey processing depot.

He buzzed the Director as he saw the wrecks piling up in front of the three big crunchers at the depot. They were hammering broken Fords and Buicks into three-foot lumps of mangled steel, spitting them onto the barges. The barges were then being towed out to Long Island Sound for the new jetport. But fast as the crunchers were, they were not fast enough. With a capacity of only two hundred cars an hour apiece, they could not keep pace with the rush-hour crackups.

"Yes, Davis," the Director wheezed.

"Would you call U.S. Steel," Davis asked. "We need another cruncher."

"Well, I don't know if we really do—but I'll call."

Davis punched off angrily.

His practiced eye gauged the flow of traffic on the George and Martha Washington Bridges. The cars were eighty feet apart and he ordered a close to seventy-two, effectively increasing the capacity by ten percent. That was almost as good as another level—but not good enough.

The traffic lane above the piers was packed and smoke from ships was rising between the two twelve-lane sections. Trucks loaded with imports paused for a moment at the top of the ramps were steam catapulted into the traffic. He saw one truck, loaded with what looked like steel safes, hit by a Cadillac, go out of control, hurtle over the edge of the roadway and fall one hundred feet—five levels—to the ground. The safes went bouncing in every direction, slamming into cars on every level. Even two hundred feet above the scene he could hear the scream of brakes and the explosions as the autos crashed and burned. He punched for Control.

"Scramble an ambulance to Pier Forty-six, all levels," he said.

He smiled. It was always good to be the first to report an accident. It showed you hadn't forgotten your training. He had reported four one morning, a record. But now there were bounties for accident reporting and it was rare when a traffic man could actually turn one in. At one time traffic accidents had been reported by the police, but now they were too busy tracking down law violators. An accident was harmful only in that it broke the normal traffic flow.

Traffic was heavy on all levels, he saw—he could actually see only three levels down and there were as many as eight below that—and the main interchange at Times Square was feeding and receiving well. The largest in Manhattan, it spanned from Forty-second Street to Forty-ninth and from Fourth to Eighth avenues. There had been protests when construction had started—mostly from movie fans and library fanatics—but now it was the finest interchange in the world, sixteen lanes wide at the Forty-

second Street off ramp, with twelve exact change lanes. Even the library fans were appeased, he thought: it had been his idea to move the library lions from the old site—they would have been destroyed with the rest of the building had he not spoken—to the mouth of the Grand Central speed lane to Yankee Stadium.

The helicopter banked, headed down the Westside parkway toward the Battery interchange and the Statue of Liberty crossover. It had been clever of the design engineers to use the Bedloe's Island base of the statue for the crossover base—it had saved millions over the standard practice of driving piles into the harbor water. The copper had brought a good salvage price, too.

Of course, the conservationists, the live-in-the-past-people, had objected here, too. But, as always, they were shouted down at the protest meetings. The traffic had to roll, didn't it?

Below the helicopter Manhattan was a seething mass of speeding cars—reds, blacks, blues, and this month's brilliant green against the background of concrete and asphalt. There were quick flashes of brake lights, frightened blurs as a tie rod snapped or a tire blew. Dipping wreckocopters swooped in to pluck cars and pieces of cars from the highways before the lanes jammed. The island was two hundred lanes wide at the top, widened to two hundred and thirty at the base with the north-south lanes over the sites of the old streets running forty feet apart, over, under, and even through the old buildings. It was the finest city in the world, made for and by automobiles. And he controlled, for eight hours a day anyway, the destiny of those automobiles. He felt the sense of power he always had here in the helicopter, swooping above the traffic. It passed quickly—it always did—and he was observing clinically, watching the flow.

"There," he said to the pilot, indicated the fifth lane on the pier route. A dull red Dodge was going sixty-five, backing up the traffic for miles. There was no room to pass, and, with the traffic boiling up out of the tunnels and bridges onto the road, a jam was inevitable. "Drop," he ordered, moved behind the persuader gunsight, lined the Dodge in the cross hairs.

He fired and watched the result. The dye marker smashed on the Dodge's hood, glowed for a moment. Warned, the driver moved to a sane 95. But the dye stayed and the driver would be picked up later in the day—the dye was impossible to remove except with Traffic-owned detergent—and sentenced. For first clogging, the fine was only $200, but for later offenses, drivers were banned from the road for five to one hundred days, forced to ride the railways into town. Davis shuddered at the thought.

Battery Point and Bedloe's Island looked good and the copter heeled. He used the binoculars to check the Staten Island Freeway, saw that it was down to sixteen lanes coming into New York from the high of twenty-two. The main rush was almost over and he could start preparing for the early lunch rush.

* * *

There was still a pile-up at the Trade Center. The one tower, two had been planned, was standing high above the highways around it, with the great bulk of the parking lot building rising above it, the smog line lapping at the seventy-ninth floor. He saw the red lights in the first ninety-two floors of the lot signifying full, knew that the remaining forty floors would not take all of the cars still piling in from the twenty-five feeder lanes. He buzzed Control.

"Yes, sir?" the voice said.

"Davis. Get me Parks and Playgrounds."

"Parks and Playgrounds?" The voice was incredulous.

"Right." He waited and when a voice answered, spoke quickly, did his best to overpower the man on the other end.

"Traffic Manager Davis," he snapped. "I want Battery Park cleared. I'm preparing to dump two thousand cars there in five minutes."

"You can't—"

"The hell I can't! I'm Traffic Manager. Clear the park—"

What there was left of it—the grass fighting for air against the exhaust fumes, dying in the shadow of the interchange above it, stomped to death as the millions of city dwellers flocked to the only green in eleven miles—Central Park had been a bastion for a long time but

it was too open, too convenient. It was buried now under a rising parking lot and seven levels of traffic. As a concession to the live-in-the-pasters the animal cages had been placed on the parking lot roof and stayed there for two weeks until they had been hit by a drunk in a Lincoln. There had been a minor flap then with the carbon-monoxide drugged animals prowling the ramps until they had been hunted down by motorcyclists.

"What about the people?" Parks and Playgrounds asked.

"Sorry about that. They have four and a half minutes." He punched off, buzzed Beacons and Buzzers.

"Davis," he said. "Re-route Battery Five, ramps two through ten, into Battery Park."

"Right." He buzzed Lower City, ordered Wall Street closed for seven blocks. Later in the day they'd have to reroute the traffic around it. No matter, the tie-up lasted for four hours anyway.

The big pile-up, as always, was at the Empire State building where the main north-south curved twelve lanes out of the way to avoid the huge building. And, as they curved, tires skidded on the pavement, cars clawed to the side and, day after day, car after car lost control on the corner, went plunging over the side to shatter on the ramps below. It was, in many ways, the best show in town and office workers crowded the windows to watch the cars spin out of control. Today the traffic looked almost good and he clocked the pack at one hundred and ten on the corner, one hundred and fifteen coming out of it. Still not good enough, though—they were braking coming into the corner, losing time, and the line was thin as they came out of it. He watched a Buick skid, hit the guardrail, tip, and the driver go flying out of the convertible top, land in the level below, disappear in the traffic stream. The car rolled, plummeted from sight.

"Home," he said. The helicopter dropped him on the roof and he gagged against the smog, trotted to the elevator, dropped. The building was shaking from the traffic noise and the hammering of rivets. He coughed on the dust.

* * *

He checked the casualty lists, initialed them. Above normal, with the Empire State section running 6.2 percent ahead of last week. He was listed as reporting the pier pile-up, and there was a report stating Battery Park was filled—there was also a note saying that the Director was catching hell for parking cars there. To hell with him, Davis thought. There was another complaint to his attention from Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner and Agnew. Two of their board members were caught in the Wall Street jam and were late for work. He threw it into the wastebasket. Outside (inside?)—hard to say with no wall on one side of the building—the workmen were throwing up the steel plates for the ramp, stinting on the bolts to save time.

"Put the damn bolts in," Davis roared. "That thing will shake enough anyway."

The din was tremendous even now, with seven ramps of traffic passing within thirty feet. It would be worse when the spur route was finished. He hoped that they would put the wall back on the office. He buzzed Smith, asked for a readout on the Empire State complex.

"Fourteen fatalities since nine o'clock."

It was now 10:07 and the pre-lunch rush was due to start in four minutes.

"Damn Empire anyway," he said. The United Nations interchange board went red and he went to visual, saw a twelve-car pileup on the fourth level, the bodies and pieces of bodies, the cars and pieces of cars falling into the General Assembly. Damn! he could expect another angry call from the Secretary General. Damn foreigners anyway, when did they get the idea that their stupid meetings were more important than traffic?

The red phone rang—the Director—and he lifted it. "Davis."

"Everything's running higher," the Director wheezed. "What's the story?"

"Empire's the big tie-up," Davis said. "That and some construction."

"Do something. I gave you the authority."

"Get rid of Empire," Davis said. "Get another forty decks on the Trade parking lot, too."

"Can't be done." The hell it can't, Davis thought. You're just afraid of the conservationists. Coward. "Do something."

"Yes, sir." He waited until the phone clicked dead before he slammed it down. He took a deep breath of the air in the office—it was even better than smoking. Then he began to bark orders over the All Circuits channel.

"Scramble another ten wreckocopters," he snarled. With half again as many copters, wrecks would be cleared that much faster. "Cut next of kin time to fifteen minutes." He was going out on a limb here, but it would speed the processing of accidents through Brooklyn and New Jersey. Now, with the rush hour just over and another beginning, wrecks were piling up outside the receiving centers and the crunchers were idle half the time. "Up minimum speed five miles an hour." That would make it at least 100 miles an hour on every highway, 65 on the ramps. He flipped to visual, saw Beacons and Buzzers post the new speeds, saw the cars increase speed. Wrecks and Checks flashed the going aloft of the ten copters and he breathed easier, flipped to visual at Empire, saw the day's third major pile-up on the third level, cursed. He closed the Thirty-fourth Street cutoff, ordered three payloaders to dump all wrecks right there, flashed a message to Identification to have a team posted. By midnight, when the traffic eased, they could begin moving the cars and bodies to New Jersey.

The red phone rang, three rings. Double urgent. He grabbed it, barked his name.

"The Director just dropped dead," a hysterical voice said. "You're acting Director."

"I'll be right there." Acting, hell. There were six hours left on his shift and he could get something done now. He turned to Smith. "You're Manager now," he said, "I just got bumped upstairs."

"Right." Smith barely looked up. "Reopen Yonkers Four, lanes one through nine," he said.

He had made the transition from assistant to Manager in an instant. Training, Davis thought.

He took the elevator to the eighth floor, the Director's office. The staff was quiet, looking down at the body on the floor. There were four boards flashing, a dozen phones

ringing. Davis snapped orders quickly.

"You, you and you, answer the phones," he said. "You and you, get the boards. You, drag that body out of here. "You"— he pointed at the Director's—his—secretary— "call a staff conference. Now."

He looked at the boards, checked Traffic, Beacons and Buzzers, Wrecks and Checks, Gate Receipts and Identification. Fatalities was doing extremely well—Well-born was the new Manager here. The crunchers were doing well. Wrecks was reporting above normal pickup time.

"The Director's dead," he told the staff. "I'm new Director." They all nodded. "Most departments look pretty good," he said. He looked at Smith. "Traffic flow is lousy," he said. "Why?"

"Empire," Smith said. "We're losing twenty percent just going around that goddamed building."

"How are your crews fixed for a major job?" Davis asked the Construction Manager.

"Okay." The Manager ticked off eleven small jobs.

"The problem is at Empire," Davis said flatly. "We can't get around the building." He looked at Construction. "Tear it down," he said. "Meeting adjourned."

Later that day he looked south from the roof. The Destruction team had the top ten floors off the Empire State Building and a corner cut off the fortieth floor with a lane of traffic whipping through it. The flow was good and he smiled. He couldn't remember doing anything so necessary before.

THE ASIAN SHORE

THOMAS M. DISCH

Tom Disch is a new SF writer who writes the new thing. He is vitally interested in the reality of our world—after reading this story there can be no doubt that he has done more than a tourist's transit through Turkey—and is equally interested in the nature of reality itself. And he writes well.

I

There were voices on the cobbled street, and the sounds of motors. Footsteps, slamming doors, whistles, footsteps. He lived on the ground floor, so there was no way to avoid these evidences of the city's too abundant life. They accumulated in the room like so much dust, like the heaps of unanswered correspondence on the mottled tablecloth.

Every night he would drag a chair into the unfurnished back room—the guest room, as he liked to think of it—and look out over the tiled roofs and across the black waters of the Bosphorus at the lights of Usküdar. But the sounds penetrated this room too. He would sit there, in the darkness, drinking wine, waiting for her knock on the back door.

Or he might try to read: histories, books of travel, the long dull biography of Ataturk. A kind of sedation. Sometimes he would even begin a letter to his wife:

"Dear Janice,

"No doubt you've been wondering what's become of me these last few months. . . ."

But the trouble was that once that part had been written, the frail courtesies, the perfunctory reportage, he could not bring himself to say what *had* become of him.

Voices . . .

It was just as well that he couldn't speak the language.

For a while he had studied it, taxiing three times a week to Robert College in Bebek, but the grammar, based on assumptions wholly alien to any other language he knew, with its wavering boundaries between verbs and nouns, nouns and adjectives, withstood every assault of his incorrigibly Aristotelian mind. He sat at the back of the classroom, behind the rows of American teen-agers, as sullen as convicts, as comically out-of-context as the machineries melting in a Dali landscape—sat there and parroted innocuous dialogues after the teacher, taking both roles in turn, first the trustful, inquisitive JOHN, forever wandering alone and lost in the streets of Istanbul and Ankara, then the helpful, knowing AHMET BEY. Neither of these interlocutors would admit what had become increasingly evident with each faltering word that JOHN spoke—that he would wander these same streets for years, inarticulate, cheated, and despised.

But these lessons, while they lasted, had one great advantage. They provided an illusion of activity, an obelisk upon which the eye might focus amid the desert of each new day, something to move toward and then something to leave behind.

After the first month it had rained a great deal, and this provided him with a good excuse for staying in. He had mopped up the major attractions of the city in one week, and he persisted at sightseeing long afterward, even in doubtful weather, until at last he had checked off every mosque and ruin, every museum and cistern cited in boldface in the pages of his Hachette. He visited the cemetery of Eyup, and he devoted an entire Sunday to the land walls, carefully searching out, though he could not read Greek, the inscriptions of the various Byzantine emperors. But more and more often on these excursions he would see the woman, or the child, or the woman and the child together, until he came almost to dread the sight of any woman or any child in the city. It was not an unreasonable dread.

And always, at nine o'clock, or ten at the very latest, she would come knocking at the door of the apartment. Or, if the outer door of the building had not been left ajar by the people upstairs, at the window of the front room. She

knocked patiently, in little clusters of three or four raps spaced several seconds apart, never very loud. Sometimes, but only if she were in the hall, she would accompany her knocking with a few words in Turkish, usually *Yavuz! Yavuz!* He had asked the clerk at the mail desk of the Consulate what this meant, for he couldn't find it in his dictionary. It was a common Turkish name, a man's name.

His name was John. John Benedict Harris. He was an American.

She seldom stayed out there for more than half an hour any one night, knocking and calling to him, or to this imaginary Yavuz, and he would remain all that while in the chair in the unfurnished room, drinking Kavak and watching the ferries move back and forth on the dark water between Kabatas and Usküdar, the European and the Asian shore.

He had seen her first outside the fortress of Rumeli Hisar. It was the day, shortly after he'd arrived in the city, that he had come out to register at Robert College. After paying his fees and inspecting the library, he had come down the hill by the wrong path and there it had stood, mammoth and majestically improbable, a gift. He did not know its name, and his Hachette was at the hotel. There was just the raw fact of the fortress, a mass of gray stone, its towers and crenellations, the gray Bosphorus below. He angled for a photograph, but even this far away it was too big—one could not frame the whole of it in a single shot.

He left the road, taking a path through dry brush that promised to circle the fortress. As he approached, the walls reared higher and higher. Before such walls there could be no question of an assault.

He saw her when she was about fifty feet away. She came toward him on the footpath, carrying a large bundle wrapped in newspaper and bound with twine. Her clothes were the usual motley of washed-out cotton prints that all the poorer women of the city went about in, but she did not, like most other women of her kind, attempt to pull her shawl across her face when she noticed him.

But perhaps it was only that her bundle would have made this conventional gesture of modesty awkward, for

after that first glance she did at least lower her eyes to the path. No, it was hard to discover any clear portent in this first encounter.

As they passed each other he stepped off the path, and she did mumble some word in Turkish. Thank you, he supposed. He watched her until she reached the road, wondering whether she would look back, and she didn't.

He followed the walls of the fortress down the steep crumbling hillside to the shore road without finding an entrance. It amused him to think that there might not be one. Between the water and the barbicans there was only a narrow strip of highway.

An absolutely daunting structure.

The entrance, which did exist, was just to the side of the central tower. He paid five lire admission and another two and a half lire to bring in his camera.

Of the three principal towers, visitors were allowed to climb only the one at the center of the eastern wall that ran along the Bosphorus. He was out of condition and mounted the enclosed spiral staircase slowly. The stone steps had evidently been pirated from other buildings. Every so often he recognized a fragment of a classic entablature or a wholly inappropriate intaglio design—a Greek cross or some crude Byzantine eagle. Each footfall became a symbolic conquest: one could not ascend these stairs without becoming implicated in the fall of Constantinople.

This staircase opened out onto a kind of wooden catwalk clinging to the inner wall of the tower at a height of about sixty feet. The silo-like space was resonant with the coo and flutter of invisible pigeons, and somewhere the wind was playing with a metal door, creaking it open, banging it shut. Here, if he so wished, he might discover portents.

He crept along the wooden platform, both hands grasping the iron rail stapled to the stone wall, feeling just an agreeable amount of terror, sweating nicely. It occurred to him how much this would have pleased Janice, whose enthusiasm for heights had equaled his. He wondered when, if ever, he would see her again, and what she would be like. By now undoubtedly she had begun divorce

proceedings. Perhaps she was already no longer his wife.

The platform led to another stone staircase, shorter than the first, which ascended to the creaking metal door. He pushed it open and stepped out amid a flurry of pigeons into the full dazzle of the noon, the wide splendor of the elevation, sunlight above and the bright bow of water beneath—and, beyond the water, the surreal green of the Asian hills, hundred-breasted Cybele. It seemed, all of this, to demand some kind of affirmation, a yell. But he didn't feel up to yelling, or large gestures. He could only admire, at this distance, the illusion of tactility, hills as flesh, an illusion that could be heightened if he laid his hands, still sweaty from his passage along the catwalk, on the rough warm stone of the balustrade.

Looking down the side of the tower at the empty road he saw her again, standing at the very edge of the water. She was looking up at him. When he noticed her she lifted both hands above her head, as though signaling, and shouted something that, even if he could have heard it properly, he would surely not have understood. He supposed that she was asking to have her picture taken, so he turned the setting ring to the fastest speed to compensate for the glare from the water. She stood directly below the tower, and there seemed no way to frame an interesting composition. He released the shutter. Woman, water, asphalt road: it would be a snapshot, not a photograph, and he didn't believe in taking snapshots.

The woman continued to call up to him, arms raised in that same hieratic gesture. It made no sense. He waved to her and smiled uncertainly. It was something of a nuisance really. He would have preferred to have this scene to himself. One climbed towers, after all, in order to be alone.

Altin, the man who had found his apartment for him, worked as a commission agent for carpet and jewelry shops in the Grand Bazaar. He would strike up conversations with English and American tourists and advise them what to buy, and where, and how much to pay. They spent one day looking and settled on an apartment building near Taksim, the commemorative traffic circle that served the European quarter of the city as a kind of Broadway. The

several banks of Istanbul demonstrated their modern character here with neon signs, and in the center of the traffic circle, life-size, Ataturk led a small but representative group of his countrymen toward their bright, Western destiny.

The apartment was thought (by Altin) to partake of this same advanced spirit, it had central heating, a sit-down toilet, a bathtub, and a defunct but prestigious refrigerator. The rent was six hundred lire a month, which came to sixty-six dollars at the official rate but only fifty dollars at the rate Altin gave. He was anxious to move out of the hotel, so he agreed to a six-month lease.

He hated it from the day he moved in. Except for the shreds of a lousy sofa in the guest room, which he obliged the landlord to remove, he left everything as he found it. Even the blurry pinups from a Turkish girlie magazine remained where they were to cover the cracks in the new plaster. He was determined to make no accommodations: he might have to live in this city; it was not required that he *enjoy* it.

Every day he picked up his mail at the Consulate. He sampled a variety of restaurants. He saw the sights and made notes for his book.

On Thursdays he visited a hamam to sweat out the accumulated poisons of the week and to be kneaded and stomped by a masseur.

He supervised the growth of his young mustache.

He rotted, like a jar of preserves left open and forgotten on the top shelf of a cupboard.

He learned that there was a special Turkish word for the rolls of dirt that are scraped off the skin after a steambath, and another that imitated the sound of boiling water; *fuker, fuker, fuker*. Boiling water signified, to the Turkish mind, the first stages of sexual arousal. It was roughly equivalent to the stateside notion of "electricity."

Occasionally, as he began to construct his own internal map of the unpromising alleyways and ruinous staircase streets of his neighborhood, he fancied that he saw her, that same woman. It was hard to be certain. She would always be some distance away, or he might catch just a glimpse out of the corner of his eye. If it were the same

woman there was nothing at this stage to suggest that she was pursuing him. It was, at most, a coincidence.

In any case, he was not certain. Her face had not been unusual, and he did not have the photograph to consult, for he had spoiled the entire roll of film removing it from the camera.

Sometimes after one of these failed encounters he would feel a slight uneasiness. It amounted to no more than that.

He met the boy in Usküdar. It was during the first severe cold spell, in mid-November. His first trip across the Bosphorus, and when he stepped off the ferry onto the very soil (or, anyhow, the very asphalt) of this new continent, the largest of all, he could feel the great mass of it beckoning him toward its vast eastward vortex, tugging at him, sucking at his soul.

It had been his first intention, back in New York, to stop two months at most in Istanbul, learn the language; then into Asia. How often he had mesmerized himself with the litany of its marvels: the grand mosques of Kayseri and Sivas, of Beysehir and Afyonkarahisar; the isolate grandeur of Ararat and then, still moving east, the shores of the Caspian; Meshed, Kabul, the Himalayas. It was all these that reached out to him now, singing, stretching forth their siren arms, inviting him to their whirlpool.

And he? He refused. Though he could feel the charm of the invitation, he refused. Though he might have wished very much to unite with them, he still refused. For he had tied himself to the mast where he was proof against their call. He had his apartment in that city which stood just outside their reach, and he would stay there until it was time to return. In the spring he was going back to the States.

But he did allow the sirens this much—that he would abandon the rational mosque-to-mosque itinerary laid down by his Hachette and entrust the rest of the day to serendipity. While the sun still shone that afternoon they might lead him where they would.

Asphalt gave way to cobbles, and cobbles to packed dirt. The squalor here was on a much less majestic scale than in Stambul, where even the most decrepit hovels had been

squeezed by the pressure of population to heights of three and four stories. In Usküdar the same wretched buildings sprawled across the hills like beggars whose crutches had been kicked out from under them, supine; through their rags of unpainted wood one could see the scabbed flesh of mud-and-wattle. As he threaded his way from one dirt street to the next and found each of them sustaining this one unvarying tone, without color, without counterpoint, he began to conceive a new Asia, not of mountains and vast plains, but this same slum rolling on perpetually across grassless hills, a continuum of drabness, the sheer dumb extent.

Because he was short and because he would not dress the part of an American, he could go through these streets without calling attention to himself. The mustache, too, probably, helped. Only his conscious, observing eyes (the camera had spoiled a second roll of film and was being repaired) would have betrayed him as a tourist today. Indeed, Altin had assured him (intending, no doubt, a compliment) that as soon as he learned to speak the language he would pass for a Turk.

It grew steadily colder, throughout the afternoon. The wind moved a thick veil of mist over the sun and left it there. As the mists thinned and thickened, as the flat disk of sun, sinking westward, would fade and brighten, the vagaries of light whispered conflicting rumors about these houses and their dwellers. But he did not wish to stop and listen. He already knew more concerning these things than he wanted to. He set off at a quicker pace in the supposed direction of the landing stage.

The boy stood crying beside a public fountain, a water faucet projecting from a crude block of concrete, at the intersection of two narrow streets. Five years old, perhaps six. He was carrying a large plastic bucket of water in each hand, one bright red, the other turquoise. The water had splashed over his thin trousers and bare feet.

At first he supposed he cried only because of the cold. The damp ground must be near to freezing. To walk on it in bare wet feet . . .

Then he saw the slippers. They were what he would have called shower slippers, small die-stamped ovals of blue

plastic with a single thong that had to be grasped between the first and second toe.

The boy would stoop over and force the thongs between his stiff, cold-reddened toes, but after only a step or two the slippers would again fall off his numb feet. With each frustrated progress more water would slop over the sides of the buckets. He could not keep the slippers on his feet and he would not walk off without them.

With this understanding came a kind of horror, a horror of his own helplessness. He could not go up to the boy and ask him where he lived, lift him and carry him—he was so small—to his home. Nor could he scold the child's parents for having sent him out on this errand without proper shoes or winter clothes. He could not even take up the buckets and have the child lead him to his home. For each of these possibilities demanded that he be able to *speak* to the boy, and this he could not do.

What *could* he do? Offer money? As well offer him, at such a moment, a pamphlet from the U.S. Information Agency!

There was, in fact, nothing, *nothing* he could do.

The boy had become aware of him. Now that he had a sympathetic audience he let himself cry in earnest. Lowering the two buckets to the ground and pointing at these and at the slippers, he spoke pleadingly to this grown-up stranger, to this rescuer, words in Turkish.

He took a step backward, a second step, and the boy shouted at him, what message of pain or uncomprehending indignation he would never know. He turned away and ran back along the street that had brought him to this crossway. It was another hour before he found the landing stage. It had begun to snow.

As he took his seat inside the ferry he found himself glancing at the other passengers, as though expecting to find her there among them.

The next day he came down with a cold. The fever rose through the night. He woke several times, and it was always their two faces that he carried with him from the dreams, like souvenirs whose origin and purpose have been forgotten; the woman at Rumeli Hisar, the child in Usküdar: some part of his mind had already begun to draw the equation between them.

II

It was the thesis of his first book that the quiddity of architecture, its chief claim to an aesthetic interest, was its arbitrariness. Once the lintels were lying on the posts, once some kind of roof had been spread across the hollow space, then anything else that might be done was gratuitous. Even the lintel and the post, the roof, the space below, these were gratuitous as well. Stated thus it was a mild enough notion; the difficulty was in training the eye to see the whole world of usual forms—patterns of brick, painted plaster, carved and carpentered wood—not as "buildings" and "streets" but as an infinite series of free and arbitrary choices. There was no place in such a scheme for orders, styles, sophistication, taste. Every artifact of the city was anomalous, unique, but living there in the midst of it all you could not allow yourself too fine a sense of this fact. If you did . . .

It had been his task, these last three or four years, to reeducate his eye and mind to just this condition of innocence. His was the very reverse of the Romantics' aims, for he did not expect to find himself, when this ideal state of "raw" perception was reached (it never would be, of course, for innocence, like justice, is an absolute; it may be approached but never attained), any closer to nature. Nature, as such, did not concern him. What he sought, on the contrary, was a sense of the great artifice of things, of structures, of the immense interminable wall that has been built just to exclude nature.

The attention that his first book had received showed that he had been at least partially successful, but he knew (and who better?) how far short his aim had fallen, how many clauses of the perceptual social contract he had never even thought to question.

So, since it was now a matter of ridding himself of the sense of the familiar, he had had to find some better laboratory for this purpose than New York, somewhere that he could be, more naturally, an alien. This much seemed obvious to him.

It had not seemed so obvious to his wife.

He did not insist. He was willing to be reasonable. He would talk about it. He talked about it whenever they were together—at dinner, at her friends' parties (his friends didn't seem to give parties), in bed—and it came down to this, that Janice objected not so much to the projected trip as to his entire program, the thesis itself.

No doubt her reasons were sound. The sense of the arbitrary did not stop at architecture; it embraced—or it would, if he let it—all phenomena. If there were no fixed laws that governed the furbelows and arabesques out of which a city is composed, there were equally no laws (or only arbitrary laws, which is the same as none at all) to define the relationships woven into the lattice of that city, relationships between man and man, man and woman, John and Janice.

And indeed this had already occurred to him, though he had not spoken of it to her before. He had often had to stop, in the midst of some quotidian ritual like dining out, and take his bearings. As the thesis developed, as he continued to sift away layer after layer of preconception, he found himself more and more astonished at the size of the demesne that recognized the sovereignty of convention. At times he even thought he could trace in his wife's slightest gesture, or in her aptest phrase, or in a kiss, some hint of the Palladian rulebook from which it had been derived. Perhaps with practice one would be able to document the entire history of her styles—here an echo of the Gothic Revival, there an imitation of Mies.

When his application for a Guggenheim was rejected, he decided he would make the trip by himself, using the bit of money that was still left from the book. Though he saw no necessity for it, he had agreed to Janice's request for a divorce. They parted on the best of terms. She had even seen him to the boat.

The wet snow would fall for a day, two days, forming knee-deep drifts in the open spaces of the city, in paved courtyards, on vacant lots. Cold winds polished the slush of streets and sidewalks to dull-gleaming lumpy ice. The steeper hills became impassable. The snow and the ice

would linger a few days and then a sudden thaw would send it all pouring down the cobbled hillside in a single afternoon, brief Alpine cataracts of refuse and brown water. A patch of tolerable weather might follow this flood, and then another blizzard. Altin assured him that this was an unusually fierce winter, unprecedented.

A spiral diminishing.

A tightness.

And each day the light fell more obliquely across the white hills and was more quickly spent.

One night returning from a movie he slipped on the iced cobbles just outside the door of his building, tearing both knees of his trousers beyond any possibility of repair. It was the only winter suit he had brought. Altin gave him the name of a tailor who could make another suit quickly and for less money than he would have had to pay for a readymade. Altin did all the bargaining with the tailor and even selected the fabric, a heavy wool-rayon blend of a sickly and slightly iridescent blue, the muted, imprecise color of the more unhappy breeds of pigeons. He understood nothing of the fine points of tailoring and so he could not decide what it was about this suit—whether the shape of the lapels, the length of the back vent, the width of the pants legs—that made it seem so different from other suits he had worn, so much . . . smaller. And yet it fitted his figure with the exactness one expects of a tailored suit. If he looked smaller now, and thicker, perhaps that was how he *ought* to look and his previous suits had been telling lies about him all these years. The color, too, performed some nuance of metamorphosis: his skin, balanced against this blue-gray sheen, seemed less "tan" than sallow. When he wore it he became, to all appearances, a Turk.

Not that he wanted to look like a Turk. Turks were, by and large, a homely lot. He only wished to avoid the other Americans who abounded here even at this nadir of the off-season. As their numbers decreased, their gregariousness grew more implacable. The smallest sign—a copy of *Newsweek* or the *Herald Tribune*, a word of English, an airmail letter with its telltale canceled stamp—could bring them down at once in the full fury of their good-fellowship.

It was convenient to have some kind of camouflage, just as it was necessary to learn their haunts in order to avoid them: Divan Yolu and Cumhuriyet Cadessi, the American Library and the Consulate, as well as some eight or ten of the principal well-touristed restaurants.

Once the winter had firmly established itself he also put a stop to his sightseeing. Two months of Ottoman mosques and Byzantine rubble had brought his sense of the arbitrary to so fine a pitch that he no longer required the stimulus of the monumental. His own rooms—a rickety table, the flowered drapes, the blurry lurid pinups, the intersecting planes of walls and ceilings—could present as great a plenitude of "problems" as the grand mosques of Suleiman or Sultan Ahmet with all their mihrabs and minbers, their stalactite niches and faienced walls.

Too great a plenitude actually. Day and night the rooms nagged at him. They diverted his attention from anything else he might try to do. He knew them with the enforced intimacy with which a prisoner knows his cell—every defect of construction, every failed grace, the precise incidence of the light at each hour of the day. Had he taken the trouble to rearrange the furniture, to put up his own prints and maps, to clean the windows and scrub the floors, to fashion some kind of bookcase (all his books remained in their two shipping cases), he might have been able to blot out these alien presences by the sheer strength of self-assertion, as one can mask bad odors with incense or the smell of flowers. But this would have been admitting defeat. It would have shown how unequal he was to his own thesis.

As a compromise he began to spend his afternoons in a café a short distance down the street on which he lived. There he would sit, at the table nearest the front window, contemplating the spirals of steam that rose from the small corolla of his tea glass. At the back of the long room, beneath the tarnished brass tea urn, there were always two old men playing backgammon. The other patrons sat by themselves and gave no indication that their thoughts were in any way different from his. Even when no one was smoking, the air was pungent with the charcoal fires of nargilehs. Conversation of any kind was rare. The

nargilehs bubbled, the tiny die rattled in its leather cup, a newspaper rustled, a glass chinked against its saucer.

His red notebook always lay ready to hand on the table, and on the notebook his ballpoint pen. Once he had placed them there, he never touched them again till it was time to leave.

Though less and less in the habit of analyzing sensation and motive, he was aware that the special virtue of this café was as a bastion, the securest he possessed, against the now omnipresent influence of the arbitrary. If he sat here peacefully, observing the requirements of the ritual, a decorum as simple as the rules of backgammon, gradually the elements in the space about him would cohere. Things settled, unproblematically, into their own contours. Taking the flower-shaped glass as its center, this glass that was now only and exactly a glass of tea, his perceptions slowly spread out through the room, like the concentric ripples passing across the surface of an ornamental pond, embracing all its objects at last in a firm, noumenal grasp. Just so. The room was just what a room should be. It contained him.

He did not take notice of the first rapping on the café window, though he was aware, by some small cold contraction of his thoughts, of an infringement of the rules. The second time he looked up.

They were together. The woman and the child.

He had seen them each on several occasions since his trip to Usküdar three weeks before. The boy once on the torn-up sidewalk outside the Consulate, and another time sitting on the railing of the Karaköy bridge. Once, riding in a dolmus to Taksim, he had passed within a scant few feet of the woman and they had exchanged a glance of unambiguous recognition. But he had never seen them together before.

But could he be certain, now, that it *was* those two? He saw a woman and a child, and the woman was rapping with one bony knuckle on the window for someone's attention. For his? If he could have seen her face . . .

He looked at the other occupants of the café. The backgammon players. A fat unshaven man reading a

newspaper. A dark-skinned man with spectacles and a flaring mustache. The two old men, on opposite sides of the room, puffing on nargilehs. None of them paid any attention to the woman's rapping.

He stared resolutely at his glass of tea, no longer a paradigm of its own necessity. It had become a foreign object, an artifact picked up out of the rubble of a buried city, a shard.

The woman continued to rap at the window. At last the owner of the café went outside and spoke a few sharp words to her. She left without making a reply.

He sat with his cold tea another fifteen minutes. Then he went out into the street. There was no sign of them. He returned the hundred yards to his apartment as calmly as he could. Once inside he fastened the chain lock. He never went back to the café.

When the woman came that night, knocking at his door, it was not a surprise.

And every night, at nine or, at the very latest, ten o'clock.

Yavuz! Yavuz! Calling to him.

He stared at the black water, the lights of the other shore. He wondered, often, when he would give in, when he would open the door.

But it was surely a mistake. Some accidental *resemblance*. He was not Yavuz.

John Benedict Harris. An American.

If there had ever been one, if there had ever been a Yavuz.

The man who had tacked the pinups on the walls?

Two women, they might have been twins, in heavy eye makeup, garter belts, mounted on the same white horse. Lewdly smiling.

A bouffant hairdo, puffy lips. Drooping breasts with large brown nipples. A couch.

A beachball. Her skin dark. Bikini. Laughing. Sand. The water unnaturally blue.

Snapshots.

Had these ever been *his* fantasies? If not, why could he not bring himself to take them off the walls? He had prints by Piranesi. A blowup of Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.

The Tchernikov sketch. He could have covered the walls.

He found himself trying to imagine of this Yavuz . . . what he must be like.

III

Three days after Christmas he received a card from his wife, postmarked from Nevada. Janice, he knew, did not believe in Christmas cards. It showed an immense stretch of white desert—a salt-flat, he supposed—with purple mountains in the distance, and above the purple mountains, a heavily retouched sunset. Pink. There were no figures in this landscape, nor any sign of vegetation. Inside she had written:

"Merry Christmas! Janice."

The same day he received a manila envelope with a copy of *Art News*. A noncommittal note from his friend Raymond was paperclipped to the cover: "Thought you might like to see this. R."

In the back pages of the magazine there was a long and unsympathetic review of his book by F. R. Robertson. Robertson was known as an authority on Hegel's aesthetics. He maintained that *Homo Arbitrans* was nothing but a compendium of truisms and—without seeming to recognize any contradiction in this—a hopelessly muddled reworking of Hegel.

Years ago he had dropped out of a course taught by Robertson after attending the first two lectures. He wondered if Robertson could have remembered this.

The review contained several errors of fact, one misquotation, and failed to mention his central argument, which was not, admittedly, dialectical. He decided he should write a reply and laid the magazine beside his typewriter to remind himself. The same evening he spilled the better part of a bottle of wine on it, so he tore out the review and threw the magazine into the garbage with his wife's card.

The necessity for a movie had compelled him into the streets and kept him in the streets, wandering from

marquee to marquee, long after the drizzle of the afternoon had thickened to rain. In New York when this mood came over him he would take in a double bill of science-fiction films or Westerns on Forty-second Street, but here, though cinemas abounded in the absence of television, only the glossiest Hollywood kitsch was presented with the original soundtrack. B-movies were invariably dubbed in Turkish.

So obsessive was this need that he almost passed the man in the skeleton suit without noticing him. He trudged back and forth on the sidewalk, a sodden refugee from Halloween, followed by a small Hamelin of excited children. The rain had curled the corners of his poster (it served him now as an umbrella) and caused the inks to run. He could make out.

KIL G

STA LDA

After Ataturk, the skeleton-suited "Kiling" was the principal figure of the new Turkish folklore. Every newsstand was heaped with magazines and comics celebrating his adventures, and here he was himself, or his avatar at least, advertising his latest movie. Yes, and there, down the side street, was the theater where it was playing: KILING ISTANBULDA. Or: *Kiling in Istanbul.* Beneath the colossal letters a skull-masked Kiling threatened to kiss a lovely and obviously reluctant blonde, while on the larger poster across the street he gunned down two well-dressed men. One could not decide, on the evidence of such tableaux as these, whether Kiling was fundamentally good, like Batman, or bad, like Fantomas. So . . .

He bought a ticket. He would find out. It was the name that intrigued him. It was, distinctly, an English name.

He took a seat four rows from the front just as the feature began, immersing himself gratefully into the familiar urban imagery. Reduced to black-and-white and framed by darkness, the customary vistas of Istanbul possessed a heightened reality. New American cars drove through the narrow streets at perilous speeds. An old doctor was strangled by an unseen assailant. Then for a

long while nothing of interest happened. A tepid romance developed between the blond singer and the young architect, while a number of gangsters, or diplomats, tried to obtain possession of the doctor's black valise. After a confusing sequence in which four of these men were killed in an explosion, the valise fell into the hands of Kiling. But it proved to be empty.

The police chased Kiling over tiled rooftops. But this was a proof only of his agility, not of his guilt: the police can often make mistakes in these matters. Kiling entered, through a window, the bedroom of the blond singer, waking her. Contrary to the advertising posters outside, he made no attempt to kiss her. He addressed her in a hollow bass voice. The editing seemed to suggest that Kiling was actually the young architect whom the singer loved, but as his mask was never removed this too remained in doubt.

He felt a hand on his shoulder.

He was certain it was her and he would not turn around. Had she followed him to the theater? If he rose to leave, would she make a scene? He tried to ignore the pressure of the hand, staring at the screen where the young architect had just received a mysterious telegram. His hands gripped tightly into his thighs. His hands: the hands of John Benedict Harris.

"Mr. Harris, hello!"

A man's voice. He turned around. It was Altin.

"Altin."

Altin smiled. His face flickered. "Yes. Do you think it is anyone?"

"Anyone else?"

"Yes."

"No."

"You are seeing this movie?"

"Yes."

"It is not in English. It is in Turkish."

"I know."

Several people in nearby rows were hissing for them to be quiet. The blond singer had gone down into one of the city's large cisterns. Binbirdirek. He had been there himself. The editing created an illusion that it was larger than it actually was.

"We will come up there," Altin whispered.

He nodded.

Altin sat on his right, and Altin's friend took the seat remaining empty on his left. Altin introduced his friend in a whisper. His name was Yavuz. He did not speak English.

Reluctantly he shook hands with Yavuz.

It was difficult, thereafter, to give his full attention to the film. He kept glancing sideways at Yavuz. He was about his own height and age, but then this seemed to be true of half the men in Istanbul. An unexceptional face, eyes that glistened moistly in the half-light reflected from the screen.

Kiling was climbing up the girders of a building being constructed on a high hillside. In the distance the Bosphorus snaked past misted hills.

There was something so unappealing in almost every Turkish face. He had never been able to pin it down: some weakness of bone structure, the narrow cheekbones; the strong vertical lines that ran down from the hollows of the eyes to the corner of the mouth; the mouth itself, narrow, flat, inflexible. Or some subtler disharmony among all these elements?

Yavuz. A common name, the mail clerk had said.

In the last minutes of the movie there was a fight between two figures dressed in skeleton suits, a true and a false Kiling. One of them was thrown to his death from the steel beams of the unfinished building. The villain, surely—but had it been the true or the false Kiling who died? And come to think of it, which of them had frightened the singer in her bedroom, strangled the old doctor, stolen the valise?

"Do you like it?" Altin asked as they crowded toward the exit.

"Yes, I did."

"And do you understand what the people say?"

"Some of it. Enough."

Altin spoke for a while to Yavuz, who then turned to address his new friend from America in rapid Turkish.

He shook his head apologetically. Altin and Yavuz laughed.

"He says to you that you have the same suit."

"Yes, I noticed that as soon as the lights came on."

"Where do you go now, Mr. Harris?"

"What time is it?"

They were outside the theater. The rain had moderated to a drizzle. Altin looked at his watch. "Seven o'clock. And a half."

"I must go home now."

"We will come with you and buy a bottle of wine. Yes?"

He looked uncertainly at Yavuz. Yavuz smiled.

And when she came tonight, knocking at his door and calling for Yavuz?

"Not tonight, Altin."

"No?"

"I am a little sick."

"Yes?"

"Sick. I have a fever. My head aches." He put his hand, mimetically, to his forehead, and as he did this he *could* feel both the fever and the headache. "Some other time perhaps. I'm sorry."

Altin shrugged skeptically.

He shook hands with Altin and then with Yavuz. Clearly, they both felt they had been snubbed.

Returning to his apartment he took an indirect route that avoided the dark side streets. The tone of the movie lingered, like the taste of a liqueur, to enliven the rhythm of cars and crowds, deepen the chiaroscuro of headlights and shop windows. Once, leaving the Eighth Street Cinema after *Jules et Jim*, he had discovered all the street signs of the Village translated into French; now the same law of magic allowed him to think that he could understand the fragmented conversation of passersby. The meaning of an isolated phrase registered with the self-evident uninterpreted immediacy of "fact," the nature of the words mingling with the nature of things. Just so. Each knot in the net of language slipped, without any need of explication, into place. Every nuance of glance and inflection fitted, like a tailored suit, the contours of that moment, this street, the light, his conscious mind.

Inebriated by this fictive empathy he turned into his own darker street at last and almost walked past the

woman—who fitted, like every other element of the scene, so well the corner where she'd taken up her watch —without noticing her.

"You!" he said and stopped.

They stood four feet apart, regarding each other carefully. Perhaps she had been as little prepared for this confrontation as he.

Her thick hair was combed back in stiff waves from a low forehead, falling in massive parentheses to either side of her thin face. Pitted skin, flesh wrinkled in concentration around small pale lips. And tears—yes, tears—just forming in the corners of her staring eyes. With one hand she held a small parcel wrapped in newspaper and string; with the other she clutched the bulky confusion of her skirts. She wore several layers of clothing, rather than a coat, against the cold.

A slight erection stirred and tangled in the flap of his cotton underpants. He blushed. Once, reading a paperback edition of Krafft-Ebing, the same embarrassing thing had happened. That time it had been a description of necrophilia.

God, he thought, *if she notices!*

She whispered to him, lowering her gaze. To him, to Yavuz.

To come home with her . . . Why did he . . . ? Yavuz, Yavuz, Yavuz. . . . she needed . . . and his son . . .

"I don't *understand* you," he insisted. "Your words make no sense to me. I am an American. My name is John Benedict Harris, not Yavuz. You're making a mistake—can't you see that?"

She nodded her head. "Yavuz."

"*Not* Yavuz! *Yok! Yok, yok!*"

And a word that meant "love" but not exactly that. Her hand tightened in the folds of her several skirts, raising them to show the thin, black-stockinged ankles.

"No!"

She moaned.

. . . wife . . . his home . . . Yalova . . . his life.

"Damn you, go away!"

Her hand let go her skirts and darted quickly to his shoulder, digging into the cheap cloth. Her other hand

shoved the wrapped parcel at him. He pushed her back but she clung fiercely, shrieking his name: *Yavuz!* He struck her face.

She fell on the wet cobbles. He backed away. The greasy parcel was in his left hand. She pushed herself up to her feet. Tears flowed along the vertical channels from eyes to mouth. A Turkish face. Blood dripped slowly out of one nostril. She began to walk away in the direction of Taksim.

"And don't return, do you understand? Stay away from me!" His voice cracked.

When she was out of sight he looked at the parcel in his hand. He knew he ought not to open it, that the wisest course was to throw it into the nearest garbage can. But even as he warned himself, his fingers had snapped the string.

A large lukewarm doughy mass of borek. And an orange. The saliva sprouted in his mouth at the acrid smell of the cheese.

No!

He had not had dinner that night. He was hungry. He ate it. Even the orange.

During the month of January he made only two entries in his notebook. The first, undated, was a long extract copied from A. H. Lybyer's book on the Janissaries, the great slave-corps of the sultans, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent.* The passage read:

> Perhaps no more daring experiment has been tried on a large scale upon the face of the Earth than that embodied in the Ottoman Ruling Institution. Its nearest ideal analogue is found in the Republic of Plato, its nearest actual parallel in the Mamluk system of Egypt; but it was not restrained within the aristocratic Hellenic limitations of the first, and it subdued and outlived the second. In the United States of America men have risen from the rude work of the backwoods to the Presidential chair, but they have done so by their own effort and not through the gradations of a system carefully organized to push them forward. The Roman Catholic Church can

still train a peasant to become a pope, but it has never begun by choosing its candidates almost exclusively from families which profess a hostile religion. The Ottoman system deliberately took slaves and made them ministers of state. It took boys from the sheep-run and the plough-tail and made them courtiers and the husbands of princesses; it took young men whose ancestors had borne the Christian name for centuries and made them rulers in the greatest of Muhammedan states, and soldiers and generals in invincible armies whose chief joy it was to beat down the Cross and elevate the Crescent. It never asked its novices "Who was your father?" or "What do you know?" or even "Can you speak our tongue?" but it studied their faces and their frames and said: "*You* shall be a soldier and if you show yourself worthy, a general," or "*You* shall be a scholar and a gentleman and, if the ability lies in you, a governor and a prime minister." Grandly disregarding the fabric of fundamental customs which is called "human nature," and those religious and social prejudices which are thought to be almost as deep as life itself, the Ottoman system took children for ever from their parents, discouraged family cares among its members through their most active years, allowed them no certain hold on property, gave them no definite promise that their sons and daughters would profit by their success and sacrifice, raised and lowered them with no regard for ancestry or previous distinction, taught them a strange law, ethics, and religion, and ever kept them conscious of a sword raised above their heads which might put an end at any moment to a brilliant career along a matchless path of human glory.

The second and briefer entry was dated the twenty-third of January and read as follows:

"Heavy rains yesterday. I stayed in drinking. She came around at her usual hour. This morning when I put on my brown shoes to go out shopping they were *wet through.* Two hours to dry them out over the heater. Yesterday I wore only my sheepskin slippers—*I did not leave the building once.*"

IV

A human face is a construction, an artifact. The mouth is a little door, and the eyes are windows that look at the street, and all the rest of it, the flesh, the bone beneath, is a wall to which any manner of ornament may be affixed, gewgaws of whatever style or period one takes a fancy to—swags hung below the cheeks and chin, lines chiseled or smoothed away, a recession emphasized, a bit of vegetation here and there. Each addition or subtraction, however minor in itself, will affect the entire composition. Thus, the hair that he has had trimmed a bit closer to the temples restores hegemony to the vertical elements of a face that is now noticeably *narrower*. Or is this exclusively a matter of proportion and emphasis? For he has lost weight too (one cannot stop eating regularly without some shrinkage), and the loss has been appreciable. A new darkness has given definition to the always incipient pouches below his eyes, a darkness echoed by the new hollowness of his cheeks.

But the chief agent of metamorphosis is the mustache, which has grown full enough now to obscure the modeling of his upper lip. The ends, which had first shown a tendency to droop, have developed, by his nervous habit of twisting them about his fingers, the flaring upward curve of a scimitar (or *pala*, after which in Turkey this style of mustache is named, *pala biyik*). It is this, the baroque mustache, not a face, that he sees when he looks in a mirror.

Then there is the whole question of "expression," its quickness, constancy, the play of intelligence, the characteristic "tone" and the hundreds of possible gradations within the range of that tone, the eyes' habits of irony and candor, the betraying tension or slackness of a lip. Yet it is scarcely necessary to go into this at all, for his face, when he sees it, or when anyone sees it, could not be said to *have* an expression. What was there, after all, for him to express?

* * *

The blurring of edges, whole days lost, long hours awake in bed, books scattered about the room like little animal corpses to be nibbled at when he grew hungry, the endless cups of tea, the tasteless cigarettes. Wine, at least, did what it was supposed to do—it took away the sting. Not that he felt the sting these days with any poignance. But perhaps without the wine he *would* have.

He piled the nonreturnable bottles in the bathtub, exercising in this act (if in no other) the old discrimination, the "compulsive tact" he had made so much of in his book.

The drapes were always drawn. The lights were left burning at all hours, even when he slept, even when he was out, three sixty-watt bulbs in a metal chandelier hanging just out of plumb.

Voices from the street impinged. Vendors in the morning, and the metallic screak of children. At night the radio in the apartment below, drunken arguments. Scatterings of words, like illuminated signs glimpsed driving on a thruway, at high speeds, at night.

Two bottles of wine were not enough if he started early in the afternoon, but three could make him sick.

And though the hours crawled, like wounded insects, so slowly across the floor, the days rushed by in a torrent. The sunlight slipped across the Bosphorus so quickly that there was scarcely time to rise and see it.

One morning when he woke there was a balloon on a stick propped in the dusty flower vase atop his dresser. A crude Mickey Mouse was stenciled on the bright red rubber. He left it there, bobbing in the vase, and watched it shrivel day by day, the face turning small and black and wrinkled.

The next time it was ticket stubs, two of them, from the Kabataş-Usküdar ferry.

Till that moment he had told himself it was a matter only of holding out until the spring. He had prepared himself for a siege, believing that an assault was not possible. Now he realized that he would have actually to go out there and fight.

Though it was mid-February the weather accommodated

his belated resolution with a series of bright blue days, a wholly unseasonable warmth that even tricked early blossoms from a few unsuspecting trees. He went through Topkapi once again, giving a respectful, indiscriminate, and puzzled attention to the celadon ware, to golden snuffboxes, to pearl-embroidered pillows, to the portrait miniatures of the sultans, to the fossil footprint of the Prophet, to Iznik tiles, to the lot. There it was, all spread out before him, heaps and masses of it: beauty. Like a salesclerk tying price tags to items of merchandise, he would attach this favorite word of his, provisionally, to these sundry bibelots, then step back a pace or two to see how well or poorly it "matched." Was *this* beautiful? Was *that*?

Amazingly, none of it was beautiful. The priceless baubles all just sat there on their shelves, behind the thick glass, as unresplendent as the drab furniture back in his own room.

He tried the mosques: Sultan Ahmet, Beyazit, Sehazade, Yeni Camii, Laleli Camii. The old magic, the Vitruvian trinity of "commodity, firmness, and delight," had never failed him so enormously before. Even the shock of scale, the gape-mouthed peasant reverence before thick pillars and high domes, even this deserted him. Go where he would through the city, he could not get out of his room.

Then the land walls, where months before he had felt himself rubbing up against the very garment of the past. He stood at the same spot where he had stood then, at the point where Mehmet the Conqueror had breached the walls. Quincunxes of granite cannonballs decorated the grass; they reminded him of the red balloon.

As a last resort he returned to Eyup. The false spring had reached a tenuous apogee, and the February light flared with deceiving brilliance from the thousand facets of white stone blanketing the steep hillside. Small flocks of three or four sheep browsed between the graves. The turbaned shafts of marble jutted in every direction but the vertical (which it was given to the cypresses to define) or lay, higgledy-piggledy, one atop another. No walls, no

architecture supremely abstract. It seemed to him to have been piled up here, over the centuries, just to vindicate the thesis of his book.

And it worked. It worked splendidly. His mind and his eye came alive. Ideas and images coalesced. The sharp slanting light of the late afternoon caressed the jumbled marble with a cold careful hand, like a beautician adding the last touches to an elaborate coiffure. Beauty? Here it was. Here it was abundantly!

He returned the next day with his camera, redeemed from the repairshop where it had languished for two months. To be on the safe side he had asked the repairman to load it for him. He composed each picture with mathematic punctilio, fussing over the depth of field, crouching or climbing atop sepulchers for a better angle, checking each shot against the reading on the light meter, deliberately avoiding picturesque solutions and easy effects. Even taking these pains he found that he'd gone through the twenty exposures in under two hours.

He went up to the small café on the top of the hill. Here, his Hachette had noted respectfully, the great Pierre Loti had been wont to come of a summer evening, to drink a glass of tea and look down the sculptured hills and through the pillars of cypress at the Fresh Waters of Europe and the Golden Horn. The café perpetuated the memory of this vanished glory with pictures and mementoes. Loti, in a red fez and savage mustachios, glowered at the contemporary patrons from every wall. During the World War Loti had remained in Istanbul, taking the part of his friend, the Turkish sultan, against his native France.

He ordered a glass of tea from a waitress who had been got up as a harem girl. Apart from the waitress he had the café to himself. He sat on Pierre Loti's favorite stool. It was delicious. He felt right at home.

He opened his notebook and began to write.

Like an invalid taking his first walk out of doors after a long convalescence, his renascent energies caused him not only the predictable and welcome euphoria of resurrection but also a pronounced intellectual giddiness, as though by

the simple act of rising to his feet he had thrust himself up to some really dangerous height. This dizziness became most acute when, in trying to draft a reply to Robertson's review, he was obliged to return to passages in his own book. Often as not what he found there struck him as incomprehensible. There were entire chapters that might as well have been written in ideograms or futhorc for all the sense they made to him now. But occasionally, cued by some remark so irrelevant to any issue at hand as to be squeezed into an embarrassed parenthesis, he would sprint off toward the most unforeseen—and undesirable —conclusions. Or rather, each of these tangents led, asymptotically, to a single conclusion: to wit, that his book, or any book he might yet conceive, was worthless, and worthless not because his thesis was wrong but precisely because it might be right.

There was a realm of judgment and a realm of fact. His book, if only because it was a book, existed within the bounds of the first. There was the trivial fact of its corporeality, but, in this case as in most others, he discounted that. It was a work of criticism, a systematization of judgment, and to the extent that his system was complete its critical apparatus must be able to measure its own scales of mensuration, and judge the justice of its own decrees. But could it? Was not his "system" as arbitrary a construction as any silly pyramid? What was it, after all? A string of words, of more or less agreeable noises, politely assumed to correspond to certain objects and classes of objects, actions and groups of actions, in the realm of fact. And by what subtle magic was this correspondence to be verified? Why, by just the assertion that it was so!

This, admittedly, lacked clarity. It had come to him thick and fast, and it was colored not a little by cheap red wine. To fix its outlines a bit more firmly in his own mind he tried to "get it down" in his letter to *Art News*:

> Sirs:
>
> I write to you concerning F. R. Robertson's review of my book, though the few words I have to say bear but slightly upon Mr. Robertson's oracles, as slightly perhaps

as these bore upon *Homo Arbitrans.*

Only this—that, as Gödel has demonstrated in mathematics, Wittgenstein in philosophy, and Duchamp, Cage, and Ashbery in their respective fields, the final statement of any system is a self-denunciation, a demonstration of how its particular little tricks are done—not by magic (as magicians have always known), but by the readiness of the magician's audience to be deceived, which readiness is the very glue of the social contract.

Every system, including my own and Mr. Robertson's, is a system of more or less interesting lies, and if one begins to call these lies into question, then one ought really to begin with the first. That is to say, with the very questionable proposition on the title page: *Homo Arbitrans* by John Benedict Harris.

Now I ask you, Mr. Robertson, what could be more improbable than that? More tentative? More arbitrary?

He sent the letter off, unsigned.

V

He had been promised his photos by Monday, so Monday morning, before the frost had thawed on the plate glass window, he was at the shop. The same immodest anxious interest to see his pictures of Eyup possessed him as once he had felt to see an essay or a review in print. It was as though these items, the pictures, the printed words, had the power to rescind, for a little while, his banishment to the realm of judgment, as though they said to him: "Yes, look, here we are, right in your hand. We're real, and so you must be too."

The old man behind the counter, a German, looked up mournfully to gargle a mournful *ach.* "Ach, Mr. Harris! Your pictures are not ready yet. Come back soon at twelve o'clock."

He walked through the melting streets that were, this side of the Golden Horn, jokebooks of eclecticism. No mail

ceilings, scarcely a path through the litter: this was an at the Consulate, which was only to be expected. Half past ten.

A pudding at a pudding shop. Two lire. A cigarette. A few more jokes: a bedraggled caryatid, an Egyptian tomb, a Greek temple that had been changed by some Circean wand into a butcher shop. Eleven.

He looked, at the bookshop, at the same shopworn selection of books that he had looked at so often before. Eleven thirty. Surely, they would be ready by now.

"You are here, Mr. Harris. Very good."

Smiling in anticipation, he opened the envelope, removed the slim warped stack of prints.

No.

"I'm afraid these aren't mine." He handed them back. He didn't want to feel them in his hand.

"What?"

"Those are the wrong pictures. You've made a mistake."

The old man put on a pair of dirty spectacles and shuffled through the prints. He squinted at the name on the envelope. "You are Mr. Harris."

"Yes, that is the name on the envelope. The envelope's all right, the pictures aren't."

"It is not a mistake."

"These are *somebody else's* snapshots. Some family picnic. You can see that."

"I myself took out the roll of film from your camera. Do you remember, Mr. Harris?"

He laughed uneasily. He hated scenes. He considered just walking out of the shop, forgetting all about the pictures. "Yes, I do remember. But I'm afraid you must have gotten that roll of film confused with another. I *didn't* take these pictures. I took pictures at the cemetery in Eyup. Does that ring a bell?"

Perhaps, he thought, "ring a bell" was not an expression a German would understand.

As a waiter whose honesty has been called into question will go over the bill again with exaggerated attention, the old man frowned and examined each of the pictures in turn. With a triumphant clearing of his throat he laid one of

the snapshots face up on the counter. "Who is that, Mr. Harris?"

It was the boy.

"Who! I . . . I don't know his name."

The old German laughed theatrically, lifting his eyes to a witnessing heaven. "It is you, Mr. Harris! It is you!"

He bent over the counter. His fingers still refused to touch the print. The boy was held up in the arms of a man whose head was bent forward as though he were examining the close-cropped scalp for lice. Details were fuzzy, the lens having been mistakenly set at infinity.

Was it his face? The mustache resembled his mustache, the crescents under the eyes, the hair falling forward . . .

But the angle of the head, the lack of focus—there was room for doubt.

"Twenty-four lire please, Mr. Harris."

"Yes. Of course." He took a fifty-lire note from his billfold. The old man dug into a lady's plastic coin purse for change.

"Thank you, Mr. Harris."

"Yes. I'm . . . sorry."

The old man replaced the prints in the envelope, handed them across the counter.

He put the envelope in the pocket of his suit. "It was my mistake."

"Good-bye."

"Yes, good-bye."

He stood on the street, in the sunlight, exposed. Any moment either of them might come up to him, lay a hand on his shoulder, tug at his pants leg. He could not examine the prints here. He returned to the sweetshop and spread them out in four rows on a marble-topped table.

Twenty photographs. A day's outing, as commonplace as it had been impossible.

Of these twenty, three were so overexposed as to be meaningless and should not have been printed at all. Three others showed what appeared to be islands or different sections of a very irregular coastline. They were unimaginatively composed, with great expanses of bleached-out sky and glaring water. Squeezed between these the land registered merely as long dark blotches

flecked with tiny gray rectangles of buildings. There was also a view up a steep street of wooden houses and naked wintry gardens.

The remaining thirteen pictures showed various people, and groups of people, looking at the camera. A heavyset woman in black, with black teeth, squinting into the sun—standing next to a pine tree in one picture, sitting uncomfortably on a natural stone formation in the second. An old man, dark-skinned, bald, with a flaring mustache and several days' stubble of beard. Then these two together—a very blurred print. Three little girls standing in front of a middle-aged woman, who regarded them with a pleased, proprietorial air. The same three girls grouped around the old man, who seemed to take no notice of them whatever. And a group of five men: the spread-legged shadow of the man taking this picture was roughly stenciled across the pebbled foreground.

And the woman. Alone. The wrinkled sallow flesh abraded to a smooth white mask by the harsh midday light.

Then the boy snuggling beside her on a blanket. Nearby small waves lapped at a narrow shingle.

Then these two still together with the old woman and the three little girls. The contiguity of the two women's faces suggested a family resemblance.

The figure that could be identified as himself appeared on only three of the pictures: once holding the boy in his arms; once with his arm around the woman's shoulders, while the boy stood before them scowling; once in a group of thirteen people, all of whom had appeared in one or another of the previous shots. Only the last of these three was in focus. He was one of the least noticeable figures in this group, but the mustached face smiling so rigidly into the camera was undeniably his own.

He had never seen these people, except, of course, for the woman and the boy. Though he had, hundreds of times, seen people just like them in the streets of Istanbul. Nor did he recognize the plots of grass, the stands of pine, the boulders, the shingle beach, though once again they were of such a generic type that he might well have passed such places a dozen times without taking any notice of them. Was the world of fact really as characterless as *this*? That it

was the world of fact he never for a moment doubted.

And what had *he* to place in the balance against these evidences? A name? A face?

He scanned the walls of the sweetshop for a mirror. There was none. He lifted the spoon, dripping, from his glass of tea to regard the reflection of his face, blurred and inverted, in the concave surface. As he brought the spoon closer, the image grew less distinct, then rotated through 180 degrees to present, upright, the mirror image of his staring, dilated eye.

He stood on the open upper deck as the ferry churned, hooting, from the deck. Like a man stepping out of doors on a blustery day, the ferry rounded the peninsular tip of the old city, leaving the quiet of the Horn for the rough wind-whitened waters of the Sea of Marmara. A cold south wind stiffened the scarlet star-and-crescent on the stern mast.

From this vantage the city showed its noblest silhouette: first the great gray horizontal mass of the Topkapi walls, then the delicate swell of the dome of St. Irena, which had been built (like a friend carefully chosen to demonstrate, by contrast, one's own virtues) just to point up the swaggering impossibility of the neighboring Holy Wisdom, that graceless and abstract issue of the union commemorated on every capital within by the twined monograms of the demon-emperor Justinian and his whore and consort Theodora; then, bringing both the topographic and historic sequence to an end, the proud finality of the Blue Mosque.

The ferry began to roll in the rough water of the open sea. Clouds moved across the sun at quicker intervals to mass in the north above the dwindling city. It was four thirty. By five o'clock he would reach Heybeli, the island identified by both Altin and the mail clerk at the Consulate as the setting of the photographs.

The airline ticket to New York was in his pocket. His bags, all but the one he would take on the plane, had been packed and shipped off in a single afternoon and morning of headlong drunken fear. Now he was safe. The certain knowledge that tomorrow he would be thousands of miles

away had shored up the crumbling walls of confidence like the promise of a prophet who cannot err, Tiresias in balmy weather. Admittedly this was the shameful safety of a rout so complete that the enemy had almost captured his baggage train—but it was safety for all that, as definite as tomorrow. Indeed, this "tomorrow" was more definite, more present to his mind and senses, than the actual limbo of its preparation, just as, when a boy, he had endured the dreadful tedium of Christmas Eve by projecting himself into the morning that would have to follow and which, when it did finally arrive, was never so real, by half, as his anticipations.

Because he was this safe, he dared today confront the enemy (if the enemy would confront *him*) head on. It risked nothing and there was no telling what it might yield. Though if it were the *frisson* that he was after, then he should have stayed and seen the thing through to its end. No, this last excursion was more a gesture than an act, bravado rather than bravery. The very self-consciousness with which he had set out seemed to insure that nothing really disastrous could happen. Had it not always been their strategy before to catch him unaware?

Finally, of course, he could not explain to himself why he had gone to the ferry, bought his ticket, embarked, except that each successive act seemed to heighten the delectable sense of his own inexorable advance, a sensation at once of almost insupportable tension and of dreamlike lassitude. He could no more have turned back along this path once he had entered on it than at the coda of a symphony he could have refused to listen. Beauty? Oh yes, intolerably! He had *never* known anything so beautiful as this.

The ferry pulled into the quay of Kinali Ada, the first of the islands. People got on and off. Now the ferry turned directly into the wind, toward Burgaz. Behind them the European coast vanished into the haze.

The ferry had left the Burgaz dock and was rounding the tiny islet of Kasik. He watched with fascination as the dark hills of Kasik, Burgaz, and Kinali slipped slowly into perfect alignment with their positions in the photograph.

He could almost hear the click of the shutter.

And the other relationships between these simple sliding planes of sea and land—was there not something nearly as *familiar* in each infinitesimal shift of perspective? When he looked at these islands with his eyes half-closed, attention unfocused, he could almost . . .

But whenever he tried to take this up, however gently, between the needle-tipped compasses of analysis, it crumbled into dust.

It began to snow just as the ferry approached Heybeli. He stood at the end of the pier. The ferry was moving eastward, into the white air, toward Buyuk Ada.

He looked up a steep street of wooden houses and naked wintry gardens. Clusters of snowflakes fell on the wet cobbles and melted. At irregular intervals street lamps glowed yellow in the dusk, but the houses remained dark. Heybeli was a summer resort. Few people lived here in the winter months. He walked halfway up the hill, then turned to the right. Certain details of woodwork, the proportion of a window, a sagging roof caught his attention momentarily, like the flicker of wings in the foliage of a tree twenty, fifty, a hundred yards ahead.

The houses were fewer, spaced farther apart. In the gardens snow covered the leaves of cabbages. The road wound up the hill toward a stone building. It was just possible to make out the flag waving against the gray sky. He turned onto a footpath that skirted the base of the hill. It led into the pines. The thick carpet of fallen needles was more slippery than ice. He rested his cheek against the bark of a tree and heard, again, the camera's click, systole and diastole of his heart.

He heard the water, before he saw it, lapping on the beach. He stopped. He focused. He recognized the rock. He walked toward it. So encompassing was his sense of this scene, so inclusive, that he could feel the footsteps he left behind in the snow, feel the snow slowly covering them again. He stopped.

It was here he had stood with the boy in his arms. The woman had held the camera to her eye with reverent

awkwardness. He had bent his head forward to avoid looking directly into the glare of the setting sun. The boy's scalp was covered with the scabs of insect bites.

He was ready to admit that all this had happened, the whole impossible event. He did admit it. He lifted his head proudly and smiled, as though to say: *All right—and then? No matter what you do, I'm safe! Because, really, I'm not here at all. I'm already in New York.*

He laid his hands in a gesture of defiance on the outcropping of rock before him. His fingers brushed the resilient thong of the slipper. Covered with snow, the small oval of blue plastic had completely escaped his attention.

He spun around to face the forest, then around again to stare at the slipper lying there. He reached for it, thinking to throw it into the water, then drew his hand back.

He turned back to the forest. A man was standing just outside the line of the trees, on the path. It was too dark to discern any more of his features than that he had a mustache.

On his left the snowy beach ended in a wall of sandstone. To his right the path swung back into the forest, and behind him the sea dragged the shingle back and forth.

"Yes?"

The man bent his head attentively, but said nothing.

"Well, yes? Say it."

The man walked back into the forest.

The ferry was just pulling in as he stumbled up to the quay. He ran onto it without stopping at the booth to buy a ticket. Inside under the electric light he could see the tear in his trousers, and a cut on the palm of his right hand. He had fallen many times, on the pine needles, over rocks in furrowed fields, on cobbles.

He took a seat by the coal stove. When his breath returned to him, he found that he was shivering violently. A boy came round with a tray of tea. He bought a glass for one lira. He asked the boy, in Turkish, what time it was. It was ten o'clock.

The ferry pulled up to the dock. The sign over the ticket booth said BUYUK ADA. The ferry pulled away from the dock.

The ticket taker came for his ticket. He held out a ten-lira note and said, "Istanbul."

The ticket taker nodded his head, which meant no. "*Yok.*"

"No? How much then? *Kaç para?*"

"*Yok Istanbul—Yalova.*" He took the money offered him and gave him back in exchange eight lire and a ticket to Yalova on the Asian coast.

He had got onto a ferry going in the wrong direction. He was not returning to Istanbul, but to Yalova.

He explained, first in slow precise English, then in a desperate fragmentary Turkish, that he could not go to Yalova, that it was impossible. He produced his airline ticket, pointed at the eight o'clock departure time, but he could not remember the Turkish word for "tomorrow." Even in his desperation he could see the futility of all this: between Buyuk Ada and Yalova there were no more stops, and there would be no ferries returning to Istanbul that night. When he got to Yalova he would have to get off the boat.

A woman and a boy stood at the end of the wooden dock, at the base of a cone of snowy light. The lights were turned off on the middle deck of the ferry. The man who had been standing so long at the railing stepped, stiffly, down to the dock. He walked directly toward the woman and the boy. Scraps of paper eddied about his feet, then, caught up in a strong gust, sailed out at a great height over the dark water.

The man nodded sullenly at the woman, who mumbled a few rapid words of Turkish. Then they set off, as they had so many times before, toward their home, the man leading the way, his wife and son following a few paces behind, taking the road along the shore.

EREM

GLEB ANFILOV

Anfilov is a young Russian writer and this is one of his first published stories. The Soviet robots have done very well on the Moon and Mars and the mechanical hero of this story appears to be their linear descendant.

At the sound of the siren, Spassky snatched up the telephone receiver. With his left hand, he dialed the number of the industrial cybernetics expert, and with his right he hurriedly turned the safety switches.

"Nothing I can do here! There's a breach in the wall!" he shouted into the receiver.

"What, what?" They did not understand him at the other end.

"There's been an accident! The wall is breached, the silicon is gushing out!"

"Failure of the blocking system?"

"I tell you, there's a breach in the wall!"

"It must be repaired at once."

"I know that myself. Can I use Erem?"

"Erem?" There was a pause. "I guess it can't be helped . . ."

Spassky put down the receiver and pressed the button for the repair machine. A few seconds later the door opened and Erem rolled into the room. Four quartz lenses stared questioningly at Spassky.

"There's a bad leakage of the molten silicon in the southern sector," said Spassky. "I don't know the exact place: the television cable burnt out. Will you remember?"

"Yes," creaked Erem. "What is the temperature inside?"

"A thousand degrees. And it's rising rapidly."

"How much liquid in the crystallizer?" asked Erem.

"A million tons. . . . The heatproofing material is on the

left as you enter. Go on, Erem," Spassky said warmly. "Hurry up!"

Erem turned and disappeared. Spassky threw himself back in his chair, sighed, and stretched his hand for a cigarette.

While Spassky was taking the first puff, Erem rolled headlong to the southern sector of the crystallizer, unlocked the door, and burst into the vestibule. Even here it was hot—about five hundred degrees. Erem checked the rhythms of his logical center. This took a second. To make sure the memory crystals did not crack, he waited another second, then threw open the inner door and found himself in the interior, facing the red-hot ceramic wall. Directly over him, some eight meters from the top, a wide, uneven gap gleamed like white flame. Streams of molten silicon ran down from the gap, bubbling and shooting sparks.

"The breach is found," said Erem over the radio-telephone.

"Large?" asked Spassky.

"About three meters long."

"Make it fast," said Spassky.

Drippings of the thickening liquid formed a ribbed pattern running down the wall. It would be difficult to reach the gap. Erem thought for a few milliseconds. Then he threw out a horizontal manipulator and seized a large wad of fireproof insulation from the pile near the door. Now he had to climb up. It's very high, he thought. He thrust out his bottom hoist and two side-pieces. The temperature was twelve hundred degrees. The oil in his chamber became liquid like water. Erem knew that it could stand another hundred degrees, and connected the hoist.

A shiny, jointed leg thrust itself out of the white asbestos jacket. The oil was drying, coagulating into a wrinkled crust.

"What are you doing?" Erem heard Spassky's impatient voice.

"Climbing to the breach."

"Faster!" cried Spassky.

Erem knew himself that he must hurry, but there was

nothing he could do. The speed of ascent was three meters per minute.

Bracing himself against the wall with his side-pieces, Erem climbed up and up. The stream of molten silicon became wider. The gap spread. Beneath it, a round bulge had formed, and the molten fluid fell from it in large, heavy splashes. One of them struck Erem's side-piece. It bent and slipped off the wall. Erem swayed on the long leg of the hoist. His massive body nearly lost its balance. But he instantly thrust out a reserve piece, pressed it into the overflow, and stopped his fall.

"How is it going?" asked Spassky. "Why are you silent?"

"I am climbing to the breach," answered Erem.

He could not extend the leg of the hoist any farther. The oil was boiling. Erem opened the valves and poured it out. Then he disconnected the inner attachment of the hoist. The leg separated itself and toppled slowly. It was easier now. Some two meters remained between him and the gap, and Erem managed to scale them with the aid of the side-pieces which held him between the walls.

The temperature was already over fifteen hundred degrees.

Despite his internal cooling mechanism and the thick layer of heatproof jackets, his logical scheme began to deviate from normal. There was confusion of visual images. Against the dark crimson background of the wall with its streaming liquid there suddenly appeared Spassky's face with silently moving lips. This interfered with concentration. By an effort of will, Erem banished the image from the wall and turned on the spare sections of his electronic brain.

It was getting still hotter. It would not take long before his logical scheme disintegrated. To delay disintegration, Erem switched on the pain center. And then he felt the incinerating heat directly, with his own indicators. His side-pieces were aching, his asbestos casing was fiery hot, the lenses of his eyes were burning, but his mind began to work clearly and fast. Erem realized that no more than a minute remained before total failure of function unless . . .

unless the temperature was reduced. He needed cold, he needed it badly. Just a little of it. And it was so easy to achieve: merely switch on the fans. But cooling was bad for the molten silicon; it was strictly forbidden. Nevertheless, Erem asked uncertainly:

"Is it possible to turn on the cooling for twenty seconds?"

"No," Spassky answered at once. "Under no circumstances! The silicon will be ruined. What are you doing?"

"Starting the repair."

Erem had been almost certain that Spassky would not permit the cooling. And he accepted the refusal as a matter of course. But to him it meant a death sentence. This repair job would destroy him. Evidently, the crystallization of a million tons of silicon was more important than the life of a repair machine. Erem accepted the order and went to work.

He moderated the pain of the burns with his psychocorrector. He brought out his second horizontal manipulator and seized a strip of the heat-resistant insulation with it. He stretched it and aimed it at the uneven, fire-breathing gap, framed in gleaming lips. With a precise movement, he thrust the strip into the fiery ooze. Both manipulators bent, cracked, and fell away.

Erem brought out a second pair of manipulators, separated a second strip of insulation, drove it in. Again the tungsten arms broke with a dry, crackling sound and dropped off. Confusion returned to the logical scheme. The memory of his first day came to Erem with sharp clarity. Desperately manipulating his psychocorrector, Erem vainly tried to eliminate from consciousness the uninvited picture of the assembly shop where he was born, the smiling human faces, the glints of sunlight on machines. . . . Light! It was his first light! . . . The noise of the plant, human speech, someone's merry voice: "I congratulate you with existence, new intelligence!" The gap . . . He must coordinate the movements of his last pair of manipulators. The casing of an essential block of mechanisms was slipping off. Aim it right! Push it in! The third strip of

fireproof insulation closed the gap. He leaned back sharply . . .

Someone chattering on the telephone . . . Spassky. Erem no longer understood what he was saying, but he forced out the answer:

"Repair accomplished. That is all . . ."

Then came delirium. The school for training repair machines. The teacher Kallistov, shouting during the efficiency test: "Up! Touch the ceiling, touch the left wall! . . ." His first job, repair of a bridge piling on the Black Sea . . . Stones dropping easily and slowly through the water. And fish . . . A lesson in fearlessness . . . A lesson in mechanics . . . "It's called the Coriolis force . . ." People, machines, fragments of thoughts flashed before him. . . . "It was a difficult job, it was the last job, but an important one . . ."

Erem did not notice when the entire lower block of his mechanisms dropped off. No more pain. The pulley of the central motor whirled senselessly, irregularly. Stopped. Like a broken phonograph record, two empty signal words, over and over again: "Scheme disintegrated, scheme disintegrated, scheme disintegrated . . ."

Spassky took a last puff and stubbed out the cigarette butt. He picked up the telephone and dialed the number of the industrial cybernetics expert.

"Everything in order," he said. "The crystallizer is O.K."

"What about Erem?" asked the expert.

"The signal is 'Scheme disintegrated.' "

"A pity," said the expert. "A pity . . . I don't know if we can restore him. When the crystallization is finished, call me. I'll come and take a look."

"I will," said Spassky, and put down the receiver.

CAR SINISTER

GENE WOLFE

A fantasy for our times? A bedtime story of the auto age? Gene Wolfe is an engineer who knows his machines. He is also a writer of large talent and small production who puts a lathe-turned finish on what he writes. The automobile has a fascination for SF authors (an anthology appeared in Italy a few years ago titled Il Grande Dio Auto*—The Great God Auto—that consisted only of SF stories about cars) so perhaps it is only right that we have a newborn mythology about our favorite machine.*

Q: What do you get if you cross a raccoon with a greyhound?

A: A furry brown animal that climbs trees and seats forty people.

—GRADE SCHOOL JOKE

There are three gas stations in our village. I suppose before I get any deeper into this I should explain that it really is a village, and not a suburb. There are two grocery stores (privately owned and so small my wife has to go to both when she wants to bake a cake), a hardware store with the post office in one corner, and the three gas stations.

Two of these are operated by major oil companies, and for convenience I'll call them the one I go to and the other one. I have a credit card for the one I go to, which is clean, well run, and trustworthy on minor repairs. I have no reason to think the other one is any different, in fact it looks just the same except for the colors on the sign, and I've noticed that the two of them exchange small favors when the need arises. They are on opposite sides of the main road (it is the kind of road that was called a highway

in the nineteen thirties), and I suppose both managers feel they're getting their share.

The third station isn't like that at all; it looks quite different and sells a brand of gasoline I've never seen anywhere else. This third station is at the low end of the village, run by a man called Bosko. Bosko appears stupid although I don't think he really is, and always wears an army fatigue hat and a gray coat that was once part of a bus driver's uniform. Another man—a boy, really—helps Bosko. The boy's name is Bubber; he is usually even dirtier than Bosko, and has something wrong with the shape of his head.

I own a Rambler American and, as I said, always have it serviced at one of the major-brand stations. I might add that I work in the city, driving thirty miles each way, and the car is very important to me; so I would never have taken it to Bosko's if it hadn't been for that foolish business about my credit card. I lost it, you see. I don't know where. Naturally I telegraphed the company, but before I got my new card I had to have the car serviced.

Of course, what I should have done was to go to my usual station and pay cash. But I wondered if the manager might not be curious and check his list of defaulting cards. I understand that the companies take great pains to keep these lists up to date, and since it had been two days since I'd wired them, it wasn't out of the question to suppose that my number would be there, and that he'd think I was a bad credit risk. A thing like that gets around fast in our village. I shouldn't really have worried about something like that, I know, but it was late and I was tired. And of course the other major oil company station would be even worse. The manager of my station would have seen me right across the road.

At any rate I was going on a trip the next day, and I thought of the old station at the low end of the village. I only wanted a grease job and an oil change. Hundreds, or at least dozens, of people must patronize the place every day. What could go wrong?

Bosko—I didn't know his name at the time, but I had seen him around the village and knew what he looked like—wasn't there. Only the boy, Bubber, covered with oil

from an incredible car he had been working on. I suppose he saw me staring at it because he said, "Ain't you never seen one like that?"

I told him I hadn't, then tried to describe what I wanted done to my American. Bubber wasn't paying attention. "That's a *funny car* there," he said. "They uses 'em for drag races and shows and what not. Rears right up on his back wheels. Wait'll I finish with him and I'll show you."

I said, "I haven't time. I just want to leave my car to be serviced."

That seemed to surprise him, and he looked at my American with interest. "Nice little thing," he said, almost crooning.

"I always see it has the best of care. Could you give me a lift home now? I'll need my car back before eight tomorrow morning."

"I ain't supposed to leave when Bosko ain't here, but I'll see if I can find one that runs."

Cars, some of them among the strangest I had ever seen, were parked on almost every square foot of the station's apron. There was an American Legion parade car rebuilt to resemble a "forty and eight" boxcar, now rusting and rotting; a bulking candy-apple hot rod that looked usable, but which Bubber dismissed with, "Can't get no rings for her, she's overbored"; stunted little British mini's with rickets; a Crosley, the first I had seen in ten years; a two-headed car with a hood, and I suppose an engine, at each end; and others I could not even put a name to. As we walked past the station for the second time in our search, I saw a sleek, black car inside and caught Bubber (soiling my fingers) by the sleeve. "How about that one? It looks ready to go."

Bubber shook his head positively and spat against the wall. "The Aston Martin? He's too damn mean."

And so I drove home, eventually, in a sagging school bus which had been converted into a sort of camper and had WABASH FAMILY GOSPEL SINGERS painted in circus lettering on its side. I spent the evening explaining the thing to my wife and went to bed rather seriously worried about whether or not I would have my car back by

eight as well as about what Bubber's clothing would do to my upholstery.

I need not have concerned myself as it turned out. I was awakened about three (according to the illuminated dial of my alarm clock) by the sound of an engine in my driveway, and when I looked out through the Venetian blinds, I saw my faithful little Rambler parked there. I went back to sleep with most of my anxiety gone, listening to those strange little moans a warm motor makes as it cools. It seemed to me they lasted longer than normal that night, mingling with my dreams.

Next morning I found a grimy yellow statement for twenty-five dollars on the front seat. Nothing was itemized; it simply read (when I finally deciphered the writing, which was atrocious) "for service."

As I mentioned above, I was leaving on a trip that morning, and I had no time to contest this absurd demand. I jammed it into the map compartment and contrived to forget it until I returned home a week later. Then I went to the station—Bosko was there, fortunately—and explained that there must have been some mistake. Bosko glanced at my bill and asked me again, although I had just told him, what it was I had ordered done. "I wanted the oil changed and the chassis greased," I repeated, "and the tank filled. You know, the car serviced."

I saw that that had somehow struck a nerve. Bosko froze for a moment, then smiled broadly and with a ceremonious gesture tore the yellow slip to bits which he allowed to sift through his fingers to the floor. "Bubber made a mistake, I guess, Colonel," he said with what struck me as false bonhomie. "This one's on the house. She behave okay while you had her out?"

I was rattled at being called Colonel (I have found since that Bosko applies that honorific to all his customers) and could only nod. As a matter of fact the American's performance had been quite flawless, the little car seeming, if anything, a bit more eager than usual.

"Well, listen," Bosko said, "you let me know if there's any trouble at all with her. And like I said, this one's on the house. We'd like your business."

My new card came, and I had almost forgotten this incident when my car began giving trouble in the mornings. I would start the engine as usual, and it would run for a few seconds, cough, and stop; and after this prove impossible to start again for ten or fifteen minutes. I took it to the station I usually patronize several times and they tinkered with it dutifully, but the next morning the same thing would occur. After this had been going on for three weeks or so, I remembered Bosko.

He was sympathetic. This, I have to admit, made me warm to him somewhat. The manager of my usual station had been pretty curt the third time I complained about my car's "morning trouble," as I called it. When I had described the symptoms to Bosko, he asked, "You smell gas when it happens, Colonel?"

"Yes, now that you mention it, I do. There's quite a strong gasoline odor."

He nodded. "You see, Colonel, what happens is that your engine is drawin' in the gas from the carb, then pukin' it back up at you. You know, like it was sick."

So my American had a queasy stomach mornings. It was a remarkable idea, but on the other hand one of the very few things I've ever been told by a mechanic that made sense. Naturally I asked Bosko what we could do about it.

"There's a few things, but really they won't any of them help much. The best thing is just live with it. It'll go away by itself in a while. Only I got something serious to tell you, Colonel. You want to come in my office?"

Mystified, I followed him into the cluttered little room adjoining the garage portion of the station and seated myself in a chair whose bottom was dropping out. To be truthful, I couldn't really imagine what he could have to tell me since he hadn't so much as raised the hood to look at my engine; so I waited with equanimity for him to speak. "Colonel," he said, "you got a bun in the oven—you know what I mean? Your car does, that is. She's *that way*."

I laughed, of course.

"You don't believe me? Well, it's the truth. See, what we got here," he lowered his voice, "is kinda what you would call a stud service. An' when you told Bubber you wanted her *serviced*, you never havin' come here before, that's what

he thought you meant. So he, uh," Bosko jerked his head significantly toward the sleek, black Aston Martin in the garage, "he, you know, he *serviced* it. I was hopin' it wouldn't take. Lots of times it don't."

"This is ridiculous. Cars don't breed."

Bosko waggled his head at me. "That's what they'd like you to think in Detroit. But if you'd ever lived around there and talked to any of the union men, those guys would tell you how every year they make more and more cars with less and less guys comin' through the gate."

"That's because of automation," I told him. "Better methods."

"Sure!" He leveled a dirty finger at me. "Better methods is right. An' what's the best method of all, huh? Aint it the way the farmer does? Sure there's lots of cars put together the old-fashioned way early in the year when they got to get their breedin' stock, but after that—well, I'm here to tell you, Colonel, they don't hire all them engineers up there for nothing. Bionics, they call it. Makin' a machine act like it was a' animal."

"Why doesn't everybody . . ."

He shushed me, finger to lips. " 'Cause they don't like it that's why. There's a hell of a big license needed to do it legal, and even if you're willin' to put up the bread, you don't get one unless you're one of the big boys. That's why I try to keep my little operation here quiet. Besides, they got a way of makin' sure most people *can't*."

"What do you mean?"

"You know anything about horses? You know what a gelding is?"

I admit I was shocked, though that may sound foolish. I said, "You mean they . . . ?"

"Sure." Bosko made a scissors gesture with his arms, snapping them like a giant shears. "Ain't you ever noticed how they make all these cars with real hairy names, but when you get 'em out on the road, they ain't really got anything? Geldings."

"Do you think . . ." I looked (delicately, I hope) toward my American, "it could be repaired? What they call an illegal operation?"

Bosko spread his hands. "What for? Listen, Colonel, it

would just cost you a lot of bread, and that little car of yours might never recover. Ain't it come through to you yet that if you just let nature take her course for a while yet, you're goin' to have yourself a new car for nothing?"

I took Bosko's advice. I should not have; it was the first time in my life I have ever connived at anything against the law; but the idea of having a second car to give my wife attracted me, and I must admit I was fascinated as well. I dare say that in time Bosko must have regretted having persuaded me; I pestered him with questions, and once even, by a little genteel blackmail, forced him to allow me to witness the Aston Martin in action.

For all its sleek good finish it was a remarkably unprepossessing car, with something freakish about it. Bosko told me it had been specially built for use on some British television program now defunct. I suppose the producers had wanted to project the most masculine possible image, and it was for this reason that it had been left reproductively intact—to fall, eventually, into Bosko's hands. When Bubber started the engine it made a sound such as I have never heard from any car in my life, a sort of lustful snarl.

The Aston Martin's bride for the night was a small and rather elderly Volks squareback, belonging I suppose to some poor man who could not afford to buy a new car through legal channels, or perhaps hoped to turn a small profit on his family's fecundity. I must say I felt rather sorry for her, forced to submit to a beast like the Aston Martin. In action all its appearance of feline grace proved a fraud; it experienced the same difficulties a swine breeder might expect with a huge champion boar, and had to be helped by Bosko with ramps and jacks while Bubber fought the controls.

The months of my American's time passed. Her gasoline consumption went up and up until I was getting barely eleven miles to the gallon. She acquired a swollen appearance as well, and became so deficient in endurance she could scarcely be forced up even a moderate hill, and overheated continually. When eight months had passed the plies of her tires separated, forming ugly welts in the sidewalls, but Bosko warned me not to replace them since

the same problem would only occur again.

On the night of the delivery Bosko offered to allow me to observe, but I declined. Call it squeamishness, if you will. Late that night—very late—I walked past his station and stared from the sidewalk at the bright glow of a trouble light and the scuttling shadows within, but I felt no urge to let them know I was there. The next morning, before I had breakfast, Bosko was on the phone asking if I wanted to pick my cars up: "I'll drive your old one over if you'll give me a lift back." Then I knew that my American had come through the ordeal, and breathed somewhat more easily.

My first sight of her son was, I admit, something of a shock. It—I find it hard to call him *he*—is a deep, jungle green inherited from Heaven knows what remote ancestor, and his seats are covered in a long-napped sleazy stuff like imitation rabbit fur. I had expected—I don't know quite why—that he would be of some recognizable make: a Pontiac, or perhaps a Ford, since they are made in both England and America. He is nothing of the sort, of course, and I realize now that those *marques* with which we are familiar must be carefully maintained purebred lines. As it is I have searched him everywhere for some sort of brand name that would allow me to describe the car to prospective purchasers, but beyond a sort of trademark that appears in several places (a shield with a band or stripe running from left to right) there is nothing. Where part numbers or serial numbers appear, they are often garbled or illegible, or do not match.

It was necessary to license him of course, and to do this it was necessary to have a title. Through Bosko I procured one from an unethical used-car dealer for thirty dollars. It describes the car as a '54 Chevrolet; I wish it were.

No dealer I have found will give me any sort of price for it, and so I have advertised it each Sunday for the past eight months in the largest paper in the city where I work, and also in a small, nationally circulated magazine specializing in collector's cars. There have been only two responses: one from a man who left as soon as he saw the car, the other from a boy of about seventeen who told me he would buy him as soon as he could find someone who would lend him the money. Had I been more alert I would have taken

whatever he had, made over the spurious title to him, and trusted him for the rest; but at the time I was still hoping to find a bona fide buyer.

I have had to turn my American over to my wife since she refuses to drive the new car, and the several mechanical failures he has already suffered have been extremely inconvenient. Parts in the conventional sense are nonexistent. Either alterations must be made which will allow the corresponding part from some known make to be used, or the part must be made by a job shop. This, I find, is one of the penalties of our—as I thought—unique automotive miscegenation; but when, a few weeks ago, I grew so discouraged I attempted to abandon the car, I discovered that someone else must have made the same crossing. When the police forced me to come and retrieve it, I found that the radiator, generator, and battery were missing.

"FRANZ KAFKA"
by JORGE LUIS BORGES

ALVIN GREENBERG

A Hollywood film about the glories of making films usually ends up as a violin supported oratorio of self-adulation. It is too incestuous; the device does not work. But here, in a fictional story, a real author of fiction appears as a character and this device works in a chillingly real manner, muddying what we usually think of as the clear and different streams of reality and fiction.

There is a story by Borges which neither you nor anyone else has ever read, for it was written in the dialect of a remote Andean Indian tribe among whom Borges lived briefly while young, but whose language no one else knows. Borges himself seems to have little memory of the language at this late date; with his failing eyesight he can no longer decipher the curious symbols which he has used to represent it on the printed page; and no one else either knows what sounds the symbols were supposed to represent or would be likely to pronounce them properly if he did. Meanwhile, an article in a recent issue of the *Journal of Anthropology* has reported the finding, by an expedition from the University of Pennsylvania, of the village where Borges lived, or where, according to rough estimates given by Borges himself after his return many decades ago, it seems likely that he lived. No signs of recent human habitation were found in the village, however, and the expedition has reported convincing evidence that the population was destroyed by a sudden flare-up of venereal disease, perhaps resulting from contact with Western civilization, probably before World War II. Though they left many artifacts behind, there is no evidence of their having possessed an alphabet, hence no record of their language. They appear, according to the

report, to have been a marginal society of hunters and gatherers; they kept no domestic animals; they dwelt in rather small shelters made of unhewn stone and did their cooking over open, communal fires; the majority of them, it appears, were left-handed; almost all of their pottery, as well as some of the stones of the huts, is decorated with drawings of insects, some quite crude and some in very realistic detail. Not all of the insects depicted on these objects are believed to be indigenous to the region, though no suitable explanation for this phenomenon has yet been proposed.

Borges, for his part, claims not to remember what the story—which he wrote either while still residing in the village or immediately after his return—is about, but is under the impression that he included much of it in a later story, with a different setting, possibly European. A former student and present colleague of mine, Charles Morley Baxter, who interviewed Borges in Buenos Aires in 1967, tried again and again to turn the questioning in the direction of this story, only to receive instead lengthy, impassioned, and knowledgeable disquisitions on German mystics of the seventeenth century, the English prose romance, and some twentieth-century French symbolists of whom he had never heard before. When he asked, at last, whether it would be possible to see the "mysterious" manuscript, Borges at once reached into the drawer of a nearby desk and presented him with a sheaf of hand-written pages. These, however, turned out to be, so far as Baxter could tell, the rough draft of an unpublished essay on the palace at Knossos by the Chilean archeologist Alfonso Quenardo, whose work, though my friend was not at the time aware of this, has long since been discredited for being speculative and nonempirical.[1]

Nonetheless, as everyone knows by now, pirated copies

[1] In 1924 Quenardo rejected a sizeable government grant under which he was to have headed an international archeological expedition to Crete, claiming that he could learn as much about labyrinths in Santiago as anywhere else and that "one does not have to dig in order to get dirty." These remarks, called arrogant by his colleagues and the press, severely damaged his academic career.

of the manuscript are in common circulation among Borges aficionados throughout the world. Generally they exist in mimeographed form, though sometimes in xeroxed copies (made, in all likelihood, from mimeographed versions), and, less frequently, in painstakingly hand-made versions, more than one of which has already been offered me, in the several years since I began to explore this subject, as the original. Never have I seen a printed version. At this time, I have in my possession over twenty copies, in one form or another. Most of them are identical in almost all aspects: regardless of format, each fills nine standard 8 1/2 x 11 pages; differences, for the most part, are minor, consisting primarily of malformed symbols; there are only a few copies which reveal the addition or omission of a group of symbols, and it seems likely that these are the result of someone's attempt to compensate for a failure in the copying mechanism. It would be no great task to collate the various copies in my possession in order to produce a "good text"; such a task would be a pointless one, however, since the text has no "meaning." Cryptography could at best substitute another set of symbols—i.e., romanic letters—for the extant ones, but could bring us no closer to a successful translation; it has, to date, failed to find a consistent basis for achieving even the first task. The manuscripts rest with me still, though I have some time since given over completely the notion of seeking a "translation" and have, of late, begun to suspect Borges' use of the term "story"—if, indeed, it was he who applied that term to this work. Professor Arthur Efron, of the State University of New York at Buffalo, has persuaded me to place these documents, as well as any others collected in the interim, in the Contemporary Literature Manuscript Collection of that fine institution when my own work with them is completed, and so indeed I shall do.

In the meantime, I have been shocked to discover the proliferation of not just the manuscripts but the symbols themselves, a phenomenon which I encountered in a most curious way. On my most recent visit to New York, some six months back, I spent an evening with my friend, the poet C. W. Truesdale, discussing both Borges, to whose

work I had introduced him a year or so previously, and my own preoccupation with the "mysterious" manuscript, a copy of which I had with me at the time, having been given it[2] only that afternoon by another poet-friend who had recently brought it back with him from Mexico City. While we discussed Borges, Truesdale's younger daughter, Stephanie, came in and sat down on the arm of her father's chair, just across from me. She had been there for some time—perhaps an hour or more, not at all a likely thing for a nine-year-old!—listening intently to our conversation and playing idly with her charm bracelet, before I suddenly became aware of what I had been seeing all along: that on one of the charms which dangled from her bracelet was one of the symbols from the Borges manuscript! I asked at once to see the bracelet. The other charms were the ordinary ones, mementoes of places visited, for the most part, which her parents had bought for her. The one with the symbol, however, was, she explained, the gift of a school friend, a shy little girl from the South who had spent a few months in Stephanie's school while her father was on an assignment in New York and then had gone away. Though Stephanie had been attracted to this child she had never become particularly friendly with her, and so had been greatly surprised when the little girl approached her after school one day and simply handed her the charm. In spite of her knowledge of her mother's strong opposition to her accepting gifts from schoolmates, Stephanie did not for a moment consider not taking it; instead, she decided to offer something valuable of her own in exchange, a beautiful polished agate that had been a gift from a friend of her parents back in Minnesota, but when she took it to school the next day she found that the girl had already been withdrawn. When she was done answering my questions in this way, Stephanie ased me why I was so interested.

"Have you ever heard of Borges?" I replied.

[2] I have never yet been able to *purchase* a copy; each time I have heard of the existence of one, tracked it down, and then offered to buy it, payment has been refused and it has been forced on me as a gift, in such a way as to make my refusal of it impossible.

"Of course," she said, "you've been talking about him all evening."

The symbol which appeared on her charm was similar to the Hebrew letter *gimel*, save that the upright portion of the symbol was tilted far more to the left and the "foot" was given more of a hook, so that it looked like this:

It was the symbol that I had come to refer to, from its curious shape and the frequency of its occurrence in the manuscript, as the "grasshopper." Truesdale himself, having looked at first with some amusement upon my interrogation of his daughter, soon became quite intrigued with the matter, having at last noted that the symbol on her charm did indeed correspond with one of the symbols in the Borges manuscript which I had been showing him and which he had been holding in his own hands for some time now. He was, all in all, interested enough to accompany me the following day on a trip to the library in an attempt to track down the sources of some of Borges' symbols in ancient or foreign alphabets, though neither of us actually expected to have much success in such a venture: Truesdale because he was not yet convinced that the whole thing was not an elaborate hoax, and myself because I could not quite believe that Borges had gotten his symbols from some "outside" source.

As it turned out, we never got to the library that day, though my later researches have demonstrated quite convincingly that the symbols—I have identified sixty-three of them quite definitively, and there are some half dozen others whose status is less certain since they may be only variations on, or malformations of, other symbols—are not derived from any other alphabets, ancient or modern. There are, to be sure, some few, such as the one noted above, in which the casual viewer might see

some relation to Hebrew, or Telagu, or Arabic, but such resemblances are merely superficial, are in all cases vague similarities and not identities, and are, in any event, not of sufficient number to warrant serious consideration.

Far more interesting, from my own point of view, was Truesdale's remark as we left for the library the following morning—he had stayed up most of the night with the copy of the manuscript that I had left behind for his examination—that he had been inspired by my own informal name for the symbol that appeared on Stephanie's charm bracelet to note that a great many of the symbols seemed to bear rough resemblances to insects. It was, I believe, the last time he ever spoke to me of this manuscript or its author. While I was still mulling over the implications of his statement, we passed a newsstand where we both observed, in the same speechless moment, that the model on the cover of the current *Harper's Bazaar* was wearing a pin in the shape of the same symbol that had appeared on the charm. It was not long before we began to see the symbol elsewhere—on the hood ornament of a foreign automobile, carved into the granite block of a cornerstone, scrawled in crayon on an advertisement for a Broadway musical comedy—and then other symbols as well—one embossed on the side of a businessman's briefcase, two appearing in an alternating pattern on the fabric of a dress in the window of a fashionable shop, another on a decal affixed to the rear window of a taxi—all within a few blocks. Truesdale's spirits began to fluctuate wildly as these things came to our attention. With a howl of excitement he would rush across a busy street, dragging me behind him through the dangerous traffic, to check the symbol emblazoned on a toy being sold by a street hawker, or haul me in pursuit of a young woman to examine the shape of her shoe buckle. In between these moments he would fall into a deep and speechless despondency, especially darkened when my own questioning of shop owners or pedestrians only served to reveal that they knew "nothing about" the symbol to which I called their attention, that it was "only a decoration," or that

"someone had asked to put it there."[3] On the southwest corner of Eighth Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street Truesdale came to an abrupt halt and began to recite, in a loud voice rendered generally inaudible by the sounds of traffic and the rapidly gathering crowd, a poem which he had apparently been composing all this while about—as best I could tell—the symbol which we had been encountering most frequently.[4] When, however, he at last arrived at the crucial point where the symbol itself was to appear in the poem, he paused, unable to find a verbal equivalent for it, equally unable to go on without it. For one terrifying moment, it seemed as if the whole world had come to a standstill. It was with great relief that I got the two of us into a taxi.

Perhaps this crisis was only the result of what Truesdale had tried to incorporate in his poem. It is possible, of course, to include all sorts of "found objects" in poems—indeed, one might well ask what other sorts of objects there are to be included in poems—and most often without the poet being able to predict in advance quite what their effect will be upon his poems. But might it not be equally valid to assert that there are some "objects" that are capable of refusing to be incorporated into poetry? Perhaps it is the property of such objects to "act" rather than to be acted upon, so that though they may easily enter poems on their own—in all likelihood in the guise of other,

[3] Perhaps one reason for his speechlessness and our inability to discuss this event was the unspoken presence of a question neither of us wished to encounter because neither dared risk an answer: were all of these people truly innocent of the symbol to which they were connected or were they part of a silent conspiracy of its presence from which we alone were excluded?

[4] I still have in my possession a copy of this poem which I was sent soon after I left New York; I do not feel, however, that I have any right to reprint it inasmuch as the poet himself refuses either to submit it for publication or to read it at any of his public appearances. I fear it has been swallowed up by the same conspiracy of silence as the symbols.

less suspicious, objects—it is not possible for the poet himself to take hold of them, and place them in the poem, at his own disposition. And perhaps this, in turn, is only so because they are, so to speak, a poetry of their own—with, therefore, their own independence of action and a certain resistance to having a chorus of words constructed "about" them. Borges himself, after all, has long since warned us that "it is hazardous to think that a coordination of words (philosophies are nothing else) can have much resemblance to the universe." So much, then, for a philosophy, a scientific system, a metaphysics, a mimetic literature. But what of a poetry?

He has at the same time asked us to see, with the symbolists, that the world itself is a book—if not a "coordination of words," at least a forest of symbols, perhaps undecipherable. So too it may be for this untitled and unreadable—indecipherable—"story" that he has given us. It does not bear much, if any, "resemblance to the universe," save for the associations, possibly only personal, evoked by a few of its markings; it is, on the other hand, a veritable forest of symbols, through which, it begins to seem to me, now that I have begun to devote myself to it more and more fully (I fear it will be some time before I shall be ready to release my manuscript collection; my study is already impossibly cluttered with the multitude of symbol-bearing artifacts that I have accumulated in only the past few months; what this brief essay on the subject may be only the beginning of I cannot imagine), one can walk endlessly, encountering such things as have never before been seen. *Not* a "coordination of words," but a conglomeration—who is to say that anything has been coordinated?—of things, symbols, presences; *not,* indeed, a "resemblance to the universe," but a universe itself, which cannot be "incorporated" into any other universe.

What Borges appears to have left us, then, is not a literature but a world—a strange, opaque, and stubborn world. And yet one cannot help being tempted to ask, seeing how closely it has approached our own now, whether it is possible to dwell in such a world. Some have seen it, that much is clear, and have perhaps attempted to enter it: hence the proliferation of manuscripts and pseudo-

manuscripts of the "story," and, lately, of the symbols. Others have tried to take hold of it more forcefully, and to bring it into their own spheres without due regard for its autonomy: hence the trauma resulting from Truesdale's attempt to include the symbol in the world of his own poem. And it is equally clear that many who come near it, or even touch upon it, without any knowledge of what they are approaching, are, by their very innocence it would seem, both protected from any dangers it might involve and included within its own sphere; hence the total naturalness and ease of Stephanie's wearing of the charm.

But at the same time, I begin to suspect that it is equally possible that "it," the Borgesan world, is not content simply to wait for others to come near, to enter into it, but instead moves anxiously forward on its own into the universe we already inhabit, even now permeating it with its own symbology. To what end? Perhaps it would be best if such a question as that simply was not raised. Not only does it suggest a teleology that may well not exist, but it implies other, and still more problematical, questions: If we knew to what end, would we want to avoid it? And if we wanted to avoid it, could we?

Already there are areas where it has impinged with dramatic effect, as if one of its symbols had somehow slipped through a tiny pinhole in a previously impervious membrane and there, on the other side—on *our* side!—had suddenly taken root and flowered. In the modern literature class I teach—used to teach!—my students persist in saying that Gregor Samsa has turned into a grasshopper, though Kafka very plainly wjbels him a dung beetle. There is nothing I can do about it, or Kafka either: a symbol stronger than his has taken hold of "The Metamorphosis." Borges, in this sense, has "created" Kafka, unless it is Kafka who, by carving out in his story a small vacuum, disguised by the term "dung beetle," into which the grasshopper symbol would naturally flow, has created Borges.[5]

[5] Most students, it appears, perform this metamorphosis of their own upon Kafka's story quite unconsciously, for they are genuinely

Meanwhile the poet Truesdale has abandoned New York for his cabin on Moccasin Lake in northern Minnesota. He seems well and cheerful, accomplishes an enviable amount of work, but refuses to fish or to fell timber for firewood. His wife explains that on some other fisherman's hook left in the mouth of some northern pike he lands—or, worse yet, imbedded deep inside the trunk of some ancient norway pine—he fears to find such a symbol as would not be at all good for him to find, in such a place. Not long after the take-off on his flight west, the stewardess presented him with a large white box, containing a birthday cake. The box was very clearly marked with his name, and the stewardess was certain there had been no mistake, but it was *not* his birthday. Was it Rochester beneath him at that moment, or some other universe in which it *was* his birthday? When the plane landed he abandoned the cake in a locker without ever tasting it. Perhaps only now someone who has come to Minneapolis from terribly far away is approaching that same locker with the correct key. It is a struggle to stick to the use of these symbols, these words, and not to let those other symbols cover these very pages. Truesdale, meanwhile, had put the cake in a poem, or rather, in his own words, "there was a poem in which there appeared a place for this cake, and no other." The poem vibrates with the cake. But what will be found when the locker is

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surprised and confused when I point out the places in the text where Kafka uses the term "dung beetle." More than one have insisted that "there must be some mistake in the text." However, one of my more remarkable students of recent years, the previously mentioned Charles Morley Baxter, has developed an extremely well-reasoned case for believing that Gregor is, indeed, not a dung beetle but a grasshopper, basing his argument on the fact that it is not the narrator himself who calls Gregor a dung beetle but rather the cleaning lady, who is concerned only with getting her work done and not with making nice distinctions between kinds of insects, who is probably quite ignorant of such distinctions anyway and by no means a reliable witness, *but through whose mistake* Kafka has very subtly implied, or permitted, the sense of "grasshopper." I am not yet entirely convinced.

opened? Can Borges have given us a universe in which it is possible to have one's cake and eat it too? Or where, better yet, it is possible for one to have the cake while another "one" eats it? Perhaps even at this moment "C. W. Truesdale" or "Jorge Luis Borges," large and bearlike and quite hungry, is opening the locker. I would imagine that the cake is still fresh. It is decorated with a unique set of symbols which, like the cake, are sweet and edible. It is not my birthday either, but what danger could there be in a little taste?

PACEM EST

KRIS NEVILLE AND K. M. O'DONNELL

Two good authors, one good story, both men familiar to these pages. Neville with "The Forest of Zil" in Best SF: 1967 *and O'Donnell with "Final War" in* Best SF: 1968. *This might be called a war story as well. A war story for our time or for some future time. Or perhaps for all time since there has always been just this one war.*

I

For four days the dead nun lay under the barbed wire in a cold luminescence that seemed to be candlelight. In a stricken way, she seemed at peace; she seemed to have located an answer.

II

Hawkins was himself obsessed with answers at that period and he passed her twice each day, admiring the way she had taken to death: the cold frieze of her features under the stars, the slight, stony chasms of her cheek coming out against the wide brown eyes. Someone, probably a detail sergeant, had clasped hands over the chest after she died and so there was a curious air of grace and receptivity to her aspect; almost, Hawkins thought, as if she were clutching the lover, Death, to herself past that abandoned moment when he had slammed into her. His reactions to the nun comprised the most profound religious experience of his life.

She lay there for four days and might have been there a week if Hawkins had not taken up the issue himself with the company chaplain, insisting that something be done because such superstitious and unsettling events could turn the platoon under his command into demoralized savages.

The chaplain, head of the corpse detail, carried a large cane and believed in the power of the cane to raise the dead and create spells.

The next morning, when Hawkins took his men out on a patrol, the nun was gone and the barbed wire with her; in her place they had put a small block of wood on the fields; it gave her name and dates of birth and death and said something in Latin about being *in memoriam*. Hawkins felt much better, but later, implications of the bizarre four-day diorama exfoliated in his thoughts, and he decided that he didn't feel so good after all.

III

SISTER TERESA, etc, etc, the wood said. GONE TO HER REST, 2196. BORN SOMETIME, AROUND 2160, WE THINK.

IN QUONIBUS EST HONORARUM DE PLUMUS AU CEROTORIUM MORATORIUM.

Caveat emptor.

IV

The nuns were always there, administering comfort to the men and helping the chaplain out at services and even occasionally pitching in on the messline, although the men could have done without that part of it nicely. Someone in the company who was Catholic said that it was one of the most astonishing displays of solidarity with battle the Church had ever given anyone. Hawkins imagined, like himself, that the nuns were simply moving around on assignments. When the next one came through, they would get out.

The nun who had been killed had, apparently, wandered out for some private religious ritual and met stray silver wisps of the enemy gas which traveled from the alveoli of the lungs to become exploding emboli in the roiling blood of the ventricle, leaving her outward appearance unchanged. The other nuns, Hawkins supposed, had wanted

to pick her up but feared to defy the hastily erected signs saying AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY PERMITTED INTO THE KILLING AREA and that had led to the whole complication of getting rid of the body. All of it still would not have been so particularly distressing to him if these events had not come in his period of religious revival.

He had never been much for religion: men who become captains of reconnaissance patrols in major wars are not, after all, profoundly religious types. They accept what they are told, and seldom, if ever, think beyond the conventional wisdom of their *milieu*.

But Hawkins had begun to feel twinges of remorse and fear from the moment he landed on the planet—probably helped along by his first view of the caged alien at the entry port. Just as indoctrination had warned, the aliens looked exactly like our own troops.

Then, too, the more he became aware of the death rate, to say nothing of the fact that the aliens were out to kill all of mankind, the more he began to feel convulsions, succumb to dim, vague fits of gloom in which he visualized himself taking complicated vows of withdrawal. It had some subtly demoralizing effect upon his work. Still, he might have reached some fragile accommodation if it had not been for the business of the dead nun which coalesced all his thinking and began to lead him to the distinct feeling that he was going insane.

On the sixth night after the removal of the body and the erection of the wooden block, Hawkins cleaned up after he had returned to the area and, in what was the best approximation of dress uniform he could make in the terrain, wandered to the rear where the nuns were; stood idly outside the huts for a time, holding his helmet in one hand; and wondering exactly what he was going to do.

V

Remember, they had been instructed; *the fate of mankind depends upon your showing here, but do not feel in any way that you are under pressure.*

VI

The old nun's face seemed strangely dull and full. It passed from one of the huts toward another and then, for some reason, stopped and asked him what he wanted.

"I want to pay my respects to the dead one. To the dead . . ." In his embarrassment, Hawkins was unable to think of the word. "To the dead female priest," he said, finally.

"That would be Teresa," said the nun. "She never understood what was happening—she always talked of flowers and trees; but she had wanted to come so badly because it was the decision of the order that all of us were to come, without exception. She said she was afraid, but all things could be part of heaven if they were observed so; and then, of course, she died. You were the one who arranged for her removal?"

Hawkins nodded dumbly.

The old nun touched him lightly, two fingers spread to accommodate his wrist, and then led him toward the hut. "It was quite kind of you," she said. "We wanted to send for Teresa, but they wouldn't let us. They said it wasn't permitted. We had to think of how she lay there in indignity—and then you returned her to us."

"Well, I tried," Hawkins said.

"We couldn't manage stone, so we used wood. We had to sneak the marker in. She was very unlucky, Teresa. No luck at all."

"Unlucky?" Hawkins said. He had always believed that religious people made their own luck, uneven but connected.

They were at the door of the hut now, that door being comprised of a series of burlap sacks which had been strung together, and she pushed them aside to lead him in.

"Sit down," she said, pointing at some spot in the flickering darkness where he could sense a low slung chair. "You'll want to talk to the Mother Superior."

"That wouldn't be necessary."

"It's the way we do things. But she isn't prepared yet."

"Do you think I could pray here?" Hawkins asked

pointlessly. "Would you mind?"

"If you want to. It doesn't do much good, though. But we can give you a book."

"No books," Hawkins said. "No *books*. I want to make up the words all by myself."

"Of course," the nun said, and went away. Hawkins clasped his hands and began to mumble words like "Father" and "*Kyrie Eleison*" and "Holy Mary," which were about all he could remember of the things he had picked up about it; but even in the murmuring stillness, with the effect given by the one candle on the shelves above him, it wouldn't quite take.

It occurred to Hawkins for the first time that he had absolutely nothing to say to God, and for some reason this cheered him; if that were the case, then God probably had nothing to say to him in return. And he would undoubtedly not be in the kind of trouble he had been fearing. There was no question of interference from forces or people with whom you had no communication.

He thought about the dead nun then, and for the moment it was without horror; perhaps the calm of her features had been an utter resignation rather than a lapsed attention caught by the fumes. It was possible, in fact, that she had died in knowledge, and if that were so it made this the more bearable—although not entirely so, of course.

After a while the curtains parted again and the old nun came out. She was dressed in what Hawkins took to be a Mother Superior's outfit and she looked very well indeed. He was not surprised in the least; he had expected it from the start.

"So, then," she said. "Now I am Mother Florence and I am prepared to properly sit by you. That was a very fine thing you did for us, and you are blessed for it."

"But why did you come out here?" Hawkins said. He was being matter-of-fact about the identity question because it was, of course, the Mother Superior's business, and not his.

"We in this order believe that the revelations of St. John are most fully realized, or to be realized in the events of these particular days. We wish to hold out, for you, against the Apocalypse."

"There are no revelations of St. John," said Hawkins, the refutation holding only a private meaning for himself. "There is no Apocalypse, either."

"We feel otherwise," she stated, calmly.

"What about your Teresa? Does she choose to believe? Dead nuns are deader than dead men. I'm sorry; there was no need for that."

The nun touched his shoulder. "We have borne worse. We come, and we observe; we hold, and we pray. And we give what comfort we are able."

Later, away from the hut, Hawkins wandered toward the center of the encampment. Drifting around him were strange night odors and within him his rage, and he guessed, as he picked up his pace, that when the two of them combined—the outside and the inside—they might make a kind of sense; there might be something to his feelings, his being. And in that hope he burst free, still moving, through the area itself and out to the other end, to the fields. Unswerving, poised with the grace of insistence, he plunged toward the wooden block in the distance. When he got there he caved it over with a sigh, feeling its edges rolling against him; he pivoted on his back to look at the sky, wondering from where and from when his brothers the aliens would place their special silver stake in his heart.

AFTERWORD
THE DAY EQUALITY BROKE OUT

BRIAN W. ALDISS

The millennium had arrived, and a remarkable arrival it was.

As the nuclear bombs fell, they went through their grotesque and beautiful phases of energy-release, growing, blooming, extending, ripping the guts out of the electromagnetic spectrum. Their terrible palsies covered the whole globe and, almost before the billions of the inhabitants of the globe were totally exterminated, the Final Whistle blew.

God appeared immediately with his henchmen striding along beside him. As the myriad dead struggled to the surface of the world and looked up, their eye sockets lit with wonder at the sight of him. They had expected God to appear in their own image; but there was nothing eye socketty about him; he took the form of an enormous tree.

While the rabble of resurrectees formed up into some sort of order—they were so disarranged that the old classificatory systems of sex, class, nationality, color, and ideology had been lost—they discussed what sort of a tree God was. He seemed to be of no known kind, and was so tall that his upper branches were shedding leaves while the lower ones were coming into bud. His henchmen, on the other hand, were a pretty ordinary bunch of elms, junipers, larches, pines, oaks, limes, and even ornamental cherries.

The majority of resurrectees were slightly miffed at this arboreal emphasis, particularly those who during their lifetimes had subscribed to the major religions, which had voted solidly in favor of an anthropomorphic God. The only people who had a giggle were the animists—such as most of the pre-Iron Age people, who had seen God in most natural things, a few kalahari bushmen, and the science fiction writers and readers, whose minds had always remained open on the subject. They would hardly have turned a hair if God had shown up as a mile-high octopus.

As order was installed in the postmortem ranks, the science fiction writers and readers observed that they had been herded into one group. It was not a very large group, occupying a stretch of fused and starred quartz of a magenta hue which had previously been the island of Tobago, off the North coast of South America—a much smaller group than, to name a nearby example, the poker players of the world, corraled on Jamaica.

These science fiction writers and readers had previously lived all round the globe, and had written and read their favorite literature in all the world's languages. Some of them were publishers and critics, trying to establish their own petty preferences and tastes at the expense of others. Naturally, the writers also did this—some of them only spoke in a series of PR messages—but they did this because they mainly regarded such activity as necessary for their own survival in a harsh world.

Curiously, this jockeying for position had much less effect on the readers than might be expected. For instance, there were three science fiction writers whose voices had particularly loud edges to them—loud, that is, in comparison with the merit of their work.

The first science fiction writer lived in California. He was very tall and wore boots to make himself taller, even in bed. He had many mistresses but never married. His clothes were so outrageous that he was noticed even in the heart of Los Angeles (we are speaking now of pre-millennial times, children). He was outstandingly handsome, with even white teeth contrasting with his marvelous tan. He wrote only one short story every year, but it wore outrageous clothes just as he did and, in place of tall boots, had an outrageously long title. For instance, even as the bombs fell, he was dictating—he never used a typewriter, being a busy multimedia man—a story entitled "When They Call Amen in the Palaces of Eternity the Sex Symbols of Dawnlight Will Come Rattling Down Around My Lawn-Sprinkler, Jesus."

When these colorful one-a-year stories were finished, the first science fiction writer would get his publicity agent to phone, call, cable, and visit with all the editors and anthologists and publishers and movie makers and creative guys available, and stir them up so much, and make them

talk about his story so much, that by year's end the story would have collected all the prizes and medallions and anthology rights in the entire field—before it was even published. Publication became superfluous—the story was to be admired, not read. Instead, it would be snapped up by the movies, resold a dozen times at ever-growing prices, and eventually would appear as a long-running serial on TV entitled "Nite Foke."

The second science fiction writer lived in London. Unlike the first science fiction writer, he was far from tall and colorful. He was practically a dwarf, and his personality was so colorless as to be almost transparent. He was divorced several times, though rarely married. Contrasting with the pallor of his face was an incomplete set of crumbling brown teeth which resembled the house he rented. He had many sets of clothes, designed to merge with the company he was in—gray double-breasted for publishers, beads and feathers for news columnists, hacking jackets for less successful country-girt writers. The second science fiction writer wrote twelve long SF novels every year, and had done so since he was aged fourteen. He specialized in outrageous one-word titles like *Maelstrom, Nightdrop, Plenipotenitary, Utopianists, Abomination,* and *Armageddon.*

As he finished these novels, the second science fiction writer went to work under assumed names, writing introductions for his own books saying how vastly superior they were to anyone else's, or else writing articles under assumed names—which he sold to magazines that could afford to buy nothing but shoddy goods—saying how vastly superior his novels were to anyone else's. Often these claims were believed (especially in academic circles, where there is a tendency to respect what is written and suspect the rest) and, as a result, the second science fiction writer was invited to lecture all over the globe, despite the failure of his books to sell. A crypt was specially built to house his manuscripts and dentist's bills.

As he grew older, he became more fussy where he spoke, and for how much, and eventually would lecture only in Hawaii, Rome, Brasilia, and a few other favored spots. The critical works on his *oeuvre* multiplied to such an extent that eventually he was installed as the dean of a

college devoted to extolling his mass-produced goods. Before the bombs dropped, he could be seen almost nightly on TV, grimacing his way through parlor games. Every word he spoke was a PR job.

The third science fiction writer did almost nothing that the first and the second science fiction writers did. His life was much more dignified—and at least as sordid. He had the advantage of living in an almost unknown but constantly fought over part of the world called—well, children, this was before The Reckoning, and the exact name had been lost.

He was of medium size and middle age, and had no problems with women. Nobody ever discovered whether he wore clothes or boots; so awful was the regime that currently held his country in sway, that the third science fiction writer lived in the darkness of a disused copper mine because of the housing shortage. He worked for the government, filing canceled ration cards in alphabetical order (difficult because of the two alphabets currently in use).

Despite this obscurity, the third science fiction writer was well known in his own land. They named a street after him one day and arrested him in it the next.

The third science fiction writer wrote science fiction only in his spare time. It was scribbled in pencil on the backs of misappropriated ration cards. It took the form of long, boring, and jocular novels with titles like *The Amusing Story of How Parapsychology Became Fashionable in Elfinland*. Eventually, the ration cards were re-misappropriated, finding their way into the hands of a Dutch critic and criminal, who translated them into abominable French and had them published complete with long-winded critical introductions explaining why H. G. Wells was incapable of writing anything as good. These French editions were pirated by a gentleman owning a publishing house in New York, who put them out in abominable abridged English translations, complete with the Dutch introductions, adding a few adverse comments of his own so that no right-thinking man could regard the publication of the scribblings of foreigners as subversive in any way.

Thus it was that the name of the third science fiction

writer blazed across the same skies as those of the first and second science fiction writers. It did him no good. Not a cent of his rocketing royalties was he allowed to touch, and he died of what was officially described as "ration card fever" only a week before the bombs came down.

In order to remind readers of the individual quality of these three authors' work, it is necessary to quote brief passages from each. Even in short extracts, the particular beauties of their prose emerge.

Here is the passage from "When They Call Amen in the Palaces of Eternity the Sex Symbols of Dawnlight Will Come Rattling Down Around My Lawn-Sprinkler, Jesus" in which the hero, Buddy Istanbul, emerging from the Rampant Ice Cream of Western Culture, bursts out into a woodland glade:

> A life of his own. That was what he needed.
>
> A life uncorrupted by corruption.
>
> Untainted by taints.
>
> Unpolluted by pollution.
>
> His life. He wanted to scream. His muscles flexed as he fought down the urge, biceps creaked as he grappled with his own throat, seized his epiglottis, struggled with his windpipe, so that not one peep would emerge into dawnlight.
>
> Peep.
>
> You couldn't win all the time! Keep control. That was the secret, keep control and knock shit out of anyone who argued.
>
> He stood there, filled with awareness—awareness of his own consciousness, conscious of his own awareness. He was himself.
>
> No one else.
>
> Roses were growing by the path. He wasn't them either. He was himself, all male, all muscle.
>
> He sniffed a rose. Worried if that was an all-male, all-muscular thing to do. Worried because he was worrying. Sniffed again. Great. One of the natural things that cried filth at all the turmoil and festering misery man had created.
>
> Beautiful roses, yellow, yellow as the froth on a tidal wave, yellow as his old grandpaw's tobacco-

stained mustache, yellow as the first locks of a dame's pubic hair, yellow as the robes of a Burmese priest shuffling toward Mandalay with a begging bowl in his hand. No, that would be saffron. Okay. Okay.

Okay, so they were saffron roses.

He plunged his fists into them, plunged again and again, plunged until another peep emerged, plunged until blood ran from the thorn-wounds, ran red among the yellow, crimson among the saffron, ran from wrist to shoulder, healthy blood, lovely blood, beautiful blood, petals of blood.

His blood. He gave it gladly—for all lovely inarticulate things. Things like roses.

He stood aside. He just had to have another peep.

Though the prose of the second science fiction writer may lack some of the intensity of the first science fiction writer, his sense of social consciousness is unmatched. Here is the brilliant scene on the planet Kleenix, where the hero, Fly Algaric, disguised as a Uruguayan *poncho*, meets two fishermen as night closes in over the Lost Fishing Port of Poufadder. It comes from Chapter Six of *Fenestration*:

Fly crept up to them behind the stacked barrels of *quagirt*, shaking his head as he saw how big the men really were.

They were talking, their words urgent, their gestures eloquent, with all the magnificent natural spontaneity of the peasant.

"I was saying that the Space Corps is corrupt," one of the men said. "They bought off Belton Jeffs, the only honest man on the planet, and shipped him to Nerlubber VI, as if they hadn't enough over-population there already."

He spat into the still waters. A fish died.

"We'd better get on with the catch," his companion said uneasily, mouthing the broken dialect with difficulty.

Fly crept nearer. So these simple peasants knew . . . He would have to kill them. Otherwise Belton's plan would fall through.

Right through.

Yes, he would have to kill them. He nodded to himself in the shadows. Have to kill them. Yet he sympathized with them. Oh, Great Jupiter, *how* he sympathized with them, and with every poor bastard peasant on this benighted planet.

The first man spat again, and gestured violently with the instinctive violent gesture of a man whose life is lived moment by moment in conditions of extreme poverty and seasickness.

"Let's set to sea again, Jarl!" he said, through his thick blubber lips. "One day, we'll rise! You'll see! We'll rise! We shall overcome, fear not!"

"I hope you're right," Jarl said glumly, glancing in Fly's direction as he crept nearer. For a moment, Fly thought he had been spotted, and he raised his scorcher, but luckily Jarl had glaucoma in both eyes.

The two men began to push the boat out. It was now or never.

"Better times do be coming to the likes of us," the first fisherman said, coughing consumptively and laughing the carefree laugh of men whose days are spent among the tall hills. "Then we'll get to the bottom of Kleenix's rigged health statistics, the high incidence of disease, the moral corruption among slum-dwellers, and the dire state of education, not to mention the shortage of fish."

He raised his great gnarled fist to the evening sky where the little Nerlubbers were already twinkling, a fine figure of a man born under oppression. There's nothing like oppression to make a man splendid. Fly suppressed a tear as he shot the man and his companion. Fine men. It was for the cause. The Corps asked no questions.

He knew what was right, he thought, nodding as he turned and ran.

The third science fiction writer is best represented by the opening of the twelfth book of *The Amusing Story of How Parapsychology Became Fashionable in Elfland*. It will be remembered that all characters are nameless. The doctor, the archaeologist, and the philosopher have been stranded on a small coral island in the Arctic Ocean. The island is

governed by a mysterious scientist called Master Builder. A whirlwind is approaching them.

They stood side by side, playing their torches on the whirlwind. It was a desperate situation. They were not downhearted.

"I feel downhearted," said the doctor.

"We shall survive," laughed the big hearty archaeologist clapping his companion on the back.

The doctor fell down and bit the coral.

"This gives me an idea," he said, picking up the chunk he had disengaged from the main mass. "You remember what Marx said about ingenuity being the mother of invention? These coral polyps are still alive. They can work the flying machine for us."

The archaeologist smote his brow.

"Amazing! But how?"

"I will show you."

The philosopher came across the ground to them. He shook hands. They had been parted five minutes. "The whirlwind has gone."

They looked out to sea. The whirlwind had whirled away. They chuckled. "Danger was meant to be overcome, as Marx pointed out," said the doctor.

"Marx?" asked the philosopher. "Yes, Karl Marx."

As they shoveled the living coral into the empty fuel tanks of their craft, the doctor explained the situation.

"Have you ever asked yourselves what a coral island is doing in the Arctic Ocean? Or alternately what the Arctic Ocean is doing round a coral island? One or other is obviously artificial."

It was the philosopher's turn to smite his brow. "I never even guessed. Which do you suspect?"

"This is the work of the Master Builder again," said the doctor, shoveling away as he continued with his explanation. "The coral polyps are the perfect example of the Socialist state. Each little polyp labors for the good of the whole without personal gain. The Master Builder has been reading Marx to them." He paused. "Karl Marx," he explained.

"Fine deducing!" cried the archaeologist, pausing

in his shoveling to strike his forehead. "But how will they power our craft?"

"They are alive," laughed the doctor. "Even you will grant me that, my old archaeologist friend." He clapped his friend on the waist. "When they fill the fuel tanks to completion, then we switch on and the engines will come to life."

"You have a great human soul," said the philosopher, striking himself with the naked spade to show how the discovery amazed him.

What good friends they were in all the cosmos, as man should be.

The interesting thing about all this—if, indeed, there is anything interesting in it at all—is that these three great names of science fiction blazed and were gone, and hardly a reader looked up. They were busy over the stories of more self-effacing authors like Asimov and Clarke, whose writings actually had some influence on the SF field.

The readers would never have claimed that all men were equal; what they read told them that idea was nonsense. The three science fiction writers would have died rather than think all men were equal to them. The publishers and critics, proclaiming their particular pet to be the Greatest, would have been out of business had they dared pretend all men were equal. And then came the bombs . . .

. . . And in due course, God, in the shape of the tall tree, came marching over to the isle that had been Tobago.

After reading out a list of their sins, God had this to say to his audience. "So much for your errors during life. I know I'm expected to punish you all suitably, but it was such a lousy environment on Earth that individualism was the law of the day and you naturally could hardly be expected to think of the feelings of those about you. So, I'm going to forgive you all, forgive all those sins, forgive all that cruddy, slapdash writing."

The masochists were silent, but everyone else gave three hearty cheers for God, tree or no tree.

"Indeed," God continued, "I'm now going to give you a gift for the Hereafter that you never had on Earth. You are now all equal in my sight."

He moved off to deal with another group of resurrectees,

leaving some puzzled frowns behind him. "How," one writer wanted to know, "are we supposed to enjoy this so-called Hereafter trip if all you guys are set up to being as good as me?" He voiced a general sentiment.

We have a little time before the bombs come down, children, so perhaps it is worth considering how we should fare if equality were imposed here. *You* consider it; I refuse to. I can think of one sphere in which it is imposed, and where its effects are plainly bad for the science fiction field. I mean, in paperback distribution. The books go out to wholesalers in bales, and the wholesalers or distributors send them out to retail outlets as assorted titles. Writers X, Y, and Z are treated as if they were exactly alike. They sell or they don't sell—no individual report comes back. Say they don't sell; next time around, the retailer says, "Don't send me any more SF," and not "Don't send me any more X and Y, though I don't mind Z, and I'd like to try U, V, and W." So the publisher decides his SF line is not selling; he cuts the print order, or he decides more lurid covers are needed, or he tells his writers to use fewer big words and more dames—or he cancels his SF line entirely.

This sort of equality is bad for all. Writers are individualists. To my mind, one of their vital jobs is to keep alive individual perception, and see that it is not smothered under one ideological system or other. If we have to have equality in the writing field, let's save it for after the bombs fall. Till then, I prefer—though I agree on the dreadfulness of the choice—to live in the same universe as the first, second, and third science fiction writers.

To keep the inequalities polished, I shall name as usual the books of the year which appealed to me most.

Of necessity, I must nominate Anna Kavan's *Ice,* since I wrote the introduction to the Doubleday edition and would hardly wish to show lukewarm about it now! It is the perfect contemporary SF novel, a natural and sophisticated evolution from the writings of such authors as Edmund Hamilton and John Wyndham—by a lady who had probably heard of neither author. This remarkable demonstration of how SF has permeated the writerly consciousness during the last decade demonstrates, epitomizes, the modern sense of disaster and loss of identity, first manifest in lower grade—almost "folk"

—writings. The magical quality of *Ice* lifts it to the same plane as Nabokov's memorable *Ada* last year.

My favorite collection of short stories arrived from Czechoslovakia, translated by Iris Urwin. Josef Nesvadba's name was already known to Western readers. His collection of eight stories, *In the Footsteps of the Abominable Snowman,* one of which is included in this anthology, is a pleasure to read on a number of levels—not least because it provides us with an allusive portrait of life in present-day Prague. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Nesvadba, apart from his powers of invention, is his ingenuity with plot, making it define areas of psychological complexity that would take other writers down into the depths of Freudian explication. In this respect, Nesvadba has something in common with the more fantastical Polish author, Slawomir Mrozek, also represented here. Nesvadba is a real find; his writing belongs to his own national tradition, through Capek and Kafka, and helps to enlarge the bloodstream of Anglo-American SF (always threatening to clot!).

Third, I must make mention of *Stella Nova: The Contemporary Science Fiction Authors,* compiled by Robert Reginald and colleagues, and published by Unicorn and Son of Los Angeles, in a limited edition (and doubtless sold out before I even type the words). It is a bibliography with biographical details of most writers alive in the SF field. In a way, it seems like an equalizer; no mention of quality is offered, since its concern is with cataloguing.

Yet the 483 writers and editors included come bursting out of their dry details in a most individual way. Who wrote "Dr. Who In an Exciting Adventure with the Daleks"? Which writer got out of science fiction, instead of trying to change it, because it was "too hidebound, too conservative"? Who produced a series of Malaysian fantasy movies such as *Aladin Burok* and *Wily Delilah*? The answers lie among the *W*'s of this ambitious compilation.

These books provided some of the bright spots of the year; and there were others—each reader will nourish his own preferences. The magazines continue, presenting well-worn formats and formulae. In Britain, the Australian-

financed "Vision of Tomorrow" folded up its newly pitched tent and silently stole away—no great loss except in its vision of lost opportunities, on which an experienced editor might possibly have seized. A planned sister-magazine of sword-and-sorcery was cancelled before the first issue could appear. Meanwhile, *Playboy* has started a paperback imprint and is publishing science fiction.

In the wider world of reality, science fiction has also held its hard-earned place. The World SF Convention was held this year in Heidelberg—the first time a World Con has ventured outside the Anglo-American hegemony—and was voted a great success. Now Sweden and Australia are bidding to capture this event in future.

Last year, this column had the pleasure of reporting on the SF Symposium in Rio de Janeiro. This year, as usual, the annual Festival of International Science Fiction Films was held in Trieste, that pleasant and international city. It was organized by Signora Flavia Paulon, who provided interesting and varied entries—movies difficult to track down elsewhere (have you see Alan Watkins' Swedish-financed *The Gladiators* yet?).

The star event of the year was undoubtedly the International Science Fiction Symposium in Japan, held in connection with the '70 Expo. This triumph of Anglo-Japanese diplomacy was arranged and organized by Japanese writers and fans; the Chairman was that *bon viveur* of letters, Sakyo Komatsu-San, and many other writers as well as translators and publishers took part. The program was a full one, and demanding, but good organization and hospitality made the event a pleasurable one.

Among other delegates present were Frederik Pohl, representing the U.S.A.: Miss Judith Merril, representing Canada; and Arthur Clarke and the undersigned representing the U.K. There was also a delegation from the U.S.S.R., ably headed by the genial Vasily Zakharchenko, which included among its number the Russian editor of H. G. Wells' works, Julius Kagarlitski, known with affection in the West for his ambassadorship on behalf of Russian science fiction.

The Symposium held sessions in Tokyo, Osaka, and

Toyota City and discussed, among other business, the state of science fiction around the world. It concluded by issuing a communiqué and, in general, established a model for future international symposia. SF has come a long way in public affection and respect.

The Symposium would have been highly interested in a pamphlet recently issued by veteran writer Jack Williamson. This is a preliminary survey of SF instructional courses at college level and shows how much work is now being done on this subject in the States. Estimates suggest there are 150 to 200 such courses active.

It must be admitted that there is a sense in which all science fiction writers are equal in the sight of the general public. No matter whether they write well or ill, whether they mint newly or debate the coinage, whether they pander, preach, or paralyze, whether they seek to widen sensibilities or harden prejudices, whether they sap or strengthen the intellect—they are science fiction writers still. It is the subject that unites them, like it or not. As Mephistopheles almost said in *Dr. Faustus*, "Why, this is the future, nor are we out of it."

And if God makes no distinctions, why should the general public?

That is no rhetorical question. The answer lies in the growth of discrimination. In literature as in love, we seldom begin with any great distinction; good taste has to be cultivated. But we can go on to learn and appreciate, casting aside the worthless to enjoy more fully the excellent. Let's hope some of the many courses aim for appreciation as well as sociology. Such discrimination is the enemy of science fiction writers like the first, second, and third writers mentioned above; it is the friend of genuine qualities—and will remain so until the bombs come.

After that, of course, everything will be equal. But the libraries will be closed.

BEST SF: 1970—THE CREAM OF THE CROP

Selected from sources all over the world, some as familiar to the SF field as *Galaxy* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, others as unexpected as *New American Review*, come the very best SF stories published in 1970—in any language. For here are stories from Russia, from Poland, and from Czechoslovakia, as well as from Britain and the United States.

Slawomir Mrozek, Gleb Anfilov, Josef Nesvadba, Alvin Greenberg, Robin Scott Wilson, Jerry Farber, Robert Silverberg, Naomi Mitchison, Hayden Howard, Robert Coover, William Earls, Thomas M. Disch, Gene Wolfe, Kris Neville and K. M. O'Donnell combine to make this the most varied and successful of this unique series of annual anthologies.