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## A PIECE OF MARTIN CANN

a startling, horrifyingly visionary adventure  
in the world of the future

**Laurence M. Janifer**







350  
AB

*“Any experience will try to change you,  
yes. Some of them will try to kill you.”*

\* \* \*

“No one can really understand, this early. From the outside . . . but we'll have a chance to improve our knowledge now.” Sure the technicians were watching, the other side of the fade-wall, he made a hand signal. Five seconds passed.

The room went black, went soundless. The world . . .  
Changed.



*Also by Laurence M. Janifer*

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# **A PIECE OF MARTIN CANN**

**Laurence M. Janifer**

BELMONT BOOKS



NEW YORK CITY



A PIECE OF MARTIN CANN  
A BELMONT BOOK—June 1968

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*For Rosemary, in spite of  
Rosemary: for Gail Wendroff,  
patient and responsive:  
and, with appreciation, for  
Dr. Lewis L. Robbins,  
Dr. Verne Peterson,  
and Coley: along with all the rest,  
not forgotten.*





Down with yonder trees, the Lord of hosts says, and build siege-works about Jerusalem; here is a city that must be called to account for all the oppression that is harbored there. Never cistern kept its waters so fresh, as she her stores of wickedness; no news from her but of wrong and waste, no sight I see there but distress and violence. Jerusalem, be warned in time; else my love thou shalt forfeit, and I will make a ruin of thee, a land uninhabited.

*Jeremiah 6:6—8 from the Holy Bible as translated by Fr. Ronald Knox*

And wherever they will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that city or that house; I promise you, it shall go less hard with the land of Sodom and Gomorrha at the day of judgment, than with that city.

*Matthew 10:14—5 from the Holy Bible as . . . translated by Fr. Ronald Knox*

"I shall not venture to tell you that this new technique is safe. You have studied it carefully



enough to know that it is not. Nor, of course, do I want to spend useless time here discussing its workings. You have all covered that so very recently in your classes that you could, in all probability, do a better job of explaining the technique than I might in its mechanical aspects, at any rate. But, as I hope to emphasize, the technique is not entirely a question of workmanship or of mechanical knowledge . . .

"No, I want only to restate a very few facts, and by that means to put them, as I hope, into high relief. When using this technique, in cooperation with psychiatrists, specialists and aides, you will, quite literally, enter the mind of a severely troubled patient, a patient who can not satisfactorily be reached by any other method. In so doing, you will be entering a world—and one which is, for all practical purposes, quite as 'real' as the world in which you have been living all of your lives. The laws of this new world may or may not bear any consistent relation to the laws of the world with which you are familiar (though as the theoreticians among you will remind me, some such relation must ultimately be capable of derivation); the objects in this new world may be objects, may have properties, of which you cannot now conceive. It is easy enough to say, as many continue to say, that the entered world is merely a 'symbolic abstraction in terms of the patient's disturbance'—it is usually easy to spade up long words, hook them together, and become convinced that they are meaningful. But that 'symbolic abstraction,' while you are within it, will be real to you. What you do will affect it in terms of its own laws and its own structure—laws and struc-

tures which you will have to discover once again for each new patient, for each new world.

*"And what that world does will affect you. Not only in the way which is perhaps easiest to accept—the rule that you will become, without your own full permission, a different being in every different world. No. Instead, we must continue to restate and to emphasize this: that if you are hurt there, you will carry the injury back to the 'normal' world; that if you die there, you will be dead. You are entering a jungle without maps . . ."*

*—Excerpts from a speech by G. Gordon Wence, M.D., E.E., Ph.D., before the graduating class of American Memorial Nursing Academy, which class included Miss Lenore Annell, in June of 2060.*



# ONE

## 1

"THERE ARE many forms of therapy," and despite herself she stopped for a second to listen to the recorded voice—a tall, pale girl as she was then, a functionary whose ritual whites emphasized slimness, perhaps distance. The visitors in from the neighboring clusters—relatives of patients, she supposed, future interns and nurses, curiosity-prones—were stickily gathered around a show-and-tell board which lit up every few seconds, showing a new scene as the voice went booming on. Odd that she suddenly wondered who it was had made the recording, whether he knew that it was still in use—whether, in fact, the person behind the fact-certain voice was still alive. Preoccupation with survival, of course, but . . . well, yes. It would be simpler having a religion, retreating back (as she felt) into the ritual rapport of orthodoxy; but that sort of decision was not, could never be, the sort a sane person could deliberately make—or having by some miracle made—live with for more than a day or two. Like . . . well, like falling in love. Though at one time human beings had made of that, too, a deliberative process. At one time or another, in fact, human beings had done very nearly anything which any mind might



ever conceivably imagine; which made a given action neither better nor worse, ancestry being no proof of virtue. Whatever you did, you were not alone. Preoccupation with survival, for instance, had been the basis of a good many societies; or preoccupation with . . . And a deep breath made no difference, not then. The words pattered on evenly through her mind, interfering with the great recorded exterior voice. "The particular needs of the individual patient must of course determine . . ."

Consensual validation, then, would be the beginning of an answer, though it wasn't quite so simple; call it a sense, instead, of the group—a need for, an acceptance of, the reassurance of the group (so that as the cities became irrelevant and slowly died, the clusters, suburbs, townships took their place; as half the world's religions died the others moved all-at-once to reaffirm believers in their orthodoxy) . . . and Miss Annell, grimacing as she halted, saw without surprise or novelty how peculiarly hard to break was any habit of thought. Instance: this endless self-analysis, her inbuilt motion, so that no action could ever simply be itself, but all had interpretations interpolating, interacting, interfering . . . true, of course, since no action had meaning only in terms of a simplistic purpose, but still . . .

"Details of a given fantasy," and she shook off the preoccupation with . . . with *whatever-it-was*, firmly she told herself—and walked on, through the lobby, passing the knots of spectators whose backs were to her, flat-white flat-tap shoes clicking to the far right archway and efficiently, briskly, as if she had neither a thought in her head nor the need for one, beyond it toward the

elevators hidden by the arch. The nearest set of doors handily slid open as she approached, and Miss Annell stepped inside, put her ID plate in the left-hand usual slot and punched *Four*. The elevator clicked twice, itself, shut its doors, popped the ID plate back up to her waiting hand. She put the plate in her reticule, blessedly without conscious thought. As the elevator carried her up she was trying to focus all of her mind on the patient, trying to adjust herself to his imagined needs, his imagined structures. And realizing at the same time that it was not enough to try, since (so well she knew this) black-space failure for the treatment, for the patient, for the team . . . she had to succeed, *had to* . . . failure for the team. For herself.

And was brought back to analyzing that preoccupation of hers with survival, with the group, with death. All quite abnormal, in fact, and all, themselves, meaning something else, which was . . .

The sentence had, for her, no end, suspended in it, she saw the elevator doors iris open, and she clicked automatically out of that box and into a green-white corridor with no discernible odor at all; the place seemed very clean, which meant (for once an objective deduction, a checkable, consensually-validated deduction, she thought with great relief) that the Vacustat had been repaired since her departure. Thirty-six hours was long enough for a job of that sort, certainly, but it was never quite possible to tell what some doctor-in-charge was going to consider more important. At any rate, her whites would last through the day (if anything did, if she herself did . . . *stop that*) and, quite possibly, longer than that. Domed, tunnelled, neither the citycluster where



she worked, nor the suburb in which she lived was a problem, but inside American Memorial Hospital a few patients could create a good deal of uncontrolled dirt.

No . . . her mind was wandering. After all, she was on the fourth floor, where the problem of uncontrolled dirt was not going to arise. On an Active Therapy floor, perhaps—but not on Four. The patients on Four were physically very well controlled. So well controlled that no one could tell whether death might not wait behind a given door, a given acceptance . . .

Well. Perhaps, then, the Vacustat hadn't been repaired at all, and . . .

What difference did it make?

Standing in the corridor, she became eyeshut, trying to breathe herself at the same time back to (if not relaxation, not so high a hope on such a morning) at least efficiency, to calm. But her mind went back to the voice downstairs, to the listeners there.

Of course she had known from the beginning what she was avoiding. Naming it, even in the darkness, was nevertheless slight relief. She had been hooked into the network before, as a nurse-in-training, but that had made her no more than an observer. And now she was going to join a full group. Dr. Herne had seemed quite sure of her; she was in no more danger than any other member—less, in all probability, since none of the others were first-timers and she would be watched, she knew, with great care throughout. But all that made matters, emotionally, no easier; her feelings might very well be silly but they remained her feelings. She could not, or she would not, push them under, pretend they were not happening. In

that escape lay only the destruction of (she remembered) the "normal" world for her, the acceptance of some other, private, riven and dangerous existence. In quite a different position regarding any hospital . . .

Well. They'd warned her about the fright—Dr. Herne and Dr. Tempar and Miss Moore, each in a different manner (clinically, awkwardly perhaps, lightly)—but she'd heard no more than words. The actual feeling was as always something else, something new. And there was, for her, for that time, no escape . . .

Miss Annell said in a fairly quiet voice the single word: "No." She opened her eyes and took one more breath and went down the bright green-white odorless corridor to the very end, where it angled left and showed her a long line of shut, translucent doors. Last walk, last mile . . . but she was not going to think about that any longer.

She reminded herself—the others had all survived. The others had lived through a network treatment, perhaps a good many network treatments (Dr. Herne, for one, had, of necessity, a lengthy record)—they had all survived. And though her training told her (and lying in the bunks at night, wondering about the fate of an isolating, indifferent family left behind in some other cluster while she went on to that necessity, the help of others)—though training insisted that everyone changed, even as the patient changed, perhaps the shift was not noticeable; perhaps it was all to the good. The others . . .

But they could not stay in her mind, she thought about the patient, and her fear swelled instantly. So that she had to force herself to push



the plate beside the door of Room 412 and as it irised open for her click tapheeled in, letting the door squeeze shut with its faint, insistent whisper. She took a chair, sat, waited. There was no further place for her to go, not with her body.

All the others looked up. Dr. Herne said at once in a deep slow voice, "We'll take a little time to get ready." She wanted to assure him that she was all right. But she was instead shaky, very shaky. She knew he could see that and she said nothing. One of the attendants—she didn't even know the name of the attendants on Four, which was a terrifying fact out of all reason—began to move in behind her. The rest of the group was already wired and helmeted in but Dr. Herne said, with absolutely no effect of repetition, "Let's give it a few minutes, shall we?", and the attendant moved away, into her view again. The chair was very large and, she imagined, quite comfortable, as well, if you didn't know what it was for. Dr. Herne asked her, "Do you want to take a brief visual?"

She nodded; without speech, another attendant moved silently to the wall at her left and slapped a panel. The wall faded into its semi-transparent state. In Room 413, Martin Cann lay in a suspensive liquid, already blocked for every sense but sight. His eyes were blankly opened under the surface of that foetal pool; the ceiling glowed with a faint warm light but he was not looking at it, or at anything in the room. His eyes were open and that was all. Detailed records on Martin Cann (she could think of the event in no other way) slipped into her mind; he was the patient, nothing else mattered. A few seconds had ticked by.

"I'm ready now." A perfectly even voice.

"All right," Dr. Herne said, almost casually. "We'll take it slowly—no need to hurry here, after all. We'll take it as slowly as we like." And behind her the attendant was moving again. The one at the wall had readjusted it, she saw, and vision faded slowly; but she hadn't even noticed. She had been thinking, instead, about Martin Cann. About . . .

No. About her patient. A comforting difference; she would not allow herself to wonder whether or not the comfort was entire illusion.

The attendant—he lowered the helmet, began to fix it in place. Miss Annell glanced down at the stopwatch she wore, quite small and plain, a graduation gift from Thomas, but Thomas had wanted . . . Thomas was back in the cluster and she had left . . .

Never mind all that.

Nine-fourteen. Dr. Herne (at the corner of her eye, when she looked up again) was smiling at her, firm, confident, experienced. And then for them all the light in Room 412 faded; she felt the first prick of the thirty wires. Nine-twenty and the lights were very low; she was entirely in the circuit. Nothing beyond the room visibility arrangement had been activated.

The real world, the normal world. "Let's have a little background," Dr. Herne said, as calmly as if he were in the staff dining room. "The patient's name is Martin Cann . . ."



## TWO

### 1

AND WHERE had the dream begun, and in what place, for what reasons? Always now questions spun whirlwinding in the wind-full world; oh, he never minded that any more, never at all.

There had been times through which he had survived, surrounded as he had been there by white walls, white faces, all the reaching noises, all the smell and taste and balance of a world that was not his there (he remembered), *there* was a time—himself forced into speech, that slow old medium, that helpless hesitant hash of sound—why, words floated like shaking globes, shiverskin purple, wrinkled, in the air, each bursting to leave behind a mist. *Danger*, but that was not what he meant at all. Because the white faces stared at him with expressions he was not to read; they shaped words of their own to shiver and burst leaving behind them—nothing at all. For he did not have to understand—that was a different time and the world was not his own. He might say long ago—if time really existed, though that was not his world either, but theirs—the clocks and schedules, the on-time, meal-time, pill-time world was theirs; and so perhaps, by contraries, there was in his world nothing to tick around him like

a wall, to bar his passage and to raise up threats—long ago, perhaps, he had lived in their world; but he had known better than that. Even in the beginning; for words were old and slow, and all the other faces wore masks of death.

It had sometimes occurred to him (if he had ever really had time) that the faces had bodies, that the bodies moved, the faces changed, in part-response to minds that thought and planned; but he knew, in such occurrence, the very voice of the adversary. Everything, after all, everything and all the spinning world was the adversary; he had proved that to himself, and he did not need to show it ever to anyone else. Because there was never to be anyone else? There were illusions, no more. No more. And though even an illusion might harm he was free, since in his own world he would be safe, in his fine endless world without words—without their silly ballooning eyes that stared, or the long reachy fingers that tried always and always to clutch and hold. He had thrown off the illusion in some illusionary past; he had not returned; he was getting better. The faces, the words, had told him that, once, but he had not believed. Some strange experience, some illusion of seconds flashing and gone, and he found that he wished to believe; that he wished to get from the faces, hands, bodies what he needed. Which was themselves, and all behind them. Which could be nothing less. Sooner or later . . .

Well . . . *sooner or later*. But if time did not really exist? How if time did not really exist? And the old, old voice that said: "Martin, Marty, sit you up, look here," and its echoes, all the booming unforgotten echoes (3Direction, inperson teacher, stranger met and friend demanded, work-



ing-people, all)—those, too, had to be his. He had to own the illusions—that was the only method known to defeat the adversary, the only method (he told himself silently, bothering no more with the slow words which did not do any good) ever known. The adversary had even been in the voices. “Martin, Marty, sit you up, now be a good boy, you and I alone, grow big and strong, you, Marty, because . . .” The very first of them, original for all the rest. The . . .

Adversary. Why, that was proof entire, was it not, proof he was healing? That he could reason? A man who reasoned never could be lost (one echo said that, one inperson echo teaching—what? no matter). The voice was of elegant necessity the adversary, since he had heard it at the very beginning, when only he had existed. Therefore: any voice, in that state, would be the voice of all-the-rest, the voice of all their staring eyes and crunching hands, the very adversary’s voice. Which he had never recognized; he had not been meant to know that fact. The sadness that swept over him like the waves long ago, being sucked out to the edge of the world and returning to tumble him in a wet whirl of death and salt, the sadness was his proof; as he recovered from his illness (oh, yes, he had been ill, there needed no false pride there, none at all thank you) and who were the man in black and the lady in black-and-white who had talked like steel curtains of false pride and of a good deal else? He could leave them for later; no one could explain everything at once, not even I, Father, not even I, Sister, that much had to be understood—as he recovered he ever felt more sad and (proof being firm enough) knew of his recovery because he was able to bear

the addition. Once under a lesser load he had (in a place without even the possibility of time) wept; but he was stronger now, stronger in his own world. And the other world was to be his as well, for the adversary might not simply be destroyed; that had clearly been explained. It was necessary to command the adversary, and hence to own him as all followers were owned. At the end. Even as they had tried their ownership on him, with their white walls and their slow cold words. Persuading him into their world, where he would be . . . what? One of them. One, a single unit, lost beyond recovery, nothing owned but his defenseless skin. At his weeping they had come near to reaching him, their words like hands; but he was stronger now, and soon they would be . . . soon they would all be . . .

Would all be *Martin. Marty*. That adverse voicing, that old sweet tone which would not leave. But in the ending all the voicings would be his; all hands, and all white faces staring. His, and obedient to him: yes, and he could no longer be forced to speech, since they would know and understand; he would think, only, and bowing they would obey; he would remain without change or motion feeling the revolution of all round all his words, his mind, round his world and round his will . . .

Ah, and the blackcovered man, the black-and-white woman. (Of whom there were many; he remembered many—which means more-than-one.) They too with their grinding words, the ground of grinning sadness at the groan of any tightgripped power . . . they too, they too would be gone at last, gone glimmering, gone white, blank and all forgot. For memory was change, change motion,



and motion finally and simply time: and time (as he knew quite well) was death; time was entire death, complete death (whatever was taught by adversaries, by adversity)—and death, ah, death was for the others. Not for him.

## 2

“WORDS,” Dr. Herne said, “which are mostly sound. Which have, perhaps, very little true content—very little real meaning.”

“Nevertheless . . .” Miss Moore said. Oboelike; Miss Annell tried to keep her eyes shut as she listened. Not tightshut: tension was worse than useless. Might, indeed, harm them all. Quietly closed, then, quietly, as if relaxed, as if she were lying somewhere far away, circling evenly into sleep . . . Eyelids flickered open. She did not see anything.

That was the worst. It did not seem to her that there was blackness in front of her eyes; the machines were much better than the training-machines had been. Blackness is a quality, blackness can be perceived. This (produced in a manner she had never thoroughly understood, never) was an electronic blockage of selected nerve tissue: in practice, then, nothing at all. Perception blocked. Sight, then, was not interrupted; sight was gone.

But she could feel her eyelids close again. She did. Lightly. Lightly. Dr. Herne’s calm voice filled the room, the world. “For diagnostic purposes, we

can speak of Martin Cann as a cataleptoid paranoid schizophrenic . . .” His tone gave the words a faint, a ridiculous lilt. “The terms are meaningless; they belong to the dark ages, and should be left there. Schizophrenia . . . catalepsy . . . assaultive episodes . . . hebephrenia, withdrawal, interrelation, and all the rest. Leave them for the dust to cover, leave them with the treatments that were treatments for the labels, never for the person who stood hid behind them.”

Miss Moore’s faint, distant slowness: “Lobotomy . . .”

“Ah—the first word on everyone’s tongue, yes. As if there weren’t worse, in those days. And worse even in ours, here and there . . .” Dr. Herne’s voice trailed off then, and Dr. Tempar’s, younger, sharper, picked up without hesitation the thread, using words as if he were carving them quickly, indelibly into the unseen air.

“Tranquilizing agents, excitants, symptomatic relief. We’ve got to be done with all of that now. We know better, and it’s up to us—and to the others like us—to stop this . . . this . . .”

She heard her own voice hesitant, offering: “Murder . . .”

As if faintly surprised, Dr. Tempar repeated the word, and went quickly, decisively on. “Murder—correct. Nothing less than murder of a person. All such techniques . . .” and, as if at a signal (but that was not possible, she told herself), Dr. Herne’s voice returned—calm, easy, confident and sane. A good voice, then, the best of voices, for the journey which was going to begin. For the danger, and the care.

“All such techniques are murder, since all of



them attempt to destroy the person, and to substitute for him only the manageable, the explicable, the apprehendable portion of him. And reducing a person to a system of words is one step back into the acceptance, the continuance of that murder. So: we cannot, simply cannot say that Martin Cann is—whatever selection of noises out of the dark ages you want to unearth. Martin Cann is Martin Cann, and we have no business with anything less than the entire person.”

“Of course,” Miss Moore said quickly (as if he’d frightened her!). “But there must be some way to transmit perceptions—some way to talk about—”

“We’ll talk later,” Dr. Tempar said, and clearly Dr. Herne felt that the young man had been a little too abrupt.

“Yes, we’ll have need of all the terms,” he added, easily, slowly. “Later, when we’ve found out what, in this particular case, the terms mean. But for now we need to go into the experience, and learn to live within it.”

*Go into the experience . . .* a favorite phrase, that, of Miss Annell’s teachers, during the mad-dened world of impressions, statements, hope that made up the last training year. Go into the experience . . . as if, perhaps, it were an oldfashioned city, an oldfashioned subway, apartmenthouse, housingdevelopment. Into the inescapable crowding, the great thick mass that forced you where you would not go, the shrieking and hysterical surround . . . for “the words are only words,” a patient voice said, no 3Ddirection but an inperson instructor studying the little class, drawing them on through willingness to patience, through patience to understanding. (As no

3Direction might ever do.) "The experience alone teaches you, about any patient, what you will have to know. And this requires your own adjustment, and your own strength and coherence, because the experience will change you, if it can."

Her own voice, months before: "Any experience?"

And, calmly: "Any experience will try to change you, yes. Some of them will try to kill you."

### 3

PROGRAM MAY 9

412: DRS. HERNE, TEMPOR. MISS MOORE,  
MISS ANNELL.

413: MARTIN CANN 30395.

FLOTATION TANK WITH FULL GEAR IN  
413 0900 OCTOBER 14.

BLOCKAGE EQUIPMENT WITH CHAIRS (4)  
IN 412 0900 OCTOBER 14.

CANN ATTACHMENTS COMPLETE BY 0915.

ATTACHMENTS HERNE, TEMPOR, MOORE,  
ANNELL COMPLETE BY 0930.

POWERED 412-413 AT 0945.



POWER STABLE TO 1100.

POWER DECREASING TO 1130.

POWER OFF 1130.

Attendants handled leads with care. In Room 413 Martin Cann floated; full sensory blockage was complete, leads were attached, checked, confirmed. Attendants checked all this against the previous check, which had been made by the building's computer and provided, like the scheduling, in the morning's outprint.

In 412 the four others were being brought into the circuit. Attendants did the work without thinking overmuch about it: the circuit wasn't their responsibility. If the hookup went wrong there would be questions asked, yes—and no cluster position, no union protection in the known world would save the job of any fumblefingered pinhead who misconnected a single lead, who let a poor attachment go by in final recheck. But once the job was technically perfect, the results had no interest for technicians. It was like . . .

Why, if you thought about it, it was like hooking up a series of machines. What the machines were supposed to do might not be anything you could understand, or anything you'd want to. Might even be something you thought was stupid, or worse. But none of that was your business. None.

No more was this hookup your business, then. People playing with getting killed (oh, yes, it *did* happen, indeed it did) in order to do something about one person who was anyway no more than a nut. Stupid, maybe: but your job was getting

the leads right and hooking them up right. Nothing more, ever.

Just like with a machine. Or—all right, then, call it five machines. After all—what's the difference?



# THREE

## 1

DR. HERNE looked round at the others. A reasonable group, he told himself—neither very good nor very bad. There was going to be trouble, but . . . well, there was always trouble. Nothing that couldn't be handled, not really.

And was that overconfidence? He paused, looked, judged: he thought not. Dismissed the stray notion (how the mind kept up attacks against itself!) and felt confidence return. A good group, he insisted—a solid group, ready to do its work. A group without casualties . . .

If there were any such thing. And Dr. Herne knew perfectly well that there was not. Never would be, since (as he sometimes thought) every change was a casualty, every shift a loss . . . though if psychiatry had continued its slow hardening into a religion, as had seemed enormously probable, he didn't doubt, a hundred years gone and more, that view would undoubtedly—oh, undoubtedly—be heresy. Change, they said, might be good or bad. And never knew that it was both.

Now, take as an example, mercury (this thought continued, pushing past its useful prime)—there was mercury in the human body, but the body knew how to handle only a certain very

small amount of the stuff. Past that amount—"hat-  
ters' shakes", purpose tremor, confusion, involu-  
tional melancholia (a real five-dollar label for  
you!) and—the simple, final five-letter word—  
death. Change was like mercury, it might be: good  
or bad, depending for the most part on the ability  
to assimilate it, to use it. And most people (most  
doctors, yes, and most nurses) were not spectacu-  
larly good assimilators. You lost whatever you  
changed from; you gained, perhaps, a very little  
of the thing you changed to. Fair trade?

Why (Dr. Herne told himself), we've never  
licked the effects of memorization. Never licked  
the sort of conservatism that goes with long mem-  
ory training, unusual demands made on that most  
conservative of mental processes. And so never  
beaten down, to any significant degree, the need  
not to change, the need to keep memory always  
and forever wholly accurate . . .

Some day.

Some century.

Dr. Herne shook his head. The group, now . . .  
well, the new nurse, Annell, she looked as fright-  
ened as everybody else felt, which might be a  
good sign. And might not—how could anyone,  
finally, tell? Reports and charts and interviews  
were meaningless until you'd been hooked up.  
Until you shoved off . . . Well, Tempar looked as  
grim as ever; Dr. Herne had decided privately  
that the man never smiled. Certainly he'd never  
been caught at it. And Moore . . . ah, well, there  
was always Moore. And what did right-of-ap-  
proval for the group mean when he'd have gained  
nothing by refusing her? Who else, within neces-  
sary age and experience limits, would be any bet-  
ter? Chance once more, he thought tiredly: losing



the cities and the population pressure was fine—for the survivors of the Teen Plagues, at any rate, forty years gone and more—but what was gained? 3direction instead of personal contact, clusters, towns, special-function groupings that did their own work in crippling the ability to work with *any* group selected at random, so that even the lessons of the Teen Plagues, the new insights regarding mind and body function (so far as they could ever be separated), were badly learned, badly applied. Change . . . the assimilation of which made necessary—well, Moore.

Perhaps ten seconds had passed. "Well," he said, firmly enough, as if he had never been away. "Are we ready to go?"

Tempar, instantly: "Ready." An activist, of course—and, hence, perhaps a necessary element. Time, if you called it time, would tell.

Miss Moore said: "Whenever you give the order, Doctor." Her voice was ever soft, gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman but a damned bad sign in a nurse. Too much submission, too much—Dr. Herne, groping for the label, gave the search up in a sigh. The group, after all, had to be, as nearly as possible, unitary; it was, in a very special way, one organism. He sank his dislike of the woman where it belonged, in the subconscious pit he had no need to reach. In the pit labelled It Makes No Difference.

And told himself, then, that the label had to be right. Had to.

Dr. Herne shut his eyes for a second. When had he done so much worrying? Not for ten years—not for twenty. Every new group made him nervous, of course, but, still, this time . . .

There was something odd about . . . well, what?

The group? Or Martin Cann? Or . . .

And that, too, went into the same pit. It Makes No Difference. He opened his eyes and found that he was looking at Annell. The youngster, the first-timer. Her vision had been blocked; only his was left. For the last minute, the last second of control . . .

"Ready," she said, very slowly. He made sure his words sounded as if they were addressed (as they were) to the entire group:

"Are you sure you understand the case?"

But she was already nodding. The others answered; he paid no attention. Annell was nodding, murmuring; she'd be all right.

"No one can really understand, this early," he said. "From the outside . . . but we'll have a chance to improve our knowledge now. Yes." Sure the technicians were watching, the other side of the fade-wall, he made a hand signal. Five seconds passed.

The room went black, went soundless. The world . . .

Changed.

There was a great light, and a voice that filled all space. Saying nothing then that could be understood, or was meant to. For the voice spoke to no one, no one at all. They had not been created. Dr. Herne, Herne, changing, looked round for the others. Seeing, of course . . .

Nothing. Nothing at all.

The world of Martin Cann had become, in some part, very suddenly and terribly clear.

For they had not been created. Not yet. There



had been no more than evening, and morning—the first day. Light, and light alone (his mind went on, his mind irresistibly went on), had thus far been created by the Lord, who . . .

No.

He said the word, he thought, aloud. He did not fully realize at that time that it had been his first word, the first true action shaped in this new world.

No.

## 2

WHY, WHO was this? And what invasion . . .

No: there was no invasion, but an addition. Only some other had come, come to share, come to exist with him, come to be a new number, no longer one but two . . . And there, there, so easily perceived, lay the black trap waiting. He saw it (of course) perfectly—if there had been such a thing as time, real time, he would have seen it in the smallest possible part of time that there was or ever could be—he saw it, knowing that time did not exist, since there could never be time without death, and death was not for him, not for him, never at all for him. This *addition* (he made a sharpness, a bitterness, of the single word) was after all the adversary. About whom, yes, a great deal was known; he had had, for most of his remembrance, reflection, thought, reasoning, he had had learning to do, and indeed he had done

his work. Knowing (as an instance, an important instance it might be) that the adversary was always and everywhere the same, always, always and everywhere recognizable: the adversary, in fact, was all-the-rest . . . and this one *addition* in particular.

This one, yes, in black, this one who stood and stared, who spoke sliding over the face of the waters, over the crown of the deep; not of them, but not to be denied. Once, long ago, he had described himself—even so far had his daring carried him!—though that one, the one who had used the slow thick words, the blackness and the distance, the hot big hands that patted and held, might have been a different aspect: it didn't matter, of course. They were all, these others, the same. They were all one. And here was one more, then, one more in black, one more he knew. Describing himself . . . that had been a slip on his part, but it was necessary that such slips be made, that the adversary be defeated at the last. (He had to be defeated: he had admitted as much, in some other, some forgotten-perhaps aspect.) "The spirit of negation." Exactly—those had been the words. Now the words held the meaning of an actual form. Now the words shivered, fractured, and (new-set round blackness) cohered; the spirit of negation had come upon him, disguised in his black, and had said the word. *No*. And was to be . . . to be, to be . . . to be cast down, cast down from the high places, fallen like a star . . .

(Voice): You have not the power.

Why—a direct challenge? The fool believes himself strong, and matchless does he believe himself, yet the wisdom of the children will hold him accountable, and he shall not escape judg-



ment. Therefore: a task waited for performance. To show him, then, fallen, like a star, a black star . . . Yet how did one see a black star?

And . . . frozen, he wondered whether that thought had been his own, or the other's, the self-described one's. Nothing was absolutely clear; so much he knew. And no clarity could be recovered until he was again himself, again alone, changeless and unreachable, without time and death. For so it was, he knew, so it was—the adversary was the bringer of death and time into the world. The adversary, who was . . .

(Voice): . . . of your council. Of a council which must be held.

He had not imagined.

He had not thought on such strength as this. But the victory, in the end, would be greater; that was all the meaning of his shock. The struggle would be of wide and infinite report, so that henceforth all generations would know his work, all generations which . . . which . . . which . . .

But that thought did not belong to him, nor yet to the adversary. Was there, then, some other still to come? Was there some other, hidden now and yet to be created? The thing was impossible—he had not foreseen it, none had foretold it (or . . . in all his self, were there elements which had yet to turn slowly to the light?). In creation he existed, needing neither time nor change. And the adversary—who had been from the beginning of things, yes, who had called him by name, as: "Martin, Marty, you look here"—his memory failed not in such wise to inform him—the adversary, then, was also to be introduced. So much he knew, and so much was fitting, and was proper. The adversary—his own strength would be given

unto him, and of his own strength he would fail, and be fallen into nothingness. Into darkness and non-existence the adversary would be made to depart, and he would depart. But this other, this new thought and its creator, of which nothing had been foreseen, nothing foretold . . .

Uneasiness passed through him (for he included all). The world shook (light breaking on the water, a thousand signalling points of dying brilliance) and then reformed.

(Voice): A council consists in more than two.

A new thought.

He was familiar enough with more-than-one. But more-than-two was to be stared at, to be considered. Could any novelty occur to him, who held all in his own existence? The thing was impossible. And yet a council . . .

Consists (he told the voice, bothering not with words, nor with the slow hot wrinkled speech like big hands on his head, on his shoulders, speech which weighed him down, which directed him to go where he would not)—consists, then, of as many as you like. Am I a subject of this world, that I should be afraid of number? Am I a unit only, one among many, that you may affright me?

Am I then a body, that I may have parts or passions, that I may have change or death? No passions have I, nor any fear. Whatever number you choose, they shall appear in council; from the waysides and the hedges even shall they come, and none shall be forgotten. And the council (at the last) shall end as it must end, and you shall all depart from me. For so it is to be; and I change not, neither am I moved.

(Had he need for fear? And yet he felt unease. He was patient with it, as with a subject, and,



presently, the feeling departed from him.) The omen was good, then; over the face of the waters he watched, and was content.

And all this, in the brightness, was between first day's morning and the evening which somehow began the second day. Reminding of himself by himself, which he needed not. Which labelled merely the brightness, unchanging and without diminution, owning neither time nor motion.

(Voice): Well? Call your council.

The voice of the adversary, yes—this new voice which he had heard. In whatever form it may be that he appear, so will I know him; it was no matter which form it was had spoken. A good omen—all were subject . . .

Yet the voice had shaped an *order*. As: "Martin, eat." As: "Marty, when I tell you to be home—" The memory, somewhere, of a blow. Face burning, muscles tense. Upstaring at a face; and he rejected then the memory, rejected picture and sound and feeling; there was nothing, there had never been such words, never been the reality of an . . . an *order* . . .

So it was that he moved then, to destroy. To erase. As was his right. As was his power. Water shivered, shone in a changed light. The voice disappeared and, as it was not, so it had never been. And . . . yet . . . still . . .

Yes, as a part of all necessity, the council was existent. As it led to the adversary, fallen like a star, so it was (his thought was sure) his sole necessity. He . . . slowly . . . allowed the voice to return, yes. You shall have your council, yes, and it shall be to you an undoing of the world, and a sorrow unto many. For whose sorrow is like unto my sorrow? And you shall know this, and you

shall drink of the cup, as a parable and as a judgment. For so shall you be destroyed, as is fit, and so shall you be erased; for this is the meaning of the council you demand, and this its true existence. For your own destruction you have challenged all existence.

Therefore let it be, as you have asked. I have foretold its end, for I am not mocked, neither am I given to trickery. I shall remain, but the adversary brings death as he brings change, to himself only as to his host. There is death in the fire which has been prepared from everlasting; and from the council no road leads but to the fire.

Without the slow words, the hot and silly wrinkled words: So be it, he told the voice. Let begin your own destruction.

### 3

"EXPLAIN," Tempar said, his voice harsh, his face sharp-beaked as he rustled wings still white and still unstained. "If the council be an honest one—"

Unbodied, they had no existence save through their own force. Herne thought of others, seeing none; in their time, others would appear. The council would be filled, and filled indeed. "If the council be an honest one, we are many against unity; and the unity must then give way."

Wings rustled, light shivered, broke. "I have no liking for this scheme of his," Tempar said. "Were it my decision, I'd run it through with fire, break



it down into confusion of its own great time, and leave us to the timeless and the final. This world, this creation—what needs it exist?" Wings made a sudden upright stand, then rustled downward in the shifting light. "Let it go: let all be as in the beginning."

Herne smiled, all luminous with age and knowledge. "Yes? And let yourself be uncreated?" In the soft, steady voice that seemed always his alone. "For at the beginning we, too, had no being—we did not own necessity, as he is all owner." Words trailed off. Herne's wings beat idly; his wide eyes stared with quiet calm at Tempar (Moore? Annell? Existence would be of their own will—as council filled, they would take there two places.)

"Don't play with me," Tempar said roughly. "Don't fence. This demands action and demands it quickly. If the presented scheme's to be defeated . . ."

But Herne cast off the vision by sheer power, remaining thought, force, person in the void. "And have you then forgotten all our purpose?" he asked, intangible and present. "So? Have you forgot yourself?"

Tempar remained with beaked face, sharp-edged wings, all abrupt movement, a luminous creation. "I've forgot nothing. The scheme's to be defeated: we are strong in number and in counsel. What else needs remembrance? If the council is to be honest, there is but one result." And stopped, and stared, defiant. Quivering for council, quivering for action, which (Herne knew) would come before his readiness. Herne stared into the future, saw it black.

"And are we all? Is this our majority? And has

he nothing to support himself except himself?" The words remained all quiet. Herne, as he had to be, intangible, thought of the others. Nowhere. And in spite of all his hope, they might remain out of existence, might not have the strength . . .

Foolishness. Pessimism, countering confidence: the mind's a pendulum, for all we try to regulate it. He watched thin Tempar grimace, wait and speak as suddenly as any thunderbolt. "Any created being of any sense—" he said, and Herne broke deliberately in.

"And is there no sense in him?" Herne began quietly. "Is there no sense in the thought and action of him, so that only we have right inherent in us?" And thought, well, play the game, and play the game—for the time being, the only game in town.

For—how long?

Where time had no existence—how measure sheer duration? The deepest trap, perhaps the last, lay there, he knew, but from it could not find an exit. Tempar stood, considering his words by all appearance. "Sense, thought, action, yes . . . yet only we exist, and only we outweigh his vote: is that not so?" And frowned—in unaccustomed pure analysis?

"Well, then—what has he called into existence?" A parade of names, a parade of beings, filled him, raced through his mind and Tempar caught at it.

"All these others against us?" he asked with shock. "The thing is monstrous: on our side's the right, the sense . . ."

"And only there?" Herne asked him gently.

"We must win out," the other said, too quickly. And then suggested, "Can *we* not create?"

He's caught the part, he's caught the role!



Herne thought wildly, blackly. "We can do nothing," he said. "We can only wait."

"And the council begins."

"Even now," Herne said. (The only game in town.) "Even now the others approach." He watched them, winged, so bright, yet no brighter than the insistent image of Herne which he'd dispelled from consciousness: the temptation was always there. And some succumbed—and were none the worse for it, he reminded himself. As long as there existed a head of team . . .

No Moore and no Annell—not yet. Perhaps. . . perhaps not at all, though buzzing hope remained. Hope had to remain. Without it the game was lost.

Tempar asked: "Game?" and Herne began to know how fully he, too, had caught himself. "No game," he said, "but life itself, always and forever. Life itself."

"In our creation," Tempar said impatiently. "None else, as none is needed. They must agree—"

"There is no surety," Herne said, in great sadness for the young man. "There is only hope—hope, and control."

Tempar could make nothing of the word. "Control?" But there was no more talk, nor were they allowed it. The others approached, Michael and Gabriel and all the others; Gabriel it was who spoke.

"We begin."

Herne quoted sadly to himself only: "Fallen, like a star." And found in his own being a great wish for the fall—and determination greater, a thought which (untransmitted: there was no way to transmit it, not in this game, not in this life) set

down for him, like iron walls and floor, the sheer solidity of life:

*I shall not.*

"You have asked a council," a great voice said, and he was there, among the winged ones, there. He had no parts or passions. He was only—control and power, changeless, outside of change. His speech was out of rhythm with the rest (though Herne could find no rhythm, nor the need of one). "A council shall be given you, to your hurt and to your great hurt. You are here. Speak."

And in the fiery anger of his role, all uncontrolled, Tempar rose to begin. To speak in a hopeless cause, to testify to a cause (Herne knew) which had at the last to triumph. For in the end there was no other answer.

Except retreat. Except the role itself. Which was acceptance, silence . . . stillness . . . death.

Moore? And Annell? Herne waited; they were nowhere. They had not arrived, they could not be perceived. Later—ah, God, later he would face them; later the damage would have to be assessed. For them, for Tempar—and, in himself, change. At least change. He had become a bright technician, sparkling with skill and all his craft—was that not change? Not damage?

But . . . later. Later. Now it had begun. To council, and to nothing else, he was directed.

Tempar, alone—and hurtfully alone, Herne saw—began astringently to speak. "We are privy to your plan—this new creation. And we see—who can not?—the lack of any necessity, in truth, within it. All the black travail of many, the creation of this new being—without need; we are opposed." He looked round at the others, and, Herne hoped, felt Herne stir there intangibly. "I



begin," he said then. "And to what form of your opposition?"

Michael arose—ah, perfect! Herne thought—with the same rush, the same surrender to the immediacy of battle. "We oppose. And in our number," he began, "there are more than you can draw, more than can be held to your side of the case. We oppose you; we uphold the new creation. Behold, then: light fills all; this light is good. Further behold—the travail you foresee (for we would be gentle with you, would convince you of this our cause in all gentility), this travail is no manner of necessity. In this new creation, no less than in ours, is freedom." The words went echoing solidly, unbreakable. The look he bent on Tempar was the evidence of battle, and the young, the rash, the active had met (whether or no he perceived the fact) at least an even match in that bright stare.

"Yet the world—" Tempar began, and a voice covered his words, and covered all of them in power:

"We do not speak of the world."

And there, Herne knew, in that voice he existed, in no time, no change—well, we had charts; we had the studies; we ought to have known. In these days of the enlightened Comity, such cases still exist, and still exist . . .

*We ought to have known.* Herne, in a box of words, tasted those words again. Discomfortably . . . were they an epitaph? Or less, or more?

Or . . .

## 4

"WHERE is this?"

The words were not words. Not exactly. There was no sound, no space. There was, or seemed to be, nothing. Nothing at all. She seemed to herself to exist in a *place*, which argued some sort of location. But . . .

"Where is this?"

She could not inquire after her own identity. The fact of place was enough: the fact of place was, truthfully, all that existed, and even that statement was certainly qualified by . . . something. Which she did not understand. Could not understand (which was part of its qualification). Nor could her questions have any answer. For without herself, how could there be anyone else? How could there be any other existence at all?

The answer, despite logic, came to her: "We are outside the world. We have no power." An elder answer. Soft, low.

". . . Power?"

And the answerer responded. Once again. "We must wait. When we are needed, we shall be called upon." A familiar answer enough (but what was "familiar"?). In some other time (if there had really, ever, been such a thing as *time*), in some other place (if there had really, ever, been such a thing as *motion*, which made possible some-



*where-else*) she had heard the words. In a different voice, she thought. A voice that taught . . .

"But if we have no power . . ."

"Then we are not needed." An answer straight out of the book, Miss Annell told herself. Moore had a lot of experience, but she seemed tied to the book, to nothing else, to nothing more . . .

Why, that was . . . memory. She felt herself begin to exist—herself. No one else. Single, subjective, uncertain. But herself. And replied. "This might be a new situation . . . he always says it's a new situation every time. If you go by the old rules—"

"If you go by the rules," the voice of the answerer said (Moore, Miss Annell reminded herself. Moore . . . it was curious how difficult she found it to retain names, to retain identities), "if you go by the rules you'll be safe. You know that."

"Safe." And in her spoken word she heard all undertones. Safety was outside, safety was in some other world with a new, a less stringent, set of demands. It could not (since she had chosen this world, chosen her part in it) be her own safety which concerned her.

Only the safety, instead, of Martin Cann. But: "You'll get over these romantic notions." The undertones had been alive for Moore, then, as well. So the rules of this momentary interior world allowed—among other unknown matters—contact so close, so thorough, that . . .

Fright bathed her in white frost. But there was courage for her; she drew on its somewhere existence. And found the glad terror of a chance of use. Not enough. Yet, to exert her force in the service of . . . the service of . . .

Silence. Peace. Fear. And (Miss Moore) the

answerer's voice again. A tinny reminder, she told herself fiercely, of the recorded speeches in the . . . hospital? . . . lobby. "You'll be of service best by following the rules."

For all Miss Annell knew the voice might be correct.

Her only salvation? Or Cann's?

She had to be sure, though. She had to know. Imagining no possible road to knowledge, in that world: "Later," she said, the word being comfort. "Later."

The (Moore) voice: "There'll be time enough later. The discussions, those endless analyses—oh, yes. But if you do what you can, what you are after all supposed to do—what's difficult about that? What's wrong with it?"

Nothing? But she tried to push through into the world of the others. There was not enough power. Not enough. "How long—"

Moore didn't let her finish. "Standard session. Which is not saying how long it feels like. Seconds, maybe. Years, maybe."

Or . . . a simple negative? A blank wall against which the whole intangible assumption of time rushed, and from which it rebounded . . . Time?

There was no time; in truth there had never been. All of that, as she now very certainly knew, was illusion. Reality was . . . waiting. Suspended, amusing herself, it might be, with fantasies—time, space, duty, danger.

But there could be no danger, no real danger, if all those words, all those presences assumed like clothing, were fantasies.

Idle amusements, no more.

Miss Moore's voice said very sharply, "Watch it." But the voice was far away, the voice had no



importance, the voice did not even truly exist . . .

Had never existed.

And silence, then, silence, suspension, nonexistence, wrapped her round. And kept her safe.

## 5

. . . UPWARD REVISIONS, PROGRAM MAY 9  
ATTACHMENTS HERNE, TEMPORARY, MOORE,  
ANNELL COMPLETED 0937

POWERED CONNECTION 412-413 AT 0952.

POWER STABLE TO 1107.

POWER DECREASING TO 1137.

POWER OFF 1137.

"LEADS OUT?"

"Leads out in 412. Going out in 413."

"Working with that tank—"

A technician shrugged, interrupted. "Take the good with the bad. My instructor said that. I'd rather work with six in a tank than a pair of doctors. Throwing the schedule off. Every time, throwing the schedule off. They don't care—"

And was interrupted himself; a technician said: "Vouchers look the same. What's there to do with an extra seven minutes, anyway?"

"Or an extra seven years. I suppose so; the work's what counts. The work's what keeps us all going."

"A right job. Over, without a mess."

"Clean leads, clean board: that's what counts. Okay on 413?"

"All clear, all clean. Not our job now."

"He's out of circuit. Let them cart him away."

"Until tomorrow."

A technician, nodding. "Same components?"

"Same. Four and one."

Shrug. "No difference to us. And maybe shorter, tomorrow."

"Maybe cleaner, you mean. That's all we have to aim at. Nothing else—the perfect job. That's all."

"Some day."

And another repeated, "Some day." While the orders were checked, corrected, printed, O.K.'d.

Two floors above, a light-system break, waiting for repair. The group divided, some toward the break, others toward a quick and easy lunch. Hands waved. A few unimportant words floated in vibrating air, were slowly, naturally damped, and were gone.

All clear, then. All clear, all clean.

## 6

TIME, ONCE passed and filled, continued to exist; and every second, immensely long in chronons,



was held exactly, after its formation; memory, residing in the cells, threw back reflections of such forms, precise, complete. The mind, as deeply as it might be surely known, selected and distorted from that store. No single blink of all existence surrendered to disorder or nonexistence; no memory available to its possessor was free from distortion. All this had been proposed, had been discussed for some thousands of actual years (and the proposals, the discussions, the theories and agreements, all, all, continued completely to exist, continued in disorder to remain in memory); the truth of that discussion was not, in 2060, known, nor was any method of uncovering that truth foreseen. Not then; not yet.

So Martin Cann, in blackness, whiteness, words and all the meanings he had superimposed, remembered faultily the events which, together with himself, had created Martin Cann. So the reports and records (abstracted, further chosen, further winnowed), a piling-up of Mrs. Doré Cann, of Marie Seaver, of Charlus Uber Robertson, of some few others, served a hospital group, however imperfectly, as surrogate for true memory. And the exact march of real existence was nowhere, in any available portion of any mind then living, known. Not then; not for some hundreds of years yet to pass.

Still, without knowledge except the knowledge of the cells, all times past existed. Look—listen—the calendar skims by so quickly, page after page in books piled crowding into the world. Reverse the process; stop at this page, at this line, at this point . . .

*April 2, 2036:* and a mouth, a palate, throat, lungs begin their short and long acquaintanceship

with air (and ears their joy of sound; eyes open and begin the lifelong lessons, color and form, on April 5); Wert Cann, all unconscious of approaching death, sits at the side of his wife as she holds Martin Cann, new-birthe and, in potential, still nearly sane. Wert hears her say: "He looks like you. He does, he looks exactly like you," and wrinkles his long sad horselike face into a grin. "Hope not," he says lightly, easily. "One of these in the family's enough. Now if he looked like you, Doré—now, then, *there* would be—"

"But he's a boy," Doré Cann said—so young then, so much at ease even in that moment. "A boy can't look like—and, anyhow, I *like* the way you look. I do . . ." She blinked, shut her eyes, opened them again. "Feel a little tired," she said.

"Surely," Wert Cann said, awkwardly, lengthily pushing himself upright and out of the chair, smiling down. "But this one—ah, this one is going to be a wonder, isn't that right?"

". . . Course . . ."

Still standing, smiling: "This one's going to have—"

"Everything," Doré Cann said. "Everything . . ."

Martin Cann heard the sentences that began to determine for him the steady shrinking of possibility; but they were only noises, no more and no less significant than the whirling puzzle of (not himself? Outside himself?) the world. Wert Cann died within the year, victim to a virus then new and quite untraceable, the virus of infectious pericarditis B., which had all unknown begun months before the birth of his son to infiltrate his system. Doré Cann did not remember the talk with any clarity, later.

It went into no record, was unearthed by no



investigation. It was, in October of 2060, perfectly hidden. And . . .

May 14, 2043: and "You be a good boy now, Marty." His mother's voice, he couldn't tell why it made him nervous, and the day was bad enough already. It was an important day, that was what everybody said, Father Callao and the Sisters and everybody. But it didn't make him feel good, not then, it made him feel frightened. A birthday party, that had been O.K., but birthdays were all right, you could *see* them, he was getting bigger and bigger all the time and growing up, so that was a birthday, that was what you could see. And presents. Maybe a party, maybe next year.

Birthdays were O.K. "I'll be fine," he said. "I will be." But no matter what he said *she* was going to go on telling him the same thing. Over and over. He wanted very badly to go somewhere else. But the only other place to go was to Father Callao. To the Sisters and his confirmation. Not like a birthday, not at all. He knew there were going to be some presents but that was afterwards. And a sort of what *she* called a party (and so did the Sisters), except everybody would have to go around being *good* all the time. Which was not a party, not a real one anyhow.

"It's a very important day," she said. Oh, it went on and on and there wasn't any way at all to get out of it. All those saints who suffered and suffered to get to be saints in the first place, they didn't have anything to put up with, not when you compared it with what *she* . . .

And that was wrong, and he knew it. Only he couldn't get rid of the wrong thought. He couldn't close his brains the way he could close his eyes. (He had made the discovery several times before;

it was always new.) After a long time he went away when she let him. And walked across to the school.

Really across. On bare pavement. Not like the places he saw in the 3D tanks where everything was all smoothed over and new and the kind of place real people really liked. No, not like that. Like . . .

His house (and it wasn't even a house, it was an *apartment*, in an *apartmenthouse*) over here.

The school over there.

The church even farther away.

He couldn't think what it was like. The 3D tank never showed such places. It was all very modern and new and the kind of thing real people wanted, in the 3D tank.

Sure, there were other boys, and girls too he supposed, who lived the way he did. Right in his own *apartmenthouse*, right in the school (he did not know then just how unusual his sort of school had become; when people in the 3D tank talked about what they had learned he always imagined they had learned it in his sort of school, not in the privacy of single rooms, nothing but the 3D giving any light at all—that wasn't learning, perhaps it never would be, for Martin)—he knew lots of others who lived the way he did, sure. But it was something the 3Ds never showed, not really. And now he had to go from one place to another and this was an important day . . .

And who was to trace the seeded, growing idea of importance which, in all the time after, he was never to rid himself of? Who was to discover in that strange ceremony, that wildly unusual collective ceremony, the mass of his own importance, of his own meaning? No one: no one then was capa-



ble of such an action, perhaps of such perception. Yet, at that moment (together with what he had already learned, being only-a-boy, being the sole life of any importance for his fierce, his determined, his disappointed mother), importance grew in him like a flower, and would not be cut down.

Communion. And they were all together, of course; that was what the word meant, wasn't it? Years later he could find no fault with that single deductive realization. And (this was the hidden life of the flower, this the shadowed, the forgotten, the unreachable core) since he owned importance, and since the communion, the all-togetherness, was important—why, then, he was all of them. He was everyone, he was everyone (at that second, a truth for that time) he was ever going to know.

If he had been entirely worthless to himself . . . if he had been entirely important to himself . . .

These are other dislocations, other diseases. But Martin existed, wildly, painfully, without knowledge, in the contradiction.

Father Callao, and his redmarked face, glittering eyes trying to be kind. The moment itself and his mother's voice coming back to him—a *very important day*. Yes, but who was to recover it, all the dropped years later?

He tried to keep himself from thinking, "Is that all? Is that all there is to it?" He did not, as he could not, succeed.

Not entirely.

And later . . .

The seminary.

The leavetaking ("This is not your life; it is no shame to recognize that, Martin, no shame at all. You must recognize that, for you, God has a call of another sort.")—and . . . God? Whom Martin knew as he knew himself, and as he knew all other things? God, passed through the prism of that war . . . all that God could become, for that self.

The laboratory, simple work requiring a certain flexibility of judgment, nothing that could be called a career. Nothing of importance, no. At which he met a girl, called beautifully Marie. But she was perhaps more than her name. And there was a procedure to be followed; it was called courtship, it was called marriage.

A procedure everyone else had followed. A job anyone else might have had. The eyes of his mother, the unremembered words and tones.

No.

Not to be borne, no. Not to be born; and so retreat.

And so importance; so a final, a filling single yes.

In a world which contained . . .

No one else. No one else at all.

## 7

THE ROOM seemed at first terribly unreal, but Dr. Tempar was used enough to that; he remembered his first experiences with the connective-therapy



groups (as an observer, locked out, carefully unable to participate; the patient was of course always the first consideration, yes) and tried to translate the terms into this new memory, this new feeling of hollow nonexistence. The room (he began) felt unreal because, in fact, in some sense it was so: because the world of the patient, the otherwise quite unreachable world—connective therapy was not for the easy cases; it was not, as he remembered the old man repeating, for any cases treatable in any other manner—had its own definitions, its own rules, laws, structures. That patient-world was, once within it, perfectly real; and what happened to you there did, in some manner, really happen. The old man had been insistent on one point and one alone, truly: if, by some mischance, miscalculation, some foolhardy attempt at unprepared attack, you died in that world—why, then, you were really dead. There were supposed to be cases . . .

Not that Tempar believed them. They were common coinage enough among the students; they seemed nothing more. He'd never seen a reliable report . . . but nevertheless it gave you (the old man said, the old man kept saying) something to think about . . .

Well. Wandering. Confabulating. All of which was also normal, also to be expected. But there was something different this time, something new . . .

"Catatonia," Dr. Herne said. Tempar watched Miss Moore move her head to face the head of the team. And where had she been when the—the council, he thought, groping for the feeling of that event—when the council had begun? Not that he'd missed her; "unsympathetic" was the

kindest term he could find for her. Despite her newness, Miss Annell was preferable—anybody would have been, in fact, but there was a fresh approach in all that the new one did, all that she saw. And she, too, was turning flowerlike to look at Dr. Herne, to gaze into the brightness of that sun. Would I were steadfast as thou art . . . well, a psychiatrist was the only sort of M. D. who did any reading in the arts; the difference might even serve for a definition. Machines or no, rules or no, the work was an art, and not, like physical medicine, a shrinking (if terribly respectable) science.

And Tempar told himself wryly enough that steadfastness would come, with the years and with the slowing down of reflex, the lessening of motive, the greying of all the great activities of life . . . Miss Annell, Miss Moore, all the others to come, would look at him in just that same way, as soon as he'd managed to rust himself useless.

Unkind? Perhaps—at any rate, he did his penance by listening to Herne. Who had the experience, after all, and might perhaps be trusted to interpret.

"There is no way to predict it, no way to describe it, except that it is some expression of a power drive. I have no idea what you nurses experienced, but the drive was perfectly clear to—"

Miss Annell burst out: "Power drive?" Well, Tempar thought, perhaps it wasn't covered in the nursing courses. Perhaps there was an excuse for her. (And became suddenly, briefly amused at his attempts to find one.) "It seems to me that catatonia represents a retreat—"

"Yes," Dr. Herne said. That solid, slow and understanding voice. "But a retreat from what? There have been a great many theories—retreat to



the womb, in the act of becoming an immovable imitation foetus; a simple slowing-up of process, so that any act of attention takes more time than the event to which attention is to be paid. A great many theories . . ." And he seemed to be mourning their loss, as if they'd been human beings—as if they'd had a substantive value of their own. Well, Tempar found himself thinking. An old man. A man rapt with memory, no more. "But the retreat is always a retreat into power . . . and a retreat from power, as well." He paused. "I'm afraid I'm not making a great deal of sense."

"I'm afraid I don't understand . . ." Miss Annell said. Timidly, bless her heart: a fine young girl, a good nurse. (And once again Tempar discovered that he amused himself; the feeling was neither new nor overfamiliar, but it passed with surprising speed.)

Dr. Herne broke in, appearing to do so politely. A talent, a distinct talent. "The power retreated from belongs to others, of course," he said. "To some childhood figure or figures, to a complex of societal figures, to—in some cases, and I believe we can now say with definiteness that this is one—the entire outside world. The imposition of any demand from such a complex is felt to be unbearable, and the patient retreats. It's possible, I think, to go that far in terms of purely theoretical formulation . . ." And he let the words die away, facing the others as if he waited for their correction. A good trick, a valuable pose to learn. Tempar nearly smiled: but it would never do to give away the show.

"I understand," Miss Annell said at last. "But the retreat from power—from these other people—" She gestured with one hand, sketching a brief

hyperbola in the air. "Can't that be a retreat to the womb, to the perfect protective environment?" (What was strange about her voice? What was in her eyes that had not been there before the session? And where had she been, what done, while the session played out its course?)

"There must be a conviction of power equal to any outside force," Dr. Herne said. "If an early figure in the patient's life, or a ill-defined segment of the entire outside world—or even the world itself—is felt as the threat, then the womb serves nothing; a foetus is protected only at the cost of its being made immediately available for destruction. It has no options, you see, or is felt to have none."

"And yet there are studies which appear to show—" Tempar began, feeling the eyes turn to him; yes, there was something heady about power. But did a man have to give up all energy to gain it?

Perhaps not, he told himself, perhaps not . . .

"Yes, yes," Dr. Herne said impatiently. "The psychology of the foetus, cellular psychology—subjects not truly relevant to this discussion. We don't want to go on all night."

The eyes had left him. "Of course not," Tempar said. Acknowledgement—at present, old man, the power is yours. But a day will come . . .

"In any case, the foetus is not thought of as having the level of defense required," Dr. Herne said. "Instead, in catatonia—such words! such jargon!—in catatonia one retreats into a position of great power."

"But I don't see? . . . the immovability, the lack of response . . ." Miss Annell once more. Moore shot her a glance of unconcealed dislike.



Tempar nodded: well, jealousy was only to be expected.

"Time does not exist for this patient," Dr. Herne said. "Space does not exist. No change, no motion is possible—within his world."

"So he thinks of himself—"

"As God," Dr. Herne said. "Brooding upon the face of the waters. God before creation; God, all-powerful in the void."

There was a terrible silence. Tempted to break it, Tempar opened his mouth, but Miss Annell spoke first, her voice troubled. "You mean, then, that all such cases—"

"No." The word had, for Tempar, echoes of battle; he stirred to them, shifted uneasily in his seat, and caught a glance from Herne. Amusement was in that glance. But (he said silently) my day will come, old man . . . my day will come. Wait and see, wait and give over to me the power when you can no longer sustain yourself within its robes . . .

And how deeply was that part of the patient's world? Every experience was the same: you were a photograph, slowly becoming clear through repeated bathings in the developer of the patient's mind, the patient's world. Yet the attitude was part of Tempar, too, and as part of himself he accepted it; Martin Cann had not created it, but only brought it out. In spite of Martin Cann, in spite of Dr. Herne, it would remain. And . . .

"No," Dr. Herne said again. "All such cases, I think, must retreat into a form of power. This form is perhaps the most thorough of all such . . . but it is not necessary. Any conception of the human mind is possible; there is no way to predict where there is no communication." A text

straight out of the schools, Tempar thought. But, perhaps—just perhaps—true for all of that.

"I see," Miss Annell said. There was a long pause, and something moved behind her eyes. Tempar watched, studied, tried to put a name to the flicker that came and went, came once again and stayed.

There were always the unstable . . .

Yes, and no school could weed them out. No training showed you which were which. Only the actualities themselves, only the trip into a new world and the need of action there, made vivid every weak point. Only the sessions caused their casualties . . .

Being dead was not, perhaps, so bad after all (or was that, too, an echo from Cann's world?). But being mad, entering such a world and being, suddenly, unpredictably, unable to leave . . .

Well. There had been some cures, Tempar had heard. Now and again, someone was able to . . .

And, very suddenly, he smiled. How suspicious we all are—how suspicious we must always be. Analyzing everything, taking every look, every word, every action apart. As if she had read his mind Miss Annell looked round at him and, seeing his smile, matched it with a shy brilliance of her own.

And never mind why I'm attracted to slim blondes, Tempar told himself cheerfully. He heard Dr. Herne begin again: "We shall have to match events, of course. What each of us has experienced . . ."

"All that will go into the reports," Tempar said. "This afternoon."

Dr. Herne nodded. "Talk—conversation is the best way of all. But, to avoid coloration,



predisposition . . . individual reports are undoubtedly superior. The best means we have yet found." Sounding as if he believed something better lay before them, unseen, awaiting some newer insight, some fuller vision. Tempar rose, and the nurses followed; Dr. Herne looked at them all regretfully.

"Tomorrow," he said.

"Of course," Tempar said, walking across to meet Miss Annell at the door of 412. "Tomorrow." But thinking, instead, about the next few hours . . .

## 8

"WELL, THEN," she said, across a refectory table in the basement, "why did I agree to come with you?"

Tempar put down his coffee cup (the ancient plastic bulbs, out of fashion twenty years and, therefore, inevitable in hospital service) and smiled. "It's an interesting way to put it. Come with me—for coffee, here in the hospital?"

"I thought you were off-duty," she said.

"My mind goes on working . . ." The smile continued. She gave it back to him—lighting the table.

"I doubt if there's anything to be deduced," she said. "Not from one phrase. You'd have to know background, etiology . . ." She shrugged helplessly. "There's just too much, Dr. Tempar."

"Just Tempar," he said. "Drop the titles. We're off-duty now—at any rate, as far off duty as we can get."

"Tempar?" she said. "Don't you have a first name?" He dropped the smile, gave her a grimace instead, a twist of disapproval that was only half an exaggeration.

"Of course I do," he said. "Everybody has a first name. If you really want to know . . ."

"Of course," she said.

"I'm Churchill Tempar," he told her. "My parents never did get used to Planetary Consolidation, and hunted back through the ancestry for some sort of connection. Wished the name on me, and I spent a fascinating childhood because of it." He wiped the grimace off, shrugged, took a sip of cooling coffee. "I dropped the name, myself, ten years ago. Beginnings of internship—seemed like an appropriate time for it."

"Churchill . . ." She held the name for a second. "But Consolidation was a necessity—if we were going to get to the other planets at all. Without Consolidation, the Comity would be so much dead weight . . . too many ways to pull the same political ship."

"They knew that," he said. "My father used to say that he had to live under Consolidation, but that nobody was going to make him like it. The old divisions—nations, states, all of that—were alive for him, in a way they'll never be alive again." He paused. "Don't *you* have a first name? Or is your sad story the same as—"

"No sad story," she said. "Just professional habit—and you *can* develop habits in that short a time, you know. Lenore Annell, if you must know—not that I've especially liked the name."



Baiting her again, he began: "So you think of changing it—"

"Not oftener than once a week, Doctor," she said. "And I never satisfy myself with the same change twice." Over the plastic bulb of coffee, her eyes looked at him. There was humor in that glance, and something else, something much more disturbing . . .

Which, he told himself firmly, he was imagining. "Like my grandmother," he said. "Emancipated woman—oh, all that about an equal sex life, a freedom from false standards, a lack of guilt . . ."

"You've had a fascinating family life," she said.

He shook his head. "No, your own grandfolks must have been the same, or very nearly. The tail-end of the Bunny Era, a professor of mine used to call it."

"Maybe mine got over the disease a little faster," she said. "Out on the plains, I don't think the Bunny Era ever made real progress. Of course, there were a few—" She stopped. "And I'm no hark-back to seventy years ago either, Doctor."

"Tempar."

"That's for later," she said firmly. "If ever. No, my people were simple; not even a university entry, as far back as we can go, until my father. And then, when I took up nursing . . ."

The room buzzed with odd fragments of talk, shook with the motions of staff here, there, in, out. "Well, we've a common interest," he said. "Genealogy. Of course, only the bad results were wished on me, but there are some fascinating things to be dug out, if you want to spend the time."

But she only shrugged, as distant as anyone else

in the refectory. "I'm not sure I do," she said. "I've seen enough of it—an interest only in the past, an interest that blocks out the present, blocks out . . ." She hesitated. "Blocks out any reality, I mean." And there was stress on the noun, so that he gave her a sudden bright glance.

"You've given your report?"

"Of course," she said. "I told you."

"And I've given mine," he said, "so there's no danger."

"Danger?"

He took a deep breath. "Tell me where you were," he said.

"But I'm not . . . nobody's supposed to . . ."

"It's important," he said.

She gave him a tiny, a faraway mocking smile. "It can't be that important," she said.

And, from where she was, from the beliefs which (undoubtedly, Tempar thought—oh, undoubtedly, may God damn the inventors of the system!) she had taken in during the session, she was quite right. It wasn't that important—if nothing you did was real, if only your own mind . . .

Unfortunately, he told himself with blinding savagery, Martin Cann was real. And . . .

And so was Lenore Annell. The thought, occurring to him in second place, showed him once more how much he had left behind when he entered internship. Like a priesthood, he'd thought, a priesthood without vows, without recognition . . . but we're not human beings any more. We're . . . doctors. Doctors first, and men and women afterward.

"Lenore . . ." he began at last.

"Such boldness!" she said, mocking him, retreating. "Myl"



"Lenore, I've got to know. It's vital to you . . . to any further sessions . . ."

"Then it will be in the report, won't it?" she said. But of course it would not, except by deduction. Except by blind mischance, the emphasis on one word, the watching eye . . .

For she would have given the report as she had done, since the awakening, everything else—according to habit, according to whim. To Lenore Annell, it wasn't important enough to make any difference; nothing was.

For, simply, it wasn't real.

## 9

THE HOUSE was small, and dark—a relic of God-knows-when, Marie had always thought, but she'd had the sense not to mention her view of the place. Mrs. Doré Cann lived there, and, apparently, liked it. Certainly she had the money to move somewhere else if she wanted to move. And Marie was not about to do anything, anything at all, to irritate Mrs. Doré Cann. Except, of course, for a single, necessary, inclusive act—which might not now, she told herself, her mind becoming slowly used to the terror and the loss, which might not now take place at all.

"I'm grateful for your visits, dear," Mrs. Cann said. "It's become very lonely here, since Martin—since Martin left."

"I'm sure you must have friends," Marie said.

Did the woman have to turn everything into a fencing-match? (But that, Dr. Tempar might have told her—if she knew Dr. Tempar as any more than a name on the hospital staff—was a characteristic of the Middle Generation, caught between the Bunny Era and present-day, more personal, less insistently “practical” or “rapid” standards. Confusion, perhaps, a sense of unfitness in any social world at all—and, so, attack. Dr. Tempar would have warned her that such a view was bound to be very much oversimplified, and perhaps she would have listened to the words, and done what Dr. Tempar had never done with them; perhaps she would have believed them.) “I’m sure there must be a good many people living near here—”

“Oh, people,” Mrs. Cann said, big and blocky, settling herself into a wildly inappropriate butterfly chair that was very nearly as old, Marie thought, as the house itself. The terrible compromise of the ancient apartment-buildings—enough privacy to create loneliness and enough lack of it to create threat. But Mrs. Cann, for reasons Marie couldn’t begin to imagine, liked the old horror-being, Marie supposed, something of an old horror herself. “*People*,” the fat woman went on. “They’re all so busy with their own concerns—they don’t *care*, dear. They simply don’t care. Haven’t you found it to be that way?” She sighed heavily and fumbled for a cigarette in the little box on her tabouret. Finding one at last, she put the great pink end to her mouth, drew in breath, and let it out in a choking cloud of scented smoke. “Oh, dear, when you mention friends . . . well, there simply is no one except for you.” Her fingers held the cigarette, removed it from her mouth, de-



scribed a perfumed pattern in the air with its glowing tip.

"And yet—there must be someone, to share your interests. To talk to, to visit with . . ." Marie was trying, once again, to push the conversation in any direction other than the one Mrs. Cann kept choosing. She had, expectably, very little success.

"My interests?" Mrs. Cann sighed through a new smoke-screen. "My dear, *Martin* shared my interests. The people here—they're very much like people anywhere. The latest dress, the latest show, the latest set of catchwords; why, what ideas they have come out of the stat sheets, or off the 3D." Sadly, slowly, she shook her massive head. The blue-grey coiffure, tight-set curls, shook slightly, itself, with the motion. "What interests of mine can they share?" she asked. "Now, Martin was bright—he had interests, he had ideas of his own . . ."

"Yes, I know," Marie said, unable to resist the words. Mrs. Cann looked at her sharply.

"Of course you do, dear," she said. "Of course you do. And you know, I'm sure, how lonely one can become, with Martin gone . . ." The words were a little too sweetly spoken, a little too sympathetic. Well, Marie told herself, I deserved that; I ought to know better than to give in to that sort of temptation.

"He'll be back," she said at last. "I'm sure of that. The doctors are doing everything they can, and—"

"Doctors!" Mrs. Cann was grandly scornful. "I'm sure they do fine work—with ordinary cases. But someone like Martin, with his fine mind—why, someone of that sort might be quite, quite

beyond their reach. After all, he's not an ordinary case."

"They've said as much, at the hospital," Marie told the woman. "There are special treatments . . ."

"I'm glad," Mrs. Cann said, spacing her words evenly, "you're so hopeful. But of course you're young, my dear, and the young are always full of hope. Even Martin, who saw further than the rest of us—"

"It's nearly time, isn't it?" Marie broke in. Really, she couldn't stand much more of the grand, idiotic talk—Martin, the sensitive, Martin, the bright, the far-seeing . . . Martin, who'd been put into a hospital by his mother. With her crazy insistence on brilliance, her fanatic religiosity, all her treatment of her son—until there was no other place for Martin to go. She'd hoped to prepare a place for him, once. She hoped still, and kept up a visiting-pattern with Mrs. Cann on that account.

But it had been a long time, and there were no guarantees. The young are hopeful, Mrs. Cann, but the young, too, are capable of a certain amount of vision. The young, too, can see how Martin was damaged, and how deeply the damage had struck . . .

The words, the ideas, flashed through her with familiar heat, leaving no trace on her outward appearance. Mrs. Cann said: "I suppose it is, my dear—nearly time. So good of you to come with me, to visit Martin . . ."

"Of course I'd want to," Marie said. If the talk were to be a fencing-match, she'd sustain her end of it; it was the least she could do for herself, or for Martin.

"Oh, of course," Mrs. Cann said sweetly. An-



other cloud of scented smoke rose. She stubbed the cigarette out, fished for another, and stood up heavily, holding the pink and white tube in two fingers. "And one never knows, dear." She stalked to the apartment door and put her fingers delicately, for a second, on the old-fashioned turning-knob. "This time, he may even recognize us," she said.

Marie followed her into the corridor. Very well, she was thinking: very well. Point and set, Mrs. Cann.

But not game, Mrs. Cann. Not yet, Mrs. Cann.

Never, Mrs. Cann. For when Martin is himself again . . .

She stopped, realizing all at once how uncertain a prospect that was—and, seeing the force of that old horror, his mother—how terrifying.

"Come on, my dear," Mrs. Cann said, stepping into the old box of an elevator. "We don't want to be late."

"No," Marie said, "we don't." But (she thought) am I? Am I late—too late, now, for Martin? Can he only shuttle between the hospital and . . . and his *home*?

That dark, small place which was not his, which could never be his . . . that place where his mother, smoke-enclosed, scented and powerful, waited and waited . . .

The elevator doors shut noisily. The box swayed as it was lowered to the ground floor. Marie, as always, shut her eyes. But behind them, this time, was a sort of knowledge. Martin would never come to her, never come back to himself. For Martin, there would be only the existence his mother doled out to him, only the life of a piece of himself. And Mrs. Cann would take that piece;

there would be none left over, Marie thought, for her.

"Let's go," Mrs. Cann said with satisfaction. "We'll be in plenty of time, I'm sure. And, this time, we may get a . . . a pleasant surprise."

Marie, caught up in her vision, went out into the open street with Martin's mother, and said, painfully, hopefully, nothing at all.

## 10

VISITING HOURS, Miss Moore told herself, were always the worst. The one thing the books never mentioned—and perhaps, after all, they did, in one sidelong manner or another; the books covered everything for you, if you had wit enough to see it—was that it was easy to deal with psychiatric patients, extremely easy—once you'd tried to deal with their visitors. There were the "old pals" with their smuggled little gifts, sometimes including heroin self-stickers, greygrass pods, amphetamine sulfate, and anything else you might think of—usually the addicts that had got the patient into a hospital room in the first place. Those could be spotted, once you'd had some experience, at twenty paces; searching them was another matter. How doggedly, how righteously, they protested their innocence; how predictably they quoted the Comity search-and-seizure laws (and how boringly you had to tell them that, on the basis of "immediate medical needs" and on the grounds of



a hospital, the quoted sections didn't apply); how surprised and determined they became when the material turned up, an ampoule in a trouser-cuff, a self-sticker screwed inside the shell of a lifetime pen, a tiny supply of pods sewn into the lining of a suit or a dress . . .

And yet those were, comparatively, the simple cases—you might say, Miss Moore thought wryly, the sane ones. There were too many of the others, too many relatives who'd driven the patient into his illness in the first place (though that was too simple: as the books said, the most any exterior person or circumstance could do, except in cases of severe brain injury, was to advance the force of an already predisposed mind), and who seemed a good deal less sane than the patient—the mourners and the wailing-walls, the bright, cheerful chatterers who “wanted to keep his spirits up” and made any real contact between themselves and the patient nearly impossible; the slow-witted and the slow-bodied, who could never get the rules straight nor ever learn to follow them . . . oh, the list was as long as any list of hospital patients. And Miss Moore knew them all, and hated each and every one of them.

On fourth floor duty, she was as nearly content as she could be with any assignment that required her to handle the visitors. Whatever had been done to them, the patients were, for the most part, beyond any further assault. The visitors could come and go as they pleased, take any attitude they wished; the patients would not be truly reached. She remembered one patient, early in her career, who had flashes of what seemed perfectly sensible talk. A young woman, she'd been visited by her mother and father, who kept telling

her with a kind of maniacal energy that she had to get well, that everyone was counting on her to "snap out of this," whatever that was supposed to mean, that her two children were always asking after her—in general, making every possible mistake. And the woman had responded quite normally, quite naturally, it seemed, agreeing with her parents, attempting (with the wreck of her mind and her emotions to prevent her, in the name of God!) to shoulder once again the responsibilities they kept forcing on her . . . Miss Moore, young and inexperienced, hadn't understood the book, then, and she'd waited for a full collapse to occur soon after the idiotic parents had gone. But there had been no collapse, and, pricked on by insistent curiosity, Miss Moore had, in the course of her duties an hour or so later, wandered as if by chance into the girl's room, to "straighten up a few things," as she said. She made great play with a table and a visitor's chair, getting them back into position, aligning them, and at last she'd asked: "How did you enjoy your visit this afternoon?"

The girl had looked up at her with a perfectly serene, entirely blank expression on her tired face. "Visit?" she'd said.

And, knowing she shouldn't press matters any further, Miss Moore found herself unable to stop. "Yes," she said. "Your parents, when they were here . . ."

"Oh," the girl said, without any change of expression whatever. "The poor things. I suppose they really do think they're my parents, don't they? But I didn't expect you to be taken in."

Miss Moore blinked and managed a good, open-ended: "Well . . ."



"I mean, you're someone with professional training," the girl had gone on calmly. "You're supposed to be able to recognize delusions when you see them. And, after all, how could they be my parents? I don't have any parents—not on earth, anyhow."

"Oh," Miss Moore said. "The other planets . . ." For there'd been settled colonies on Mars and Venus even then; Miss Moore wasn't all that old. But the girl shrugged off the suggestion.

"You don't understand," she said. "How on earth—if you'll excuse the pun—how on earth could Eve have parents?"

After that, Miss Moore had stopped worrying quite so bitterly about her charges, and spent her time merely, sadly, trying to keep the visitors from tangling each other up beyond recall. (The girl, she remembered, had actually been released, a year or so later, after a long course of hypnopsychiatric therapy—and immediately moved to another continent. Miss Moore had no idea what had happened to the parents. Perhaps, she thought with all the joy of justice, they'd ended up in the fourth floor wards themselves. But probably they had not. The trouble was that the uncertainties and the imbalances of the parents were projected, in effect, onto the children, so that the parents escaped the most serious consequences of their actions—while leaving an unmerited, and perfectly inescapable, gift for the next generation.)

Well, time had passed, and Miss Moore was no longer young—no longer attractive, she supposed, as if that mattered. A few of the younger staff had taken to calling her The Bull, and the nickname, she told herself with what she tried to make a

calm, clear acceptance, was probably accurate—physically, at any rate. And the girl had long ago gone out, recovered (except for the final, uncheckable six per cent of returnees: you never knew for certain, but the odds were as good as they could be made, and getting better every year), forgotten the staff at the hospital, forgotten the young Miss Moore . . . and did anyone remember that slim, erect figure, that soldierly carriage, that work which made up in speed what it lacked in sheer experience and efficiency?

No one remembered, she told herself. She was alone, alone in the void, and there was no one to come to her aid . . .

*Stop that.*

There were dangers (she told herself once more, fiercely—as she told herself over and over during every connective-therapy case) in every relaxation into the world of the patient. Your only armor was the world you brought along—the books, the knowledge, the experience that told you this was only one more fantasy world, of no real existence, of no real importance. And even so, each fantasy crept into you somehow, changed you, left you with odd echoes of thought and attitude . . .

The void . . .

Miss Moore thought it an odd time for such reflections to come up, until she noticed that Martin's mother and his—fiancée, perhaps, though no one had ever made a positive statement on the subject—at any rate, the two women who were there every visiting-day, as far as Miss Moore knew, had left the free-travel elevator along with a crowd of other visitors and were headed her way.



"I'm glad to see you, Mrs. Cann," she said as they came to the barrier and to her desk behind it. "Miss Seaver."

A fair-sized pile-up was collecting behind the two women, and pushing in from either side. But Mrs. Cann leaned forward regardless of anyone else—of course, Miss Moore told herself: she would—and, filling the air with the obscene odor of those bulbous cigarettes of hers, asked, bright-eyed: "Is he . . . is he . . ."

"Any better?" Miss Moore said, attempting to hurry matters. "Well, he had his first session this morning. He's resting now, but there's no reason why he shouldn't have visitors."

"Do you . . . do you . . ." The woman said everything twice. Her companion—mousy and much too shy, Miss Moore thought—had at least the grace to look uncomfortable at all this waste of time.

"Think he'll recognize you?" Miss Moore finished. "I couldn't say, Mrs. Cann. I really couldn't say."

Miss Seaver had only one question, and she asked it as the women, showing their green passes, were allowed through the barrier. The guard clicked it shut again, letting the invisible curtain of force screen off the others. "Who's with him this afternoon?"

"Miss Gregori," Miss Moore said. "She's new to you, I think, but she's perfectly competent." A trainee, really, but why let the visitors know that? It would only give them one more thing to worry about, one more thing to pester staff with. And it didn't matter; Martin Cann was not likely to do anything at all—and, unless his reaction to a single session had been spectacular, there was nothing

on earth his visitors could do to him, short of attacking him with a knife or some such. Not that Miss Moore would put it past them, but for anything of that sort even a greenie like Gregori was well-enough prepared.

Or ought to be. "Go right on down to his room," Miss Moore said, and added—well, it cost her nothing, and might cheer the visitors—"I'm sure he's expecting you."

And turned back to the next in line, and the next, and all the ones after that.

Running a hospital ward, Miss Moore sometimes thought, would be the easiest job in the world if all you had to deal with were doctors, nurses, and patients.

## 11

PROGRAM MAY 12.

412: DRS. HERNE, TEMPOR. MISS MOORE,  
MISS ANNELL.

413: MARTIN CANN 30395.

PROGRAM DUPLICATES PROGRAM FOR  
THESE ROOMS MAY 11.

NO DEPARTURES FROM PROGRAM ARE  
CONSIDERED.

NO DEPARTURES FROM PROGRAM WILL  
BE ALLOWED.



"Nice of them," a technician said.

"Oh, they wouldn't let us go off on our own hook. Might damage something."

"Might, indeed. Power drain, required leads . . ."

A technician snorted. "You've got a doctor's mind," he said bitterly. "Always thinking of the other side."

"Always thinking of the patients."

"And the staff. Look, that's not our job . . ."

"I know it," the first technician said. "All the same, there's the mechanics of the system to be considered."

"True enough."

Pressing his advantage, "Suppose some new boy came on and decided to go off on his own?"

"There's no chance . . ."

"There's not much of a chance. But there is a chance. Do you know how much equipment he could ruin?"

"Give us all extra work, I suppose. With overtime."

"Even so . . ."

"Oh, all right," a technician said. "Looking at it from the equipment point of view . . ."

"What other point of view is there?"

"Ask a doctor. 'You're dealing with human beings here . . .'"

Laughter—not very much. It was an old joke, and a stale one. The technicians got to work on the tank leads, and moved on into 412 for the staff leads. The board was checked out.

"Clear?"

"Clear and clean. Whenever we get the word."

A wait.

"Late again."

"Only a minute, so far."

"Watch and see. Half an hour's nothing to them, some days."

"Maybe . . ."

"There's the signal. Ninety-five seconds late."

"Connection ready."

"Connection made."

"Power input steady."

"Power input clocked."

The technicians settled back, quietly, to watch the dials. Nothing was going to go wrong, but you had to watch the dials. They were almost as unpredictable as . . . as those "human beings" the doctors kept talking about.

Almost. A clock displayed silent time.

One hundred five minutes to power-off.

One hundred four.

One hundred three.

## 12

"WHERE ARE the others?" Tempar snapped, with powerful impatience. "We are not complete in council. No discussion can take place—"

"You are afraid, brother?" the Archangel Michael said quietly, leaning toward him, wings quivering slightly, meeting each other far over his head. "Is it fear that brings you to this desperation?"

"Fear?" Tempar's voice matched his stance: heavy, solid, ready to do battle. "I've no fear, and



you know as much. But we must have a full council. These are the requirements: that the council be full, that it discuss fully the matter before it, that it come to some conclusion, and that it do all this as rapidly as possible."

"And, to gain the first of these rules," Gabriel said with a certain lightness of tone, "you'll sacrifice the last?"

"As quickly as possible," Tempar said. "But there is no possibility where a full council has not met." He looked round at the others. Herne sat immovable—an old conservative, and Tempar knew he could count on that vote. Gabriel sat like a conservative as well, as befit his role: but Michael was as eager as Tempar himself for action, for the only real form of decision. Talk solved nothing.

"There are others?" Michael asked, mocking, never ceasing to try for an advantage. But Tempar considered himself a match for this brother of his, and did no more than nod, forcing someone else to ask the question.

Not surprisingly, it was Gabriel who took up the fallen attack. "Which others, my brother?" his light voice asked. "For we know of those whom you shall not wish to see . . . and, if you call for full council, they, too, must be admitted."

Herne snapped, suddenly and shockingly: "We withdraw the call." But Tempar turned on him in black rage.

"We make the call," he said. "Any member of the council may make such a call: I have done so. If there is opposition—"

"Perhaps," Michael said, "your brother has sense on his side."

"And perhaps not," Tempar replied angrily. Herne was shaking his head.

"You cannot do this," the old conservative said. "You must not let yourself be trapped here, trapped by this scheme. Of course there will be others . . ."

"Let there be a thousand," Tempar broke in without hesitation. "Let there be a myriad, as the brothers about the Throne. Yet shall they see the right in our cause; yet shall they side with us."

"But they cannot," Herne said, "since—"

"Cannot?" Tempar made the word a foul object. "Do you surrender so easily, my brother? Or is it that these others have won you over to their perverted view—the view that such needless creation is, somehow, needful, and somehow correct. When we know better, when we must know better—have they persuaded you so quickly, my brother? Between a word and a word?"

"They have not," Herne said heavily and slowly. "But you must see that this is no method of victory for us . . ."

"You, who head our force," Tempar said. "You, who have been light-bringer from the beginnings of all time . . . and all we hear from you, now that the council's an accomplished fact, is this cat-  
aract of caution, these words of timid advice! Elder brother, light-bringer, have you nothing else for us? Or is it that you step down from your place, and leave it vacant?"

Michael and Gabriel started at the statement, but speech came from none of the four; instead, a voice spoke its measured tones into the place of council, and was heard by all as it spoke.

"The place of this elder brother has not been surrendered, not shall it be. I foresee, moreover,



that his opposition shall continue, nor shall it be abated. Is this correct? I ask you, who are most concerned, and await, for the benefit of these your brothers and for the benefit of the council entire, your reply."

Still more slowly, still more heavily, Herne spoke. "It is true. I have not surrendered my place: I have not abated my opposition. Nor shall I do either; this I, too, can foresee."

"You have great gifts," the voice said, without mockery or haste. "But the request of your brother cannot be denied, by my own laws. This request calls for a full council. I therefore allow it to convene, without delay of time or space—since, as I understand your mind, it is the creation of time and space that forces your objection?"

"Yes," Tempar said defiantly. "It is this unnecessary addition to the state of all existence, this deliquescent and uncertain structure—"

But Herne's slow voice overrode him there. "It is not the basis of our objection," he said, "but a part only. And that not the most important part. Nevertheless, let it stand; and, as you require it, let the council convene."

"Require?" Michael said, mocking. "It appears to me that your brother it was, and ours, who required it; merely, assent was given to this call upon our laws. Can you not appear before us with the truth which we have ourselves witnessed? For this is a shrinking unknown to any of our kind, that the truth should be forgotten, or unspoken; true it may be of the new creation purposed, for which we are called to full discussion—but, for us, my elder brother, the shrinkage bodes an ill we have not known, and looks toward an evil we have never seen."

"And yet I spoke the truth," Herne said—with more agility, Tempar thought, than he would have given the old fox credit for. Truly there was something to say for experience—rightly commanded, rightly used. But with experience came unwillingness to battle, unwillingness to put your statements to a final test . . . Tempar shrugged, wings rustling. One aspect was balanced by the other—experience by fire, and readiness by knowledge. "The law is a requirement not ours, but his; if it be called upon, then what is called on is his own requirement."

Michael stared, threw back his head and laughed in great peals like the uncreated thunder. Gabriel, more passive, raised a wingtip, motioned with it as a gesture of appreciation, and nodded. There was no time to do more. Behind those two came the Host, all winged and clear-eyed, ranged by rank on rank, filling the place of council which was made to fit them, and to fit no more. So many . . .

Tempar himself felt some first stirring of uncertainty: he had not remembered that there were so many, or so determined. Of how many there could it be said: his own decision may be altered by our act? Tempar began to reckon, but his sums gave him no pleasure, nor any certainty.

And yet . . . behind them, also, behind the old conservative and fiery Tempar, there ranged a Host—some countable number, small, tense. Two he knew, and (without knowing why) rejoiced to see: Annell and Moore, the former of the youngest band, the latter with experience and weight to add to their discussion.

"The council is complete," the voice said evenly. "Myself shall take no part beyond advice,



as is most fit; yet shall I watch and wait for your conclusion. I have said that this creation, to my heart, is our high-valued flower, and our fruit: so much you know. Now, let the council work."

And the place of that council was emptied, suddenly, without warning, so that it seemed for the time hollow, and Tempar saw Annell peering round, uneasy with the feeling it engendered.

"Fear not," he told her. "He is not away, nor can be—else we'd have no more existence. A part of his presence only, that perceptible to our gross senses, has been withdrawn, that we may the better deliberate."

Michael leaned across toward him. "You bring courage to your band?" he asked. "To your small band?"

"We have, for all ourselves, courage enough—and strength enough as well." Tempar gave him glance for glance, defiance for defiance.

And his word was last, despite the shifting need of Herne (as Tempar read him) to put in some last and cautionary speech. Gabriel looked once upwards, once to each side of the council-place; nodding, he spoke.

"The council now is open. Who begins?"

## 13

A TECHNICIAN said: "This one's a funny one. Draws power where you wouldn't expect it."

Another peered at a dial, then at a second. "Right. Unless it's the read-outs gone crazy."

"What, by infection? Being around nuts so long, the dials pick it up? Let me tell you, *that's* a sensitive circuit."

Laughter. "Okay, okay—just take a look and explain it. Power in 413 gone nuts, away up. For what?"

"Who knows? They got the power, they can draw on it."

"And in 412 too. Annell and Moore; look at the dials, look at what's happening to the leads."

A pause. "A lot of power going out. This must be a big one."

"They're all big ones. One of these days . . ."

"Sure, sure, we know. One of these days the machines are going to go bust. Too much power drain."

"Well, they could. You know they could. There's nothing can stand up against a real drain, an unexpected shift . . ."

"That's why we're here, brother," a technician said. "Listen, do you really think something could happen, with us here?"

"It's . . . possible. It's got to be possible."

"If it were," a technician said, "do you think anybody would let these jobs be used for setups like this one? Doctors and nurses and nuts and nothing but talk? These jobs are valuable jobs, and don't you forget it."

"That's what I'm thinking of. . . ."

"You're not. If you were thinking, you'd remember how much care we give these jobs. And you'd remember what the Guild thinks—the same as you, brother. Nobody uses a job this big and valu-



able where there's a risk like the one you're talking about."

"But—"

"But nothing. Our job's to protect the machines. People damage 'em, we don't let the people use 'em—simple as that. Anyhow, got your gain adjusted?"

"Gain adjusted in 413."

"Gain in 412, two leads, adjusted."

"All right, then. O.K. Now drop it. Everything's going to be fine. These babies are good for another sixty years, and that's damn' near as long as any one of us is going to be around to coddle 'em."

"And by that time they'll have better machines, anyhow."

"Damn' right."

A pause. "Listen," one said after it. "There isn't a better machine. And you all know it."

"Maybe not now—but there will be. Count on that. Things go on improving—that's progress. Like these doctors, they shape up people, right? Well, if even people get shaped up, what do you think'll happen to machines? Progress, that's all, and you can count on it."

A final pause. "I guess so."

And quiet. The technicians watched the dials.

MICHAEL BEGAN with deceptive mildness, his wings unmoving and his face apparently at rest.

"In favor of the creation proposed—in favor of this novelty of motion, since you will have it called so," he said slowly, evenly, "we own a ranking here as numerous as that about the Throne. I feel that this will carry the council, and that there is no doubt of it." He appeared even further to relax, folding his wings, half-lidding his eyes. Tempar was not deceived.

"And yet we have a backing of our own," he replied, as mildly, "and one we hope to add to during the council. There must be discussion, and in such converse who knows what may change? So shall there be."

And Moore, dryly, added—as if from some strange sense of duty, Tempar thought—"I stand with you."

Others spoke: "And I . . ." "And we . . .": "We stand opposed to any new creation . . ." Annell stood shyly forward, as if in fear her presence and her words would otherwise go without notice.

"I stand with Herne and Tempar, as I must," she said, and Gabriel looked up, his gaze as sharp as any in the rankings.

"Must?" he asked her, and Annell replied.

"As my own study of this cause has taught me, I can obey my own conclusions, and no others." Annell stopped, looked round: there was patient silence. "So, I must," she said, stepped back and finished.

"We honor no necessity within the council." Michael's bright tone threw off disguise. "Here we exercise our freedom and our judgment. And yet, if freedom contravenes the giver, if judgment contravenes the Judge himself—why, what sort of necessity is that? And what is loyalty, when it is not to orders given, and to plans projected?"



"The council is our right, and in our judgment we cannot be constrained by plan or order." Tempar's grin was as sharp as Michael's sword, as deadly. "If that were so, the council would be nothing—a play, a game without reality."

Herne cut in then, more sharply still, so that Tempar looked round to see the old one speak in anger. "Yes, can you say we are without reality? Can you say this council is without reality? Can you admit—"

"Admit?" Michael took him up on the one word, but the stroke was feeble, Tempar saw. Herne rustled wings and returned the battle with impatience.

"Use what word pleases you," he said abruptly. "Can you call us anything but real? Is there a way for you to deny the council . . . and to deny our right to our decision, whatever that decision may be?" And he paused, looked round at the assembled hosts, and spoke again, one final whiplash word. "Well?"

"First blood, our elder brother," Michael said—with so much ease Tempar began to grow (he knew not how nor why) thoroughly uneasy. "And yet—creation? Is creation our concern?"

"In this our council, our concern must lie—" Herne began, picking over slow short words; Tempar, impatient, broke in and finished for him.

"We have been called and set to judge the plan." Another face was in the ranks, he saw, a face he recognized. Ithuriel, thin, shining, and possessed of power. That one stood with Michael, Gabriel, the host of others . . . Tempar quelled his own fright. "If we had not been called, what would you do here? For all are here that have a right to judgment; you know as much."

A murmur of agreement. Some brother spoke, but went unheard in thunder. A voice not of the council uttered words:

"The council is of right; you may decide. Nay—by the rule of your creations, all, you *must* decide. The council is reality; your judgment and decision are reality. Leave off this wordplay and begin."

Beside him, Tempar saw Herne shift, wings rustle, heard a chuckle and a breath. And wondered why, but had no time—now that directive had been plainly given (indeed, twice given; now no brother might oppose them upon any unclear ground), Michael was crying with the voice of Gabriel's eternal brassy notifier:

"Question! I call the question—here and now, as we are so commanded in the council!"

A cheap and silly trick—but what's the counter? Tempar felt thought flash through him, and caught at the first trailing, ragged edge of it. "We must set forth our own position, this—"

"You have of right, you have of right—eternally, without a pause, you have of right," Michael broke in, impatiently. "Oh, yes, I quite agree to all your right; and yet you need set forth nothing at all. Your famous and reiterated position is novel to none here, I'm sure of it."

"The rules of council state—"

"Ah, you're well up in rules," Michael said, cutting as deeply with his word as with his blade. Ithuriel, shining behind, waited and listened, and, seeing that bright figure, Tempar hesitated—just long enough for Michael to go on. "In facts, in the decisions we discuss, you may not be so perfect. Is't not so?"

Annell, pale wings all stiffened, piped against



the tide of murmur: "Can we not decide in accord with rule?" Tempar looked back at this pale sister, and felt a stirring of great loss; that, too, for no known reason. What had happened? Where, in any place, had he foreknowledge . . .

Well, there was no time, and he in battle. "The rules of council were, and are, and will be wise. By full discussion we'll discover whether or you, or we, are perfect in decision—" And, with conscious imitation, snapped the last phrase with Michael's challenging tone, in Michael's intonation: "Is't not so?"

"First blood remains to you, my brother," Michael said, slipping back to meekness in so sudden a fashion as to raise the deepest doubts. "You waste our council's firm attention with this constant repetition of what needs no repetition. State your position; make it clear, if you may do so. We shall not delay you by so much as one small word."

Tempar had no chance then to speak. Herne began. "As elder, it is my right thus to state."

"It is," Tempar said, hoping that the old one might, by the same miracle as in his speech of rage, set forth all evenly. Here was a battle; as the old one did not know, and could not know . . . why, mildness, doublemindedness, was all his strength, and all his strength was weakness in that council. Yet, Tempar told himself, there was a chance . . .

"This new creation," Herne began slowly, almost learnedly, with a tone Tempar tried to identify, "This new creation is no more than the creation of a destruction. Why should there be made that which is to be unmade once again? For we all know—we can all see clearly—that great unmak-

ing, great destruction, follows this proposal. In creation those things are highest which are self-created. We lay no claim to be of that sort. Nor can any but the one lay such a claim. Next in the ranking are the everlasting, not subject to unmaking—these we are. Much lower still are all creations made to be unmade—created for destruction, nothing more. This lowering does the higher ranks no honor. Who here—and we can foretell, we can see; we can, indeed, judge, or we should not be here—who, then, can say where lowering will end? In a creation without consciousness? In a creation without self or choice? In a creation like unto . . .” He paused, looked round and straightened wings, as, suddenly, he stabbed a finger, pointing “. . . like unto this our brother’s sword, which has its virtue from our brother, and without him would be as nothing. That one instrument, unbuckled, cast aside, is a fair model of all this new creation, and of what may follow it—then stop it at the source! There is no virtue in a constant fall, from the first rank, the second, to the third and then beyond to fourth, and fifth, and eighth, and . . . twentieth, for all we can foresee!”

The words rang out and made a space around them; silence and movelessness descended on the ranks, as if a cloud had fallen, holding them entrapped. Gabriel stirred at long last, and:

“Stop at the source?” he asked. “Then—since we are the second, not the first, rank—uncreate us!”

“Your argument, our elder brother, tends to nothing less,” a voice said quietly: it was Ithuriel. The ranks stirred, watching this most shining brother: his tall and straitened figure held the eye.



"Uncreate us," Michael said, as if in thought. "Well . . . what, in all you say, is to prevent it?"

"In what I say, I speak for what's to come, not what is past," Herne answered. "We can no longer suffer uncreation. I say again, as I have said, that we are second in the rank; yet . . . is there need to stoop still further?"

"Let it stop here," Moore added impatiently. "If he had wished to be alone, without creation, we would not be here in council—we would not be anywhere at all, from everlasting to everlasting. But—here we exist. And he is not alone. Let it remain so. Let us be companions . . . as far as any order can companion the self-created. For the rest . . ." This elder sister threw wings wide, refolded them. "For all the rest, why, let it go," she said. "There needs no weak addition in creation."

"Yet there is light," Ithuriel reminded her—reminded all the host, as Tempar saw. "The process is begun; with light is space, with space is time, with time destruction. It may not now be otherwise."

"This light is not from everlasting," Tempar said, striking the host with all the weight of wrath. "This light may be put out; we may return to everlasting lack of time and space—to everlasting lack of brute creation, meant for a fall, a fall again, a fall through all this time and space you speak of. Yet we may return; we may put out the light."

"And yet the light is like unto our brother," Michael replied. "It is no wonder bright Ithuriel has come here to defend it; is it not a work of wonder, and a work of awe? It is not in our power to create it."

"Put out the light," Tempar insisted. Yet he saw

that Moore had wrecked the line of discourse; all her speech was nothing but a target for Ithuriel, a target for the blade of Michael too, and for the final instrument mild Gabriel gave all existence to, under the one and self-created existence.

"Put out the light?" Gabriel asked him now. "Then . . . unmake us, as well. Leave him alone, the one and self-created. If we can go back—as bright Ithuriel makes you say—then all can go back, even to everlasting. Let there be no third rank in creation; let there be no second, either, nor no second place. Let the one self-created rest alone, as he began alone."

"And it is so." Tempar could not believe the thin high voice of Annell. "And, indeed, it is so; outside the mind of that creator, have we existence?"

"We exist," Moore said. Her tone was flat as Herne's unreadable expression. "We shall exist, no matter what is done; no matter what is thought, or purposed here, we shall exist."

And this defiance shook . . .

What?

Tempar's wings . . .

Rustled?

Moved?

Were . . .

(And the others, Herne, Moore, Annell, all the others, gone, with somewhere the cloudy memory of a being who was Michael, Gabriel, Ithuriel, a host of others, ranged out against him, a being against whom battle was a clear and joyous necessity . . . through a blackness which grew, dissolved in light, returned as darkness, all remembrance . . . fell . . . )

Yet the defi had been a necessary step. It had



been mistimed, of course, but Moore might be depended upon to mismeasure, to misunderstand, to become rigid in the game, to become too much dependent on authority, to . . .

*Game?* Then—if that were a game—where was this darkness? Where did all his mind tell him that he belonged? And where was the . . .

Creator?

Self-created, he existed . . .

In himself. Never in others. All reality was . . . battle, he had thought; but it was not so.

In falling, blackness, timelessness, he knew that all reality . . . (and Miss Annell's most earnest and uncaring face appeared to him in memory, in beauty) all reality was loss.

And all of loss was insupportable . . . the death of parents, the leavetakings and the slow disintegration of . . . books, pens, clothing, all objects . . .

So . . . one battled. Against this loss. And one lost the battle; but the battle was not lost, for battle it remained, and did not change. The battle was a wall against what he—what Tempar, poor and foolish Tempar whom he knew a little better, perhaps, than he once had known—could not withstand, could not support; the battle was a wall like all this new destruction of Miss Annell.

The battle—all his battles—were a wall against life itself, against the growth and death of all things.

And his game, his life, his studied, learned, profession . . .

A battle.

A wall.

Quite useless (he could hear Herne's voice in that judgment). Quite useless.

One more loss.

Like (he could not avoid the thought; it came in darkness, it came in this peculiar loneliness of knowledge)—like all else. Life was never a battle, except as it was made so by one man's vision and one man's desperate necessity.

For all of life was real; and all reality was loss.

Darkness, loneliness, the insupportable, the unchangeable . . .

Loss.

Later . . . when there was time, when there was space and he had come back to himself (oh, knowing that it was himself; he had not Miss Annell's temptations, and did not want to think about them, did not want to suffer that pain as well as all others). Later, he wondered whether or not he had screamed.

And wondered, as well, what sounds were made by . . . by (his mouth twisted with bitterness as the connections were removed) the self-created, by the caller of the council, the creator of light . . .

Wondered, then, what sounds were made by Martin Cann.



# FOUR

## 1

"MAMOI . . . minnai . . . namanam. . ."

The words were indistinct, fading rapidly into the air of the room. An improvement, so much was clear. Marty was speaking. This new therapy they talked about (Mrs. Cann told herself) had effects, it really did. Of course, it was too slow, since Marty shouldn't have had to stay in a place like this . . . this hospital longer than a day, a week at the very most. Marty was a good boy, he never deserved that. Even Father Cahillen had told her that Marty didn't deserve the mental hospital . . . and Father Cahillen was a good and holy man, who could not be wrong in such a matter . . . the Lord guided Father Cahillen, as she had told Marty from the earliest of his days, and as Marty had always believed.

Why, he had had faith, and faith was supposed to be rewarded. Not stiffened up like a board, staring, curling them into a casual-seeming ball (but try and move him! she remembered). All that relaxed-looking posture was as hard as the stone walls of her building (harder, now that they'd given up any real attempt to keep the place nice, even for the sake of appearances, not that appearances were a worthy motive). Not eyes-closed un-

reachable. Faith, devotion, good works, didn't deserve that, did they?

The deeds of the Lord were not to be understood, he'd said. And Mrs. Cann tried to accept that.

But could the Lord have taken her boy away and put this . . . this unseeing, unthinking, unreachable ball in his place?

Ah . . . she had cried enough. "The son of these tears . . ." But that was St. Monica, wasn't it? And she had no idea of herself as a Saint; no better and no worse than the rest of mankind, and womankind too, she often said. But she had cried and she had prayed, she had been faithful and visited, tried, given him the best of care . . . turned him over to these white-coats when her whole heart wanted him for herself . . . wanted to take care of him, she thought, amending herself. And now she had reward.

He was speaking. Really and truly, he was speaking. "He said 'Mama,' didn't he?" she burst out.

"Mama?" But that was Marie Seaver, Mrs. Cann thought, always doubting, always making even the most hopeful signs into just one more question-mark. As if there weren't enough trouble in the world. Some poeple had to go out and create more for themselves and for everyone else.

The nice-looking nurse was on duty, Miss What's-her-name, the blonde. "Perhaps he did," she said. "But, very often, these first sounds are . . . well, not quite what you'd call speech. Involuntary, you see, as if the body were testing out its own activities one by one." The girl had changed, Mrs. Cann saw, from the last time



they'd seen her, two weeks ago or more; she talked as if she were reading out of a book. Not as if she cared. And she really had cared, once. Mrs. Cann, as Mrs. Cann assured herself, had a mother's heart and could not be deceived in such matters.

Now . . . well, what could anyone expect of the white-coats? "But the body could test out any sound," she said. "Marty's trying to say *mama*. He's trying to call to me. I know that much, and you needn't argue with me. I know all that's wrong with him, too . . . so you needn't try to make things easy for me." No one ever had made matters easy for her, Mrs. Cann reflected in a familiar way; but then she'd never wanted that. The idea was to carry His cross, wasn't it? And that meant being able to take up the most terrible situations . . .

Of course, what had happened to Marty was just one more of those, and one which, she felt, she had withstood with exemplary calm and with the correct attitude. But wasn't it open to her to feel sorry for *Marty*, to wonder whether she could help *Marty*? It wasn't for herself (she was sure) that she suffered; it wasn't for herself that she worried, and felt uncertain and unbearably sad. Since Marty had been born, nothing had been for herself—nothing at all, which was both right and just. It had all been for Marty . . . so, then, didn't she have the *right* to worry, cross or no cross?

"I'm sure you're right," Marie Seaver was saying, the question-marking-time girl, the mousy little hopeful who thought she was going to get Marty.

As well she might, Mrs. Cann knew; for Marie

would obey her, Marie would listen to what she knew, absolutely *knew* was best for Marty. Marie would put up no fuss, make no drastic reversals. Marie, in other words, was safe. Not like . . . not like . . .

Mrs. Cann's mind roved for an instant, seeing again the two or three girls Marty had been attracted to—all quite unsuitable. And all, all, easily enough got rid of. Marty had been a good boy (and would be again, she was sure, and would be soon again, now that the new treatment, with the Lord's help, was giving him so much). Marie had stayed . . . but Marie was safe. Not like . . .

With a suddenness which, later, Mrs. Cann put down to pure maternal intuition (for she believed in such things, no matter what the "new set" said), she thought: "Not like Miss What's-Her-Name, here. Not like Miss Annell."

The white-coat was talking. "Of course, that he's making any sound at all is evidence of real progress, quite good progress so early in the treatment." As if any fool couldn't see that!

"Then you feel that there's hope?" Marie asked, as timidly as she seemed to do everything else.

Miss Annell nodded, her blonde hair framing her face like a cap older than the nurse's cap that held it. "We think there's very real hope," she said. "If we didn't, Mr. Cann could never be in this program. I'm sure you know of the effort and the time involved. We can't continue it with every patient, not even with every patient unreachable by other means. As yet, we're forced to limit ourselves only to those who do show hopeful signs. So you can see . . ."

"Yes," Marie was saying, "thank you," but Mrs. Cann broke in.



"Are you a part of his—what do they call it?—his team, Miss?" she asked. She had no clear idea why she'd come up with that question, out of all the possibilities. The use of that little word *we* might have done it, though nurses had been overusing it for centuries.

"You know that any such information must be kept confidential," the white-coat said. Right out of the book, of course, right out of the same book she'd been reading from ever since they'd come in to visit. She certainly had changed; something had changed her. A fight with a boyfriend, a change in her diet, "one of those days" . . . but Mrs. Cann rather thought not. Marie was looking at Miss Annell wide-eyed; had the mouse, too, caught some of the shakiness of that tone?

"It doesn't matter," Mrs. Cann snapped. "As you know, the Director here is an old friend of mine. I can always check the records for . . ." She cut the lie short. Something else, something she could never have predicted, had changed the direction of Miss Annell's thoughts.

"I suppose not," she said.

Marie said (oh, the idiot, breaking in at such a moment! She could ruin everything—and if she did Mrs. Cann would see to it that Marie was ruined, she promised herself. There was no doubt of that at all)—Marie said: "Then . . ."

"I'm on the team," Miss Annell said. "Yes."

Mrs. Cann watched the two of them, the mouse and the white-coat, as they stared at each other. Rivals, Mrs. Cann thought with a satiric pleasure—rivals. Not that there was any doubt as to the way things would turn out. After all, she was Marty's mother, and she was on Marie's side.

But (a disquieting thought, she put it away for

examination later, when she'd gone home) Miss Annell had been inside Marty's mind, had been closer to him than Marie in that way . . .

Closer . . .

Mrs. Cann felt a sort of hatred stir in her thick body. What right had Miss Annell . . . what right had anyone . . .

Except herself. Except Marty's mother. For whom the Lord would provide, for whom (since she had given up so much, since she had suffered so much, so very much) the Lord would always and without fail provide. Father Cahillen had nearly said as much, once, a long time ago, and whether or not he told her he hadn't meant such a thing at all Mrs. Cann knew that what he'd said was true. Whether he'd meant it or not. Whether anyone in the world ever meant it, Mrs. Cann knew it; the Lord would provide.

The Lord would defeat Miss Annell, give her some horrible punishment. The Lord would restore Marty to her, allow her to arrange matters with the mouse, sustain her and at last give her all the rewards she wanted, all the happiness she expected.

That much, she told herself, was certain. And looked at Miss Annell while she tried hard to believe herself.



## 2

*Dr. Anselm Herne*  
*Psychiatric Offices*  
*American Memorial Hospital, New York Complex*  
*(3rd Location)*  
*Head of Section*

Dr. Herne looked wearily at the imprint at the top of his report pad. All that printing, all that status, stood to the left; at the right there were spaces for date, for patient, for treatment and "others, if any, officiating," which Dr. Herne had never been able to figure out, not for certain. Did that include other Heads of Section, other doctors who could officiate of themselves, of their own right? Or was it no more than jargon-English for other doctors and nurses involved? Sometimes he felt one way, sometimes another, and as the day lengthened into a long, dark evening he felt more and more like an official. Which was not to be wondered at, he told himself. Before he could change his mind he'd printed *None* in absolutely decisive letters in that final space. Then he went back in and filled in the other spaces—May 12, '68; Martin Cann; connective therapy standard method . . .

And then he stopped and very nearly smiled. Was there anything at all in connective therapy that could be described as "standard"? Oh, the

machines, of course—but they were no more than a means to an end, and the end was always different, always shockingly different. The ultimate aims might be the same (though they never were, not precisely); even the motives might be the same (though Dr. Herne doubted that profoundly; people reacted differently to different stimuli, and every patient was a stimulus, every doctor and every nurse a person); but the end was always different.

Well, the hospital forms were there to be filled out, not argued with. And Dr. Herne looked at his watch and noticed, with some faint surprise, that it was very nearly 1900. Katherine had been told to expect him at 1900; but Katherine was a doctor's wife, and any doctor's wife knew, after a time, that . . . that, well, things came up. Things no doctor could control.

At any rate, he hoped she knew it. There did seem at times to be a good deal of doubt . . . a good deal of . . . (Dr. Herne closed his eyes, remembering the fights, and trying not to remember. He had a responsibility to Katherine and the children, yes, but he had a responsibility as well to Martin Cann, to the other doctors and nurses. He'd gone over their reports with care, and he hadn't wasted any time, now that he was faced with making up his own report. The feelings of guilt that lay in shreds about his mind were automatic, and meant nothing. He was doing the best he could do; and, when he thought that, he had Katherine's laugh to ignore as well as everything else. After a bit he was alone in his office with the reports, with his stylo, and with Martin Cann. It felt very peaceful, being so alone.) Dr. Herne opened his eyes.



He picked up the stylo his hand had let fall. He took a single breath and began to write, more quickly than he could think. At times, that was the only way to get at the truth, he knew—a sort of professional version of the ancient word-association structures. The stylo went lightly over paper, magnetized and fixed the patterns in black on paper's white; Dr. Herne wrote without stopping. If he stopped, Katherine would return, and he could not afford the energy to deal with Katherine, not just then.

Later, later . . .

Always, he thought, the word was *later*.

But his own responsibilities . . .

The stylo continued to move.

Prognosis for this patient continues favorable, due in most part to a renewal of some contact (even if minimal contact) with the outside world, as reported by nursing staff and combined fourth-floor orderly report. However, it becomes more and more clear that the case is not only unique, as is any such case—as is, in fact, any case at all—but that its particular qualities contain great danger both for the patient and for the therapy staff involved in connective-therapy treatments.

Patient's withdrawal into a world of his own making seems to have at least one major cause in patient's own feelings—that the world is a direct threat to him, in part and in its entirety. This is not the only motive for withdrawal of this severity, but it is perhaps the most common. Since, however, it is (in this case) the entire world which represents a direct and presumably fatal threat to the patient, he must retreat to a position

of such power that he controls the outside world. It can no longer threaten him, since he can at any moment interpose his own power between its motions and himself.

A number of such states of withdrawal have been theorized, and some have come up in reported clinical practice. Because, however, of Martin Cann's orientation (consult interview records with Mrs. Doré Cann, mother), and because, apparently, the situation represents in any case the largest possible concentration of power possible, this patient has formed a fantasy which becomes clearer with each treatment.

He is (consult my final report of May 11) God. More, he is God-before-creation; he has created light, and the remainder of all creation waits upon his word. That this provides him with an effective control of any and all portions of the world which he feels may be threatening to him is obvious; that he insists, as God within his private world, on the continuance of creation may be less so. This, however, is a necessity; without it he would not be controlling the world, but denying it absolutely, and he is not prepared to go to such final lengths. It may be stated with fair certainty that it is exactly this necessity which makes the patient available for treatment at all: if he had gone to the lengths of denying the possible or putative existence of the world, of any recognizable world at all, no treatment now known would offer more than minimal chances for success. His own fantasies would offer him no clear road back into the world of consensual validation, into the objectively real world as we experience it.

Since, however, the psychiatric team is forced to take up roles within this self-created fantasy,



certain difficulties arise. To speak, at first, in general terms: it becomes necessary for the psychiatric team to oppose the patient's wish for continued creation—to block his move in that direction and thus to make his fantasy world sufficiently unpalatable to him. Allowing further "creation" would underline the "reality" of the patient's private world, and would, in effect, make the team co-conspirators with both the patient and with his imagined aides (the Thrones, Archangels and Dominions) in the continuance and the growing solidity of his fantasy. Instead, then, since we cannot simply tell the patient that his world is unreal—in connective therapy, as in any other form, no checkable arguments for such a statement exist for the patient—we must work against his aims. In this case, his aims are clear, which is of course advantageous; the difficulties of team position require further analysis.

In effect, we are arguing from, and working from, what has been thought of as the traditional standpoint of Lucifer (within this fantasy, of course). This presents the patient with a ready-made opportunity to oppose the team, and with ready-made and highly negative emotional attitudes toward its work.

To varying degrees, this is true of each of the four persons involved in the basic team. (More may later be called up; see conclusion to this report.) Going, then, into detail:

Dr. Tempar: An activist by nature, he finds adjustment to so basic a world of threat, argument and opposition difficult if he is, at the same time, to maintain contact with the objectively real world. Since the moves indicated within the patient's world are not necessarily the best moves

from a psychiatric standpoint, difficulties are caused. It is not anticipated that any truly severe strains will result, since Dr. Tempar is expected to serve more as an in-fantasy oppositional character than as an exterior guide. For this psychiatrist, moreover, the case can be seen most clearly not as a danger but as a learning process—as is any case, for any doctor. The limits of an activist view, for instance, may become more and more clear as the case progresses. Danger exists, in that Dr. Tempar may find himself so deeply imbedded within the patient's world that his actions will prove harmful to the basic intent of therapy, but it is not thought that these dangers represent any great chance, and no change is recommended.

Miss Moore: As a nurse with wide experience both in this and in other, simpler forms of therapy, she . . .

The stylo stopped. Dr. Herne stared down at the new page.

Now, what could anyone say about Miss Moore? Particularly when the report had to educate as well as describe—the Board of Governors did not consist of psychiatrists with E. E. degrees, and it was, eventually, the Board which was going to see all these final reports. And what would they see—what were they capable of seeing—in a report about Miss Moore?

Experience, competence, knowledge . . . and all of it straight out of the books. Dr. Herne wondered, every so often, whether Miss Moore had ever in her life really met one other human being. If she had, no results of the meeting were visible. And yet . . .

Well, it was a question he faced every time



Miss Moore became a part of his team. It was a question with which he had become, over the years, awfully familiar.

Unfortunately, he'd never become familiar with any fitting answers . . .

. . . and in other, simpler forms of therapy, she serves as a base of knowledge for any less-experienced members of the team. In this case she has not been of major effect as yet, since the male-oriented qualities of the patient's fantasy (consult interview records both with Mrs. Doré Cann, mother, and with Miss Marie Seaver, fiancée) maintain no more than a limited and secondary part-availability to any females whatever. However, the structure of the fantasy is slowly changing under the impress of the team, and it is to be expected that Miss Moore will contribute more (*and worse*, Dr. Herne told himself; *and probably much worse—but you work with the materials at hand*) as her position in the fantasy becomes more acceptable. Miss Moore's experience insulates her from any real danger (*and from any real recognition, too*), and the danger to Martin Cann is not great, as she is used to working under direction in such a team and does not have primary problems adjusting to the patient-world as against the objective-world. (*All right, that does it—satisfied now, you book-teachers? Satisfied now, you case-type theoreticians?*)

Miss Annell: This therapy represents her first active experience with connective therapy—which is in some ways unfortunate. The lack of any easily discovered female roles in the patient's world creates for her a difficulty not usually to be met with. Again, the need for team support at every

moment when she is actively engaged in that world creates a certain lack of security, a lack of the ability to depend on her own talents—which are considerable. As yet, she seems to have suffered no major ill effects from the therapy, and she has contributed, dependably, everything within her power. No replacement is requested, nor is the need for one foreseen.

Dr. Herne: As head of this team, I attempt to be conscious both of difficulties and of opportunities. The role which must be played has been taken over, in large part, by myself. Obviously, I cannot clearly judge my own performance, but I feel that my presence is not hurtful to the team, and is a help to the patient—whose welfare must continue to be uppermost during any therapy.

And that, Dr. Herne thought, did it. Rereading it, he wasn't entirely satisfied—he'd referred to Martin Cann by name here and there, he'd gone a bit away from the sort of "technical" English the Board expected . . . but, he told himself ruefully, he had to allow himself these small moments of rebellion. These small moments on behalf, perhaps, of the patients . . .

And more likely on behalf of Dr. Anselm Herne, he knew. Dr. Anselm Herne, who needed to learn as much as anyone else on the team—as much as Miss Moore, as much as them all—and who was no selfless human being. Who needed a small moment of rebellion now and again . . .

Especially, he remembered, when he was going to be late getting home to Katherine. The time was 2015, he saw. Tiredly, he stacked the papers for morning delivery, put away the office stylo, got up and turned out his office light.



One psychiatrist, he thought, gone for the day. Or (as it might be) for the year.

. . . And what was there, after so long, to grow so bitter about? What sort of change was Martin Cann making in him? And—would he be able to withstand it, this time? Would he come through and be able to continue his work and his life?

That, he knew very well, was the question to which nobody ever had the answer. Not until (and there it was again, the word, the repeating word) later.

"Later." In the darkened room, he said the word aloud. Then he snorted at his own intern-like scrabblings, and went out into the corridor.

Night had come down; the hospital was comparatively quiet, and only dreams appeared to stir in the darkness of the long dull halls. Dr. Herne, turning away from them with a sense of final, firm decision, found an elevator in the bank round the corner, and gave it his card. The elevator took him downstairs; he strode through its opening door, and went out through the silent, dim-lit lobby, out the glass front door, and then, step by usual, casual, informed step, away.

Katherine, after all (he told himself, quite without bitterness, quite without irony), was waiting.

### 3

AND WHO KNEW what they dreamed, the patients who waited, some wide-eyed and quiet, some

down in the terrible hollow of (drugged or undrugged) sleep, some few lying both awake and restrained, their muscles tense against indignity, the forcegowns still and light around them. Within American Memorial the night staff went quietly from door to door, from hall to hall, and thought, perhaps, precisely nothing about the sleeping dreams, the waking dreams, of men and women who were . . . anything at all, now, anything you pleased. And of the patients themselves only a few, those in touch with what was called reality, wondered about the others. There was no room nor time, there was no ease to worry about someone's troubles not your own, and even that last defense against interior attack had gone. But, elsewhere, some few wondered, and imagination helped to build a horror worse, perhaps, than any checkable reality. In sleep herself, Mrs. Doré Cann muttered instructions, pleas, devotions, all to Marty, while he turned his back on her and said nothing at all, this Marty simultaneously eight years old and twenty-four. She told him, she begged him to believe, that she had done all she could, that no decision was or ever had been hers but God's alone. Had she chosen death for her husband, had she chosen hurt for her son? Why, she could not, could not . . . and yet the figure never moved nor spoke. The old apartment walls pressed down in darkness, and Mrs. Cann began to wish to wake. Some miles away, then, in a fresher, lighter section of the city, one other woman stared, entirely awake, at patterns left by light beyond her windows, shifting in inexplicable pictures on the ceiling of her bed-room. And Marie Seaver wondered . . .

Where was he? Where was Martin, whom she



had known, for whom she had waited and hoped? Where was the boy who needed rescue so very badly, needed help and care so badly . . . at that she caught herself (for perhaps the thousandth time). She was not his mother, not his nurse, nor like to be. She was . . .

Well? If the treatment really helped Martin, she could one day be his wife. But could it, could any sort of "treatment", help him that much? If he were finally free and independent, a husband capable of decision, of responsibility, would he remain Martin Cann? Or would the doctors—leaving Martin quite as he had been—somehow give him support, give him the strength to oppose some future collapse? She had heard a good deal about this sole and insistent idea, *the integrity of the individual*; she did not think that she understood it in the least. She knew, as everyone knew, that a mental illness (in the way they spoke of it, in the old words) was no "visitation" from outside but was a part of the person himself. How, then, could it be removed without somehow violating "integrity", without somehow changing, revising, collapsing the person? And what would she do when faced with a Martin who was a stranger to her, a stranger to all the world—a new man, never seen before, a creation not of ordinary flesh (though that, too, that first, of course) but of American Memorial, a creation built of doctors, nurses, drugs, treatments . . . who was this person she visited? For whom was she continuing her battle?

Oh, the nurses assured her—and the doctors, as well, when she could pry into their time for half a minute—that somehow the miracle would be accomplished, that Martin would return to the

world. They had such hopes in the new treatment, which was already beginning to show results . . . and yet, they had never answered her question. Nor had she asked it, not clearly, not exactly; the worry had forced itself through into her mind, but not the cause of it, so that at best she could present to them no more than fright. She did not think they understood that fright. Of course, the problem would be an old one to them, it would be familiar, but . . . and once again she stopped herself. Would the problem be so familiar to them, after all? Would they have thought of such a thing? They did not, after all, want Martin as she did; they knew nothing about him (so she told herself) but the blankest of case-histories. And what were the facts but an invitation to romance, an invitation to invent?

Martin's mother . . . yes, they had that, they'd seen her. But of his hatred, helpless, balanced, they might have no clear idea. Religion . . . oh, yes, they had all spoken of the early influences, of the religious who had forced Martin, her Martin, into so black a mold. And yet (she'd said as much; at least, what she said had gone down in his record, and she could have some hope it was understood) the religion was not at fault, was not a simple falsity to be erased. They had all nodded, all agreed; but who knew what was concealed behind their faces? Who knew what they might eliminate, in making Martin new, in making him whole . . .

As he could never be whole, she saw; for, whole, he was himself and his disease. He was his strength and all his weakness. He was the unmoving, unrecognizing figure she visited (with Mrs. Cann, always with Mrs. Cann—but was she at



fault any more than any other fact? Surely, it was too simple to blame her, to hate her, for Martin . . .), and when he was released . . .

If he was released . . .

Light shifted in the room. Marie Seaver shut her eyes, but the act made altogether too vivid Martin's dreams, as she imagined them. She opened her eyes again but the dreams would not leave her—dreams in which Mrs. Cann spoke like some irresistible goddess, made commands most horrible and most inalterable, while Martin crawled to obey, unable to move in any other manner, while the priests and Mrs. Cann's idea of God looking down and shuddered, looked down and laughed, looked down and . . . aided Mrs. Cann. Against her son. Against that part of him that was (she knew it!) whole and sane, that piece of him which struggled, yet, and was aided through the treatments (whatever they were truly like), and would somehow survive.

Whether or not she recognized it, whether or not it was any shadow of the Martin she had known, she had to believe what she'd been told—that piece of Martin would survive, would come free at last into the world.

But Martin himself . . .

Her eyes shut. He was dead, and better so.

Inside the hospital, the dreams went on. They were themselves, simple or complex; they had no congress with imagined dreams, with the private terrors of the outside world. Here one man cried out, there a woman stirred . . . and in the mind of Martin Cann was no such fear to be tasted, but instead, anticipation and certainty.

The council would continue; he had won. He

had become more-than-one, he had become a horde to sweep all victory before him. He pictured the adversary cowering, fallen, as indeed he had to fall. There was no doubt of all this in his mind.

Or very little.

#### 4

"BACKLASH?" one of the technicians said.

Dr. Herne thought sadly of the old joke about Orientals, and realized that (at least for him, at least in this world of process and device) it had, in the person of these experts, come true—he couldn't tell one from another. They were all the same, all alike. (A normal, a healthy adjustment to a common situation. If it creates no major difficulties to the technician, then your own feeling, old man, is only pathetic, antiquarian, and of no clinical worth whatever—except insofar as it shows up your *own* neuroses; so much, Dr. Herne to Dr. Herne.) "Backlash," he repeated. "There's a terrific power drain in this case. Whatever it does to your boards, you ought to be ready for it."

"We're ready, Doctor," the technician said. "We're ready for anything . . . all the time. This line of work, Doctor, you got to be."

Dr. Herne sighed. "I suppose so," he said.

"Doctor," the technician said—with earnestness, and perhaps, Dr. Herne thought, just the slightest shade of contempt—"you better believe we are.



Because without us the whole thing goes down the drain."

"I know that." And perhaps it was even true . . . perhaps he, with his dedication to simple humanity, was merely out-of-date, merely a fossil in the days of the device and the technology. Not that he believed such a thing for a second. Still . . . "I imagine I should have told you earlier."

"If you knew earlier, sure," the technician said. "We got to know all we can to do the work right—connect up all the machines and all the people."

"I suppose so." Again, he thought. A surrender in the face of the inevitable? He wasn't sure; at any rate, a surrender in the face of the all-conquering Present.

"Look, Doctor," the technician went on, relaxing in a chair in Dr. Herne's quiet morning office. "If you can tell us why there's this backlash, this power drain—whatever—we'll be able to do some more about it, maybe. Guard against it . . ." The technician made a vague gesture, apparently indicating all manner of technical maneuvers.

Dr. Herne said: "I'm afraid not."

"But, Doctor—"

"You know the rules," Dr. Herne said. "They're no different here than they are in any other hospital, in any other place. The patient's mind is sacrosanct, not to be entered except for need, and not to be disclosed except for cause." Had he been a little too sharp there? Perhaps; perhaps not. It was done. The technician shifted in his chair.

"This is cause," the technician said. "The more we know . . ."

"The possibility of a power drain, of a real backlash, is what you have to know," Dr. Herne

said. "Knowing the details wouldn't allow you to predict the amount of that drain or the timing of it. You won't be inside the patient's mind." He said, with a gentleness that cost him real effort: "I'm sorry. The rule has to stand."

"Sure, Doctor," the technician said, and stood up. "I understand."

And Dr. Herne thought—with considerable accuracy—that he could predict the conversations among the technicians, a little later in the day.

Martin Cann was two weeks into therapy, two weeks in which the Council had become a major defense, and an entire standoff. As the door shut and left Dr. Herne alone, he was trying to think of a way to break through . . .

Because there had to be a way. There had to be. Martin Cann was a human being, and human beings deserved to be saved . . .

Thinking, he realized, like a preacher himself. Well, after two weeks of Council, that was at least natural . . . in an odd sort of way. The Devil, Dr. Herne told himself with a brief, sad flash of amusement, quoting Scripture . . .

#### PROGRAM MAY 25

412: DRS. HERNE, TEMPOR. MISS MOORE,  
MISS ANNELL.

413: MARTIN CANN 30395.

FLOTATION TANK WITH FULL GEAR IN  
ROOM 413 0900 MAY 25

BLOCKAGE EQUIPMENT WITH CHAIRS (4)  
IN ROOM 412 0900 MAY 25.

CANN ATTACHMENTS COMPLETE BY 0915.



ATTACHMENTS HERNE, TEMPOR, MOORE,  
ANNELL . . .

"It's the same thing," a technician said. "Every day the same thing. Might's well take yesterday's sheet and change the dates, that's all."

"Except for what I heard," another said.

"Sure. A backlash. A power drain. Which that character wouldn't know if it hit him."

"He might. He's an E. E. too, don't forget."

Laughter. "And not touched a piece of equipment, not on his own, since he got the letters. What's a degree mean?"

"Nothing. The degree is the work. Hook 'em up, hook 'em out, that's it. And watch the gauges."

"Real careful, I guess."

Murmur of agreement. "Real careful, like the Doctor says. Look, this guy can blow out a whole board unless we keep him dialed right."

"Like a circuit about to blow. Got to watch it."

"Sure you do," a technician said. "But with a circuit, if you know it's going, you yank it out, replace it. It's too risky to use."

"Can't do that with people," a technician said.

A long pause. "No," one said slowly. "More's the pity."

"Plug in people, plug in machines," another added. "The difference is . . . what the Doctors say it is."

"And damn' silly, too."

"Sure, but they give the orders. Got to take orders, right?"

"Right."

And a clock buzzed; technicians got ready. With the Cann attachments first, then the others.

Efficient, quick, casual. Take the orders, fulfill the orders. Machines or men—what was the difference, after all?

None, that technicians could see.

None (it might be) that anyone could see . . . without a special bias in one direction or the other. Not that the technicians bothered with that sort of airy speculation.

But Dr. Herne did.

## 5

"ARE YOU certain, Doctor?" Tempar asked. "It's a risk, and a hellish one. If we miss with it, there may not be any chance at all . . ." He stopped, watching the older man's face. A second of silence passed before he went on, in a tone a trifle more subdued: "Of course, you've thought of that."

"I have," Dr. Herne said. "I quite recognize the risk; but matters are at a standstill now, and likely to remain so. To some extent, Martin's been brought out of his world, and into a world in which he must be in contact with others, and with opposing views. But it's not enough, clearly; he must be brought back to the 'real world.'" And Tempar could hear, with a faint stirring of—what? fright?—the quotation marks drop round those last words. "I have tried to see a safer method, a method involving less risk to all of us, including Martin. If you can see one . . ."

He let the sentence end there. Which gave



Tempar the ball, of course; that, Tempar thought, was standard procedure. Not that he minded it; he had his own ideas. "I think that a simple course of directed opposition . . ." he began.

"Which we've tried for two weeks," Dr. Herne said slowly. "And which we can neither . . . neither, in your terms, win nor lose."

But what other terms were there? "There must be some way to break free of the Council . . ."

"And so there is," Dr. Herne said. "I've outlined it; you've all seen my suggestions in the notes for this session."

"Still . . ." Well, what was there to say? Herne ran the show. Later on, Tempar promised himself, things would be different. Tempar himself would be running the show, and in no distant future. When Herne retired—and he couldn't be that far away—Tempar would be in a good position, a very good position.

But the old man had perception; you had to give him that. "What is your worry with this new plan?" he asked, and Tempar could not fob him off with more talk about risk to the patient, risk to the treatment or even to the team. Herne had seen through all that, he knew, and there was nothing left for it but the truth (or what, he added, uncomfortably still aware of those quotation-marks, Tempar himself thought of as the real world's truth).

"The team," he said.

"Normal risk," Herne said. "You know that." He did not move; his gaze was very sharp, very open, very acceptant. Am I still a patient, then? Tempar asked himself. Am I still in my own training-analysis?

Perhaps. Perhaps. "All right," he said. "It's Miss Annell. To be frank—"

"To be frank, you've formed an attachment," Herne said. "But you must remember that Miss Annell, too, knows the risks; that this is her own life, that you have no right to interfere in her own decisions . . ."

"Don't quote the Consolidation Agreement at me!" Tempar burst out.

"I was only . . ." Herne began mildly enough.

"I'm . . ." Tempar softened his tone, no easy matter. "I'm sensitive on the subject. Oh, I know the Agreement, I know it's right, the only way human beings *can* live. Just . . . a personal sensitivity."

"Of course."

Agreement put him off balance. Was that Herne's purpose? Somehow (and he could not decide whether his decision were a compliment, or a fatal judgment) Tempar thought not. The man was honest; the man was even simple, in his way. But . . . "That's the point," he had to say. "She doesn't know the risks."

"Her training . . ."

"Training?" He paused, heavily. "Do you know what she's become? Do you know what's happened to her?"

Herne sat straight upright. "There's been no evidence of any severe change on the charts, in interviews . . ." he began, wonderingly.

"There wouldn't be," Tempar said. "Not in this case. But . . . that first session. In which she didn't appear; in which she was—remember?—uncreated. That first session was enough."

"In what way?" Herne demanded, wasting no time now. As, Tempar realized, he himself had



been wasting time . . . but it wasn't easy to talk about this, to disclose to anyone the private world of Lenore Annell . . .

Good Lord, had he been bitten *that* badly? Perhaps. Though (of course) he was quite alone.

And the consequences of that fact—the possible consequences—frightened him so badly that he lost his hesitation. If she'd gone *that* far . . . and she might very well have . . .

"Contagion," he said. "She was alone, uncreated. Nothing existed. Her first real experience of connective therapy. And, as Martin Cann believes himself—must believe himself—alone in the world . . ."

There was quite a long silence. "Are you sure?" Herne asked at last, in a voice so strained with tragedy that Tempar, for a second, had no words, nothing at all to offer this wanting man, this old man who led them all (father-image?—the words pattered through his mind, and out. What difference did they make?). Then:

"I'm sure," he said. "A talk with her, a few signs . . ."

"Which you're in a better position to interpret than anyone else," Herne said, and added quickly: "Not in any irony, Doctor. The plain truth, I'm afraid. Then . . . she has begun to believe that she alone exists? That nothing matters? I can't see why it hasn't shown up . . ."

Tempar barked; it might have been, he thought with an oddly reflective corner of his mind, a laugh. In this area, at least, he had the answers, and the old man did not. "If nothing makes any difference, then why not go on as before? Why not continue the charade? It might hit someone

just that way . . . and it has hit Lenore—Miss Annell—that way. Look at it.”

Another silence. Dr. Herne murmured: “I see,” and sat, his eyes no longer on Tempar, his mind judging, comparing, testing. The seconds became a minute, then another, a terrifyingly long time. Tempar burst out:

“Then you see why we can’t—”

“Accept the risk?” Dr. Herne said. “I see why we must. It’s not that—that, as you know, as we all have to know, casualties are to be expected. I enter every session with the feeling that it’s my last; I must, and only luck, or whatever you choose to call it, has preserved me so far.” (And Herne wondered how much, after all, Katherine had to do with his luck; given a satisfying, a fulfilling life outside the hospital, might he not have considered matters less carefully, having less emotional room for them? Perhaps the old joke about psychiatrists being bad marital risks had a real point, after all, and an unavoidable one. Hard on Katherine, of course, but Katherine had made her own life . . . and all the decisions had been finished with years before. There was nothing to be done; and Dr. Herne found himself still unable to be thankful for this unhappiness. A lack in him, so much was clear: a definite lack.)

Tempar was impatient still. “Then if it isn’t the acceptance of casualties—and it’s one thing to accept the accomplished fact, and quite another to force it into actuality, with your eyes wide open—if it isn’t that, what is it?”

“The cure of Martin Cann,” Dr. Herne said, “and the cure of all of us. We are all involved here, make no mistake. And a relaxation of the



original source of the contagion may aid Miss Annell more than anything else."

"And may not," Tempar said.

Dr. Herne shook his head, slowly, sadly. "A good nurse. A good woman. But—has she any other chance—now?"

"If we went on as we have been doing . . ."

"She would remain in her world. Remain, without alternatives, without escape. And, if the current position continues itself much longer, she will be locked in without a great deal of hope. No matter what."

"Yes," Tempar said heavily, slowly—surrendering. "Yes, I see. You're . . . I suppose you're right. But I wish . . ."

"And you didn't mention this before?"

"I could not," Tempar said. "I thought that I might be able to . . ."

Dr. Herne's nod was as slow, as sad as his previous motion. "Of course you did," he said. "I'm sorry I asked. But . . . you see why we must accept the risk? For everyone involved?"

Tempar rose. "I . . . suppose so," he said. "I'll see you inside, in a little while."

"Yes." Herne did not move. "But—Doctor, have you realized your own danger? Have you thought what your own position might be, given your identification with this world?"

"My . . ."

"Please, Doctor," Herne said. "Consider it. Keep it in your mind. There is a place for action, and a time for it; there is a place, too, for acceptance, for understanding."

"I know that," Tempar said.

He did not hear, after he'd gone, Dr. Herne's very slow, very soft: "Do you? Do you? And . . ."

are we all condemned? Are we all, this time, this one time, to fall ourselves under the sway of . . . of God? Under the sword of the justice of God—the justice of Martin Cann?”

No answer. After a time Dr. Herne rose heavily and went on to the hookup room. There was, after all, nothing else to do.

## 6

MICHAEL BEGAN with attack, as he preferred: the brightness of his glance was evidence enough of that. “Well?” his voice rang out, filling the place where they were. “We are met again, we are met again and again—to no purpose and to no conclusion. Is this to continue?”

Tempar was ready. “There is no time here. We discuss its existence, that is all. In this truth, why push on impatiently?”

“And yet you were impatient for the Council.” Michael’s voice, but the words of all the host behind him, ranked with him, with Gabriel. “What contradictions are in your existence! How marvellous a piece of work . . .”

“Which was not said of us; and was not said,” Herne added. “If we are to remain in this—this *farce* . . .” His tone twisted the words; Tempar looked round. What was the old one doing? Such attack was worse than useless. Michael, Gabriel, the youngest of the host would know the parry. Without surprise, he heard Gabriel say:



"This farce, which you did order, and which was allowed—which was, in sober fact, commanded . . ." Mocking, the words trailed off to silence. All the host stirred, even Annell and Moore showed their surprise. Tempar blamed them not for that.

"Our elder brother meant . . ." he said, and in a rush was silenced, interrupted—by the same elder brother. Oh, a time for action was the Council, as he knew: but action so informed by sober judgment that it had some faint chance of real success. This challenge . . .

"Your elder brother," Herne had said, "meant, as you all know, what he here has spoken." He glanced at all the host, in quiet challenge. "Here was Council, prepared for a decision on this matter. And yet, Council goes on, and does go on: why, we are all like to be uncreated, if we continue thus without finality."

*Like to be uncreated* . . . Tempar took the words into his mind, and there they made a world, an echo. He felt pain for which he could not account.

Pain . . . for which no remedy existed. How could he, one of the Host, feel any bite like pain, feel any sorrow . . .

*Like to be uncreated.* And the pain would not leave him. The pain would not be understood, and would not leave him.

"Your suggestion?" Michael said easily. Silence fell. A Voice . . .

## FIVE

### 1

"THERE OUGHT to be something we can take to him," Mrs. Cann said nervously. "Now that he's . . . recognizing us."

"Not recognizing us," Marie said. "Recognizing . . . something. We don't know what." She paused. "I expect that nurse does."

"Nurse?" Mrs. Cann's bewilderment was grand to see; but, having gone so far in her own disclosure, Marie felt it better to go on.

"Miss Annell," she said. "She's part of the team that treats him, you know and I'm sure she—"

Mrs. Cann smiled, distantly. "Why, dear girl, I think I hear a note of—well, jealousy, I suppose. Now, isn't that the silliest thing? I mean, after all, these are doctors. Nurses. Professional people. Isn't it ridiculous to think of them as—as doing anything other than helping Marty back to life, back to real life? And I suppose that means back to us . . . unless he's changed, of course."

The barb had no power to hurt her, Marie thought; she was accustomed enough to that sort of thing. But she had to explain, to defend . . . for some reason. Into which she did not inquire. "She's a nurse, that's all," Marie said. "I suppose



she must know something more about Martin's treatment than we do."

"Naturally," Mrs. Cann said. "She's been close to him, you know." And again the barb failed of effect—so far as Marie could tell. Which was odd, but not to be questioned; the defense made itself valuable, and questioning might destroy it.

"Of course," Marie said.

"But even so," Mrs. Cann said after a second, "there ought to be something . . . if you haven't any ideas?"

"I'm afraid not," Marie said. "Since we don't know—"

"A book," Mrs. Cann said. "Or . . . well, not a book. He isn't really . . . isn't really *reading*, just now, is he?" And the question failed so far of the mark that Marie saw with great suddenness the pathetic, the distant necessities of Martin's mother. Who was also a human being: who was not, out of hand, to be condemned . . .

"Something else, then," she said, and Mrs. Cann brightened.

"I know just the thing," she said. "Marty was so fond of them—when he was a boy, you know, when he was happy, we were together . . . he was so fond of them, picking them to show me, all the kinds he could find anywhere around here."

"Yes?" Marie said.

"Flowers." And Mrs. Cann's face bore a smile so bright, so satisfied, that Marie had no heart to disturb it.

"I think flowers would be just the right thing," she said, and the smile remained.

"I'm so glad," Mrs. Cann said. "And we've got time before visiting hours to get them—I'm so glad you take the time, coming here early to be with

an old woman like me. I'm sure we can get him something really nice now . . ."

"Certainly," Marie said (and behind her eyes, all unseen by others, the nightmare slid, and held, and darkened all her world). "Something really nice."

Something Martin would recognize, from the childhood days . . . in which he had been so happy, just Martin and Mother together . . . something really nice, to remind him . . .

But: oh, Marie said, perhaps to herself, oh, my dear God, is there no end to this? Is there no end to any of it?

"A fine idea, and a fine day," Mrs. Cann said. "Let's go, then."

"Certainly," Marie said, her voice quite steady. She reminded herself how much practice she had had, in keeping her voice that steady.

And Mrs. Cann, moving toward the door, said only, cheerfully, with a bright decisiveness that might even have been real: "Fine!"

## 2

IT HAD NOT destroyed her. Miss Annell knew with perfect clarity that Dr. Herne had been worried—and silly Tempas as well, of course—but their worries had, of necessity, come to nothing. The new departure, the new risk, had not destroyed her.

Nothing could; she knew that. For what was the world—what was Martin Cann, what were the



Doctors, what was everything else—except her own creation? And she was superior, certainly, to *that*. She could be destroyed only by something more real, something larger . . . and there was, she perceived, nothing at all of that sort.

(Contagion? The thought had, during two weeks, crossed her mind often enough—and she had learned to dismiss it, when it appeared, as essentially meaningless. How could she suffer contagion from an unreal being, from an unreal situation? No: the fact of her sole existence was a fact, immediate and without argument. From that, and that alone, everything else followed. She wished she could get rid of the very thought of contagion, but clearly she didn't have her mind under such control, not yet. Fragments of the old, false world in which she was only one out of millions, comparatively defenseless and comparatively afraid, still held her, and training herself out of any reference to those fragments was going to take time. She was willing to give it the—entirely illusory—time; what difference, after all, did all these days and hours make? For all time was, of course, her creation. Sooner or later, these final fragments, she told herself, would disappear, and she would be, simply and finally, herself, knowing that only she existed, only she had ever existed. She was quite patient, and perfectly willing to wait, now that she knew the objective. It was worth waiting for, she was assured; it was, after all, truth.)

No, the new departure had done nothing to her. What (in the illusory world of American Memorial) it had done to Martin Cann was a different matter. She went back to recall it, to explore it. There had been the challenge, and a

challenge such as Cann could not ignore. There had been a Voice . . .

"I have given my word. You are not uncreated. And yet . . ."

Herne replied to the voice, an action so daring that the host stood stock-still and made no sound whatever. "Yes?" the elder brother said. "Complete your thought; leave us not wondering on it."

"Complete . . ."

"Do so," Herne said.

The Voice: "Very well. I had thought that I might have been better alone, without even such creation as you—as all of you. Alone, I was myself and there were none to combat me; now, these matters have changed. Truly, the wisdom of the wise, yea, even of the most wise, is confounded in its time, and the will of many shall confound it. Yet shall I not rescind my given word."

And, in the face of this final threat—standing, as it were, on the brink of what was felt to be nonexistence, final, absolute—Herne showed neither fear nor hesitation. His reply was immediate: "Alone, you created this host. The host is useful to you, and provides, in Council, some detailed and complete consideration for any view. Yet there is more . . ."

The Voice: "I need no such: I have created those whose views also I have created; and how, indeed, could it be otherwise?"

Herne's patient voice continued challenge. "You created all this host. Not, as I said, for Council or discussion, but for other reasons. For reasons—as it may be—of necessity."

The Voice: "Necessity constrains me not, and



no need can control me. What you say is empty noise, no more."

"So?" Herne said. The host remained still. "Will you, then, hear my reasons?"

The Voice, once again: "Your reasons, for my actions?" A pause. "Very well. It shall be so. What has been prophesied will here come to pass."

"Perhaps," Herne said evenly. "But this is the necessity which constrains you—that you are a creator. And what creator can exist without some creation to give meaning to his title?"

(As Herne knew perfectly well, this was the most monstrous of fallacies; but, in the odd imitation-cosmos in which Martin Cann lived, it might truly pass. So much he had later explained—so much he had opened the workings of his mind.)

After some pause, the Voice: "But this is an argument for any further creation, is it not?"

"It is not," Herne said instantly. "Some creation is necessary: further creation is always possible, but may or may not be advisable. This, you must see."

"Is there aught I do not see?" the voice said. "Is there aught of which I am ignorant? Before the creation of the world, I am; and after all worlds have gone into dust I shall be. Can there be aught of which I remain ignorant?"

And Herne continued along the same, the already-decided path. "There can," he said; "there is."

Shock. Fright, perhaps. A stirring of wings, a shifting of eyes and hands and all the senses of the host. Herne paid this no attention, as he could not; to what the Voice paid its attention he could not know. But there was a cessation of talk until the stir had died away. And then, still, magnifi-

cently certain, magnificently commanding, the Voice:

"Of what do I remain in ignorance?"

"You know that we can be, by your word, uncreated," Herne said with steady quiet. "Your knowledge is mistaken; some of us, I now perceive, can fall to nonexistence, but these, in present Council, are your faction. Our faction will not quickly uncreate—no matter your attempt."

"This is defiance—this is the adversary, as was prophesied!"

Herne nodded; wings rustled; speech. "Then try me. Try your ultimate command. I suffer it, and shall remain despite."

A . . . hesitation? Herne appeared to think it so.

A . . . particle of faint uncertainty?

At last, the Voice: "So be it. On yourself have you brought judgment, and the wise shall at the last be sent away. So be it."

And Herne waited, the others waited, the host waited . . .

A swift, a shivering, a lightning-flash of bright and total power, a whirlwind and a stillness.

Four remained. The four were Tempar, Moore, Annell, and Herne.

Silence. Withdrawal of the power. "Well?" Herne shot into that silence.

And the Voice: "I do not understand . . ."

"You shall. We were created as an aid to this, an aid to understanding."

"Yet I see not how such things can be . . ."

"You shall see, as you like, and by our service; for service, thus, we owe to you. No mild agreement, but the speech of truth."

"Truth . . ."



"A real truth, in a real world." (And even Herne was worried that he'd gone too far there . . . later.)

There came a silence longer than the others. The Voice spoke once again: "If you can aid me, so be it. Begin."

"In our next meeting—which is not long delayed."

"Now."

"I cannot give you aid except as aid is possible. I say when next we meet."

"You say . . ."

"As I must, in the service of yourself, and in the service of the truth."

And did the Voice say: "Very well," or anything at all? The darkness came, the whirling back to . . .

POWER OFF 1130.

POWER DRAIN COMPENSATED.

ATTACHMENTS OUT . . .

And an end. Perhaps (Herne later said) a good end . . . or a good beginning. Miss Annell shrugged at the phrase, remembering. What difference did it make, after all?

What difference, now she knew the truth, did anything make?

But if her own creations rebelled . . .

(A disturbing thought. She put it away. It did not disappear, but waited for her . . . somewhere. Somewhere. Not to be denied; not finally to be denied. And she ignored that, too.)

These silly—*people!*

## 3

"Is HE . . . improving? I mean, really improving?" Marie felt the words as awkward, even silly, but she could find no others, when this Miss Annell faced her. Miss Annell's face had grown more remote, she thought; was that because she had been close to Martin, had (in some real, important sense) actually known him, and was now looking at his . . . his fiancée?

But she did speak, she did give, professionally impeccable as to voice and manner, information. "He's improving. Much more rapidly than we had hoped . . ."

"Rapidly? Does he recognize—"

"You? Anyone?" And what colored those words? Contempt, jealousy, knowledge of some loss to her, to Marie herself, of some real piece of Martin? "Not yet. That is one of the last stages, you see. It may take time yet."

"Then his improvement . . ."

"Is a step on the road toward recognition, toward fulfilling his duties in the world."

And with that Marie had to be satisfied. Mrs. Cann had not hung back; she was even then in Martin's room with her flowers . . . Marie said: "Thank you," wondered if she'd meant the words, and went with some dispatch on past the desk and into Martin's room.

He sat there. He hardly moved. ("He turned



his head to look at the flowers," Mrs. Cann confided in an undertone. "I think that's an awfully good sign." And Marie found herself saying: "I'm sure it is," without either knowledge or hope. Miss Annell had leached out of her the latter; and Miss Annell alone owned the former.)

Mrs. Cann chattered on to him, apparently quite certain that somewhere, in some way, Martin was hearing her. Marie sat, for the most part, silent. Time went by; and then, for a few seconds, Mrs. Cann went out into the hall. ("I'll be right back. Got to powder my nose," she confided, in the ugliest type of ancient slang.) Marie sat, staring at Martin—thin, pale, his hair so neatly combed you knew he hadn't done the job himself, his hospital clothing rumpled, if clean, his limbs disposed apparently at random. His eyes were open, large and blue; they saw nothing she could recognize or respond to.

"Martin . . ." she began, feeling that she had no chance to get through to him, and at the same time feeling the desperation of only-a-few-seconds. "Martin, whether you can hear me or not . . . Martin, whatever's left when you're . . . cured, whatever it is, whether I recognize it or not, I promise you—I won't desert it. I won't leave you alone, Martin. I won't leave you without protection. Without me."

The flicker of an eyelid? Accident, she told herself; no more than accident.

"I won't leave you," she said again. "No matter what's left, no matter what's much better left behind. I swear to you . . ."

And Mrs. Cann was in the room.

The visit's time was taken up with chatter, from then on.

# SIX

## 1

PATIENT: MARTIN CANN 30395.

DOCTOR ATTENDING: DR. HERNE.

RESPONSE TO TREATMENT: SATISFACTORY.

SUGGESTED DATE OF TRANSFER TO OUTPATIENT STATUS: JULY 3.

RESPONSIBLE SIGNATORY FOR PATIENT: MRS. DORÉ CANN (MOTHER).

SUGGESTED DOCTOR HANDLING OUTPATIENT THERAPY: DR. YANSOU.

SPECIAL RECOMMENDATIONS, IF ANY: SEE FULL REPORT ON TREATMENT; PLEASE CONSULT WITH DR. HERNE BEFORE BEGINNING OUTPATIENT STATUS.

PRESENT WARD & ROOM NUMBER . . .

"It's a little rushed, isn't it?" Tempar asked.

Behind his desk, Dr. Herne began to relax. "I don't think so. It's to everyone's advantage to get him into Outpatient as soon as possible. Consolidate the relationships with the 'real world,' and



give him something stable in the way of Yansou to fall back on as needed . . .”

“Release one more bed . . .”

Herne shrugged. “It’s a consideration. Not a prime consideration.”

“Even so—”

“No,” Herne said. “On this one, I’m prepared to overrule. I think we all took on too many characteristics of Martin’s world. If the decision has to be made, then I’ll have to ignore the rest, and make it.”

“As the . . . elder brother?”

Herne very nearly smiled. “As the responsible party,” he said. “I can’t pass the decision on, and I think it’s best for Martin.”

“It may be,” Tempar said. “You pulled a wild one there . . .”

“I know it. Was there any other way?”

“All right.” Tempar went over to the door and leaned on it. “You were right that time; you may be right this time, too.”

“I think I am,” Herne said mildly. “But I’d like to ask—”

“I know,” Tempar said impatiently. “What have I learned—right?”

“Right.” The word made Herne self-conscious, just a bit. Resolutely, he ignored the pinprick. There were more important things . . .

“I’ve learned . . .” Tempar’s voice trailed off. In a kind of agony he asked: “What has *she* learned?”

“Miss Annell?” Herne said. “She’s—I know this is hard to accept, but nothing less than truth will serve—she’s beginning to learn. A lesson more painful than I’ve ever had to take—than you may

ever have. I hope that's true. But that she's learning; I am quite sure of that."

"In another hospital . . ."

"She could hardly be treated here," Herne said gently. "No staff member can—you know that."

"Yes, but . . ." The hopelessness of discussion clamped down, it appeared, on Tempar's words. He stared, mute, waiting.

"And her case is mild, comparatively simple. We have the etiology . . . or most of it. I don't think we need fear for Miss Annell. The percentage of return among staff seems to be near ninety-three, you know."

"But that seven per cent—"

"The price we pay," Hence said. "The price we all pay. What you and Miss Annell had between you . . . is none of my business, I suppose. But don't think I haven't paid the price, in my own way." (Katherine, Katherine . . . once, perhaps, there had been a chance. But there was not any chance any more.) "You have to learn that, really learn it, and learn to accept it."

"Doctor—"

"There is no other way."

Tempar shifted against the door. Herne thought of asking him to sit down, decided against it. A silence filled the room for a few seconds.

" . . . What did I learn?" Tempar said, his voice tense, removed—as good a recovery, for the moment, as Dr. Herne had hoped for. Time would do the rest of that work. "Action—action is necessary. But not always necessary . . . and never necessary without consideration."

"Never?"

" . . . There are no certainties," Tempar said after



a time, as if by rote. Well, it was in the textbooks. That it was also true was something Tempar, with luck, would learn another time, in another therapy session.

"Of course," Herne said. "We learn, too, you know. We learn with the patient—with every patient. And, with luck, we continue to learn, continue to know ourselves, know the world—the worlds—a bit better. Without luck . . ." He hesitated, stopped. Tempar said:

"Without luck . . . what?"

Herne shrugged. "Miss Moore," he said. "On this one, she didn't do any real harm—but there's always a textbook nurse. A closed mind." (For neither of them were ever to know that Miss Moore could have seen what had happened to Lenore Annell, could have noticed it, mentioned it, days earlier than any other notice. Miss Moore, perhaps, never knew herself that she had that opportunity.)

"Someone better?" Tempar said.

Herne shook his head. "Better the weakling you know than the one you don't," he said. "To some extent, you can plan around known weaknesses; unknown ones come as a shock. And . . . there are so few without major weaknesses . . ."

"Perhaps," Tempar said. "Do you know . . ."

"Yes?"

Tempar shut his eyes, opened them again. "I thought of replacing you, did you know that?" And before Herne could have replied, he was going on: "The man of action, the man of . . . confidence. But I'm beginning to see . . ."

"That action is a secondary quality," Herne said. "Yes."

"That I can't replace you. That you know too

much, see too much . . ." Tempar made a single helpless gesture with one arm.

"And that I rather like playing God," Herne said. "As I learned—more thoroughly than ever before. God . . . or his mirror-image."

"It had to be done," Tempar said.

It was Herne's time to hesitate. At last. Very slowly, looking into the past and perhaps into the unknown, riskfilled future, he said:

"I suppose so. I suppose so."

## 2

"Martin . . ."

"Yes, Marie?"

"Now that they say you're well—"

"But they don't. They say I'm getting well. There's a difference—and a difference I can even see for myself. Don't fool yourself, Marie. I need support, professional support. I'm going to need it for a while."

Marie stared at him—still pale, still thin, but somehow, now, himself. Which was impossible.

"Martin . . ."

"Yes?"

"You're . . . yourself," she said. "You're . . . entirely yourself."

"Not with my mother," he said. "I can't handle all that, yet. Or with Father . . . Father . . ." He shook his head; he very nearly grinned. "I can't



recall that name. What would the doctors call it—fugue? Amnesia, temporary, selective?"

"It doesn't matter," Marie said, and Martin nodded very soberly.

"No, it doesn't," he said. "What you call it . . . there are too many words. There always have been, for me . . . But it's what you do about it that counts. I'll be able to face them, to deal with them . . . but not now."

"And . . ." she began. Martin looked at her as if he were reading her mind. He did not (there in the hospital room, quite alone, the door slightly ajar) touch her at all.

"Us?" he said. "Marie, that's going to have to wait, too. I've got to be stronger, I've got to be sure . . ."

"But . . . you're yourself . . ."

"Who else would I be?"

"I thought . . ." She groped for words. It took her some time to explain what she had thought, what she had (as far as she had ever been able to see) actually known. When she had that done, Martin nodded gravely.

"But . . . you see . . . all that is in me," he said. "Always will be. In you, too . . . in all of us. But . . ." His hands sketched something, a questioning set of shapes, in the hospital air. "But it's not what I have, or what I am. It's like with the names. Not what you call it—not what I have. Instead, it's what I do about it. The . . . the . . . *attitude* I have toward it. I'm no different; but I can select a better attitude now. Maybe. For a while."

"For good," Marie said.

Martin shrugged. "I need support: I'm not well," he said. "I know that. But . . . well, we can hope."

"Yes." And quite a long silence before she said: "I met—several times, I met—a nurse here, a Miss Annell."

Martin's tone was polite, questioning, and (she thought, she hoped) no more. "Yes?"

"She was on your case, she said."

"That's right," Martin said. "Why mention it, just now?"

Marie took a deep breath. "Martin, what did you—what do you think of her? Not as a nurse—as a person."

He looked grave. "It's important to you?"

"It's . . . important," she said. "Yes." And left it at that, waiting for his answer.

He gave it almost casually. "She was an angel," Martin said. "She was a positive angel."

"Then . . . you . . ."

"No," he said. "You don't understand. She *was*. And—not a casual description. But she isn't, now."

"Martin . . ."

"Yes?"

"She wasn't . . . a woman you might have . . ."

"No," Martin said. "Absolutely no. I tell you, she was an angel." And threw back his head and began, relaxedly, sanely, beautifully, to laugh.

It came to Marie Seaver rather slowly (but it came to her; she saw it, and made of it the first small treasure in her new life) that Martin Cann had not laughed in a very long time.



## 3

PROGRAM JULY 5

ROOM 412 . . .

"Day after day," a technician said, "and nothing to do but watch them talk. Takes forever."

"Sure. Always does take forever."

"One day there'll be a hookup job we won't have to wait for."

"One day? Second Tuesday in April's first week, I think."

"Sure. All we got to do—"

"Hook 'em in, hook 'em out. Sure. What I want to know—"

"Know? I don't want to know. I want to get to work. And their talking goes on for years—"

"What I want to know is, why do we have to deal with these doctors and all? I mean, when you take a machine—"

"Then everything's simple."

"Hook a machine up, it works. No backtalk. No prima donna stuff."

"These . . . doctors. These people."

"Think they're something."

"A machine, now—"

"A machine," one technician said, "you can understand. Right?"

"Right."

THE END

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