

An Anthology of Original SF Stories

ORBIT 10

Edited by **DAMON KNIGHT**

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*An Anthology of New
Science Fiction Stories*



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CONTENTS

THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS	1
Gene Wolfe	
JODY AFTER THE WAR	64
Edward Bryant	
AL	71
Carol Emshwiller	
NOW I'M WATCHING ROGER	82
Alexei Panshin	
WHIRL CAGE	87
Jack M. Dann	
A KINGDOM BY THE SEA	94
Gardner R. Dozois	
CHRISTLINGS	118
Albert Teichner	
LIVE, FROM BERCHTESGADEN	133
Geo. Alec Effinger	
DORG	146
R. A. Lafferty	

vi *Contents*

GANTLET	157
Richard E. Peck	
THE FUSION BOMB	169
Kate Wilhelm	
Index to Volumes 1-10	209

Orbit 10

Gene Wolfe

THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS

When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,
And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,
That eats the she-wolf's young.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

WHEN I WAS a boy my brother David and I had to go to bed early whether we were sleepy or not. In summer particularly, bedtime often came before sunset; and because our dormitory was in the east wing of the house, with a broad window facing the central courtyard and thus looking west, the hard, pinkish light sometimes streamed in for hours while we lay staring out at my father's crippled monkey perched on a flaking parapet, or telling stories, one bed to another, with soundless gestures.

Our dormitory was on the uppermost floor of the house, and our window had a shutter of twisted iron which we were forbidden to open. I suppose the theory was that a burglar might, on some rainy morning (this being the only time he could hope to find the roof garden deserted) let down a rope and so enter our room unless the shutter was closed.

The object of this hypothetical and very courageous thief would not, of course, be merely to steal us. Children, whether boys or girls, were extraordinarily cheap in Port-Mimizon; and indeed I was once told that my father, who had formerly traded in them, no longer did so because of the poor market. Whether or not this was true, everyone—or nearly everyone—knew of some profes-

sional who would furnish what was wanted, within reason, at a low price. These men made the children of the poor and the careless their study, and should you want, say, a brown-skinned, red-haired little girl, or one who was plump, or who lisped, a blond boy like David, or a pale, brown-haired, brown-eyed boy such as I, they could provide one in a few hours.

Neither, in all probability, would the imaginary burglar seek to hold us for ransom, though my father was thought in some quarters to be immensely rich. There were several reasons for this. Those few people who knew that my brother and I existed knew also, or at least had been led to believe, that my father cared nothing at all for us. Whether this was true or not I cannot say; certainly I believed it, and my father never gave me the least reason to doubt it, though at the time the thought of killing him had never occurred to me.

And if these reasons were not sufficiently convincing, anyone with an understanding of the stratum in which he had become perhaps the most permanent feature would realize that for him, who was already forced to give large bribes to the secret police, to disgorge money once in that way would leave him open to a thousand ruinous attacks; and this may have been—this and the fear in which he was held—the real reason we were never stolen.

The iron shutter is (for I am writing now in my old dormitory room) hammered to resemble in a stiff and oversymmetrical way the boughs of a willow. In my boyhood it was overgrown by a silvertrumpet vine (since dug up) which had scrambled up the wall from the court below, and I used to wish that it would close the window entirely and thus shut out the sun when we were trying to sleep; but David, whose bed was under the window, was forever reaching up to snap off branches so that he could whistle through the hollow stems, making a sort of Panpipe of four or five. The piping, of course, growing louder as David grew bolder, would in time attract the attention of Mr. Million, our tutor. Mr. Million would enter the room in perfect silence, his wide wheels gliding across the uneven floor while David pretended sleep. The Panpipe might by this time be concealed under his pillow, in the sheet, or even under the mattress, but Mr. Million would find it.

What he did with those little musical instruments after confis-

3 *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*

cating them from David I had forgotten until yesterday; although in prison, when we were kept in by storms or heavy snow, I often occupied myself by trying to recall it. To have broken them, or dropped them through the shutter into the patio below would have been completely unlike him; Mr. Million never broke anything intentionally, and never wasted anything. I could visualize perfectly the half-sorrowing expression with which he drew the tiny pipes out (the face which seemed to float behind his screen was much like my father's) and the way in which he turned and glided from the room. But what became of them?

Yesterday, as I said (this is the sort of thing that gives me confidence), I remembered. He had been talking to me here while I worked, and when he left it seemed to me—as my glance idly followed his smooth motion through the doorway—that something, a sort of flourish I recalled from my earliest days, was missing. I closed my eyes and tried to remember what the appearance had been, eliminating any skepticism, any attempt to guess in advance what I “must” have seen; and I found that the missing element was a brief flash, the glint of metal, over Mr. Million's head.

Once I had established this I knew that it must have come from a swift upward motion of his arm, like a salute, as he left our room. For an hour or more I could not guess the reason for that gesture, and could only suppose it, whatever it had been, to have been destroyed by time. I tried to recall if the corridor outside our dormitory had, in that really not so distant past, held some object now vanished: a curtain or a windowshade, an appliance to be activated, anything that might account for it. There was nothing.

I went into the corridor and examined the floor minutely for marks indicating furniture. I looked for hooks or nails driven into the walls, pushing aside the coarse old tapestries. Craning my neck, I looked at the door itself and saw what I had not seen in the thousands of times I had passed through it: that like all the doors in this house, which is very old, it had a massive frame of wooden slabs, and that one of these, forming the lintel, protruded enough from the wall to make a narrow shelf above the door.

I pushed my chair into the hall and stood on the seat. The shelf was thick with dust, in which lay forty-seven of my brother's pipes

and a wonderful miscellany of other small objects. Objects many of which I recalled, but some of which still fail to summon any flicker of response from the recesses of my mind—

The small blue egg of a songbird, speckled with brown. I suppose the bird must have nested in the vine outside our window, and that David or I despoiled the nest only to be robbed ourselves by Mr. Million. But I do not recall the incident.

And there is a (broken) puzzle made of the bronzed viscera of some small animal, and—wonderfully evocative—one of those large and fancifully decorated keys, sold annually, which during the year of its currency will admit the possessor to certain rooms of the city library after hours. Mr. Million, I suppose, must have confiscated it when, after expiration, he found it doing duty as a toy; but what memories!

My father had his own library, now in my possession; but we were forbidden to go there. I have a dim memory of standing—at how early an age I cannot say—before that huge, carved door. Of seeing it swing back, and the crippled monkey on my father's shoulder pressing itself against his hawk face, with the black scarf and scarlet dressing gown beneath and the rows and rows of shabby books and notebooks behind them, and the sick-sweet smell of formaldehyde coming from the laboratories beyond the sliding mirror.

I do not remember what he said, or whether it had been I or another who had knocked, but I do recall that after the door had closed again a woman in pink whom I thought very pretty stooped to bring her face to the level of my own and assured me that my father had written all the books I had just seen, and that I doubted it not at all.

*

* *

My brother and I, as I have said, were forbidden this room; but when we were a little older Mr. Million used to take us, about twice a week, on expeditions to the city library. These were very nearly the only times we were allowed to leave the house, and since our tutor disliked curling the jointed length of his metal

5 *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*

modules into a hirecart, and no sedan chair would have withstood his weight or contained his bulk, these forays were made on foot.

For a long time this route to the library was the only part of the city I knew. Three blocks down Saltimbanque Street where our house stood, right at the Rue d'Asticot to the slave market and a block beyond that to the library. A child, not knowing what is extraordinary and what commonplace, usually lights midway between the two, finds interest in incidents adults consider beneath notice and calmly accepts the most improbable occurrences. My brother and I were fascinated by the spurious antiques and bad bargains of the Rue d'Asticot, but often bored when Mr. Million insisted on stopping for an hour at the slave market.

It was not a large one, Port-Mimizon not being a center of the trade, and the auctioneers and their merchandise were frequently on a most friendly basis—having met several times previously as a succession of owners discovered the same faults. Mr. Million never bid, but watched the bidding, motionless, while we kicked our heels and munched the fried bread he had bought at a stall for us. There were sedan chairmen, their legs knotted with muscle, and simpering bath attendants; fighting slaves in chains, with eyes dulled by drugs or blazing with imbecile ferocity; cooks, house servants, a hundred others—yet David and I used to beg to be allowed to proceed alone to the library.

This library was a wastefully large building which had held government offices in the old French-speaking days. The park in which it had once stood had died of petty corruption, and the library now rose from a clutter of shops and tenements. A narrow thoroughfare led to the main doors, and once we were inside the squalor of the neighborhood vanished, replaced by a kind of peeling grandeur. The main desk was directly beneath the dome, and this dome, drawing up with it a spiraling walkway lined with the library's main collection, floated five hundred feet in the air: a stony sky whose least chip falling might kill one of the librarians on the spot.

While Mr. Million browsed his way majestically up the helix, David and I raced ahead until we were several full turns in advance and could do what we liked. When I was still quite young it would often occur to me that, since my father had written (on

the testimony of the lady in pink) a roomful of books, some of them should be here; and I would climb resolutely until I had almost reached the dome, and there rummage. Because the librarians were very lax about reshelving, there seemed always a possibility of finding what I had failed to find before. The shelves towered far above my head, but when I felt myself unobserved I climbed them like ladders, stepping on books when there was no room on the shelves themselves for the square toes of my small brown shoes, and occasionally kicking books to the floor where they remained until our next visit and beyond, evidence of the staff's reluctance to climb that long, coiled slope.

The upper shelves were, if anything, in worse disorder than those more conveniently located, and one glorious day when I attained the highest of all I found occupying that lofty, dusty position only a lorn copy of *Monday or Tuesday* leaning against a book about the assassination of Trotsky.

I never found any books of my father's, but I did not regret the long climbs to the top of the dome. If David had come with me we raced up together, up and down the sloping floor—or peered over the rail at Mr. Million's slow progress while we debated the feasibility of putting an end to him with one cast of some ponderous work. If David preferred to pursue interests of his own farther down I ascended to the very top where the cap of the dome curved right over my head; and there, from a rusted iron catwalk not much wider than one of the shelves I had been climbing (and I suspect not nearly so strong) opened in turn each of a circle of tiny piercings—piercings in a wall of iron, but so shallow a wall that when I had slid the corroded cover plates out of the way I could thrust my head through and feel myself truly outside, with the wind and the circling birds and the lime-spotted expanse of the dome curving away beneath me.

To the west, since it was taller than the surrounding houses and marked by the orange trees on the roof, I could make out our house. To the south, the masts of the ships in the harbor, and in clear weather—if it was the right time of day—the whitecaps of the tidal race Sainte Anne drew between the peninsulas called First Finger and Thumb. (And once, as I very well recall, while looking south I saw the great geyser of sunlit water when a star-

crosser splashed down.) To east and north spread the city proper, the citadel and the grand market and the forests and mountains beyond.

But sooner or later, whether David had accompanied me or gone off on his own, Mr. Million summoned us. Then we were forced to go with him to one of the wings to visit this or that science collection. This meant books for lessons. My father insisted that we learn biology, anatomy, and chemistry thoroughly, and under Mr. Million's tutelage learn them we did—he never considering a subject mastered until we could discuss every topic mentioned in every book catalogued under the heading. The life sciences were my own favorites, but David preferred languages, literature, and law; for we got a smattering of these as well as anthropology, cybernetics, and psychology.

When he had selected the books that would form our study for the next few days and urged us to choose more for ourselves, Mr. Million would retire with us to some quiet corner of one of the science reading rooms, where there were chairs and a table and room sufficient for him to curl the jointed length of his body or align it against a wall or bookcase in a way that left the aisles clear. To designate the formal beginning of our class he used to begin by calling roll, my own name always coming first.

I would say, "Here," to show that he had my attention.

"And David."

"Here." (David has an illustrated *Tales from the Odyssey* open on his lap where Mr. Million cannot see it, but he looks at Mr. Million with bright, feigned interest. Sunshine slants down to the table from a high window, and shows the air aswarm with dust.)

"I wonder if either of you noticed the stone implements in the room through which we passed a few moments ago?"

We nod, each hoping the other will speak.

"Were they made on Earth, or here on our own planet?"

This is a trick question, but an easy one. David says, "Neither one. They're plastic." And we giggle.

Mr. Million says patiently, "Yes, they're plastic reproductions, but from where did the originals come?" His face, so similar to my father's, but which I thought of at this time as belonging only

to him, so that it seemed a frightening reversal of nature to see it on a living man instead of his screen, was neither interested, nor angry, nor bored; but coolly remote.

David answers, "From Sainte Anne." Sainte Anne is the sister planet to our own, revolving with us about a common center as we swing around the sun. "The sign said so, and the aborigines there made them—there weren't any abos here."

Mr. Million nods, and turns his impalpable face toward me. "Do you feel these stone implements occupied a central place in the lives of their makers? Say no."

"No."

"Why not?"

I think frantically, not helped by David, who is kicking my shins under the table. A glimmering comes.

"Talk. Answer at once."

"It's obvious, isn't it?" (Always a good thing to say when you're not even sure "it" is even possible.) "In the first place, they can't have been very good tools, so why would the abos have relied on them? You might say they needed those obsidian arrowheads and bone fishhooks for getting food, but that's not true. They could poison the water with the juices of certain plants, and for primitive people the most effective way to fish is probably with weirs, or with nets of rawhide or vegetable fiber. Just the same way, trapping or driving animals with fire would be more effective than hunting; and anyway stone tools wouldn't be needed at all for gathering berries and the shoots of edible plants and things like that, which were probably their most important foods—those stone things got in the glass case here because the snares and nets rotted away and they're all that's left, so the people that make their livings that way pretend they were important."

"Good. David? Be original, please. Don't repeat what you've just heard."

David looks up from his book, his blue eyes scornful of both of us. "If you could have asked them they would have told you that their magic and their religion, the songs they sang and the traditions of their people were what were important. They killed their sacrificial animals with flails of sea shells that cut like razors, and they didn't let their men father children until they had stood

9 *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*

enough fire to cripple them for life. They mated with trees and drowned the children to honor their rivers. That was what was important."

With no neck, Mr. Million's face nodded. "Now we will debate the humanity of those aborigines. David negative and first."

(I kick him, but he has pulled his hard, freckled legs up beneath him, or hidden them behind the legs of his chair, which is cheating.) "Humanity," he says in his most objectionable voice, "in the history of human thought implies descent from what we may conveniently call *Adam*; that is, the original Terrestrial stock, and if the two of you don't see that you're idiots."

I wait for him to continue, but he is finished. To give myself time to think I say, "Mr. Million, it's not fair to let him call me names in a debate. Tell him that's not debating, it's *fighting*, isn't it?"

Mr. Million says, "No personalities, David." (David is already peeking at Polyphemus the Cyclops and Ulysses, hoping I'll go on for a long time. I feel challenged and decide to do so.)

I begin, "The argument which holds descent from Terrestrial stock pivotal is neither valid nor conclusive. Not conclusive because it is distinctly possible that the aborigines of Sainte Anne were descendants of some earlier wave of human expansion—one, perhaps, even predating *the Homeric Greeks*."

Mr. Million says mildly, "I would confine myself to arguments of higher probability if I were you."

I nevertheless gloss upon the Etruscans, Atlantis; and the tenacity and expansionist tendencies of a hypothetical technological culture occupying Gondwanaland. When I have finished Mr. Million says, "Now reverse. David, affirmative without repeating."

My brother, of course, has been looking at his book instead of listening, and I kick him with enthusiasm expecting him to be stuck; but he says, "The abos are human because they're all dead."

"Explain."

"If they were alive it would be dangerous to let them be human because they'd ask for things, but with them dead it makes it more interesting if they were, and the settlers killed them all."

And so it goes. The spot of sunlight travels across the black-

streaked red of the tabletop—traveled across it a hundred times. We would leave through one of the side doors and walk through a neglected areaway between two wings. There would be empty bottles there and wind-scattered papers of all kinds, and once a dead man in bright rags over whose legs we boys skipped while Mr. Million rolled silently around him. As we left the areaway for a narrow street the bugles of the garrison at the citadel (sounding so far away) would call the troopers to their evening mess. In the Rue d'Asticot the lamplighter would be at work, and the shops shut behind their iron grilles. The sidewalks magically clear of old furniture would seem broad and bare.

Our own Saltimbanque Street would be very different, with the first revelers arriving. White-haired, hearty men guiding very young men and boys, men and boys handsome and muscular but a shade overfed; young men who made diffident jokes and smiled with excellent teeth. These were always the early ones, and when I was a little older I sometimes wondered if they were early only because the white-haired men wished to have their pleasure and yet a good night's sleep as well, or if it was because they knew the young men they were introducing to my father's establishment would be drowsy and irritable after midnight, like children who have been kept up too late.

Because Mr. Million did not want us to use the alleys after dark we came in the front entrance with the white-haired men and their nephews and sons. There was a garden there, not much bigger than a small room and recessed into the windowless front of the house. In it were beds of ferns the size of graves; a little fountain whose water fell upon rods of glass to make a continual tinkling, and which had to be protected from the street boys; and, with his feet firmly planted, indeed almost buried in moss, an iron statue of a dog with three heads.

It was this statue, I suppose, that gave our house its popular name of La Maison du Chien, though there may have been a reference to our surname as well. The three heads were sleekly powerful, with pointed muzzles and ears. One was snarling and one, the center head, regarded the world of garden and street with a look of tolerant interest. The third, the one nearest the brick path that led to our door, was—there is no other term for it

—frankly grinning; and it was the custom for my father's patrons to pat this head between the ears as they came up the path. Their fingers had polished the spot to the consistency of black glass.



This, then, was my world at seven of our world's long years, and perhaps for half a year beyond. Most of my days were spent in the little classroom over which Mr. Million presided, and my evenings in the dormitory where David and I played and fought in total silence. They were varied by the trips to the library I have described or, very rarely, elsewhere. I pushed aside the leaves of the silvertrumpet vine occasionally to watch the girls and their benefactors in the court below, or heard their talk drifting down from the roof garden, but the things they did and talked of were of no great interest to me. I knew that the tall, hatchet-faced man who ruled our house and was called *Maître* by the girls and servants was my father. I had known for as long as I could remember that there was somewhere a fearsome woman—the servants were in terror of her—called *Madame*, but that she was neither my mother nor David's, nor my father's wife.

That life and my childhood, or at least my infancy, ended one evening after David and I, worn out with wrestlings and silent arguments, had gone to sleep. Someone shook me by the shoulder and called me, and it was not Mr. Million but one of the servants, a hunched little man in a shabby red jacket. "He wants you," this summoner informed me. "Get up."

I did, and he saw that I was wearing nightclothes. This I think had not been covered in his instructions, and for a moment during which I stood and yawned he debated with himself. "Get dressed," he said at last. "Comb your hair."

I obeyed, putting on the black velvet trousers I had worn the day before, but (guided by some instinct) a new, clean shirt. The room to which he then conducted me (through tortuous corridors now emptied of the last patrons; and others, musty, filthy with the excrement of rats, to which patrons were never admitted) was my father's library—the room with the great carved door be-

fore which I had received the whispered confidences of the woman in pink. I had never been inside it, but when my guide rapped discreetly on the door it swung back, and I found myself within almost before I realized what had happened.

My father, who had opened the door, closed it behind me, and leaving me standing where I was, walked to the most distant end of that long room and threw himself down in a huge chair. He was wearing the red dressing gown and black scarf in which I had most often seen him, and his long, sparse hair was brushed straight back. He stared at me, and I remember that my lip trembled as I tried to keep from breaking into sobs.

"Well," he said, after we had looked at one another for a long time, "and there you are. What am I going to call you?"

I told him my name, but he shook his head. "Not that. You must have another name for me—a private name. You may choose it yourself if you like."

I said nothing. It seemed to me quite impossible that I should have any name other than the two words which were, in some mystic sense I only respected without understanding, *my name*.

"I'll choose for you then," my father said. "You are Number Five. Come here, Number Five."

I came, and when I was standing in front of him he told me, "Now we are going to play a game. I am going to show you some pictures, do you understand? And all the time you are watching them you must talk. Talk about the pictures. If you talk you win, but if you stop, even for just a second, I do. Understand?"

I said I did.

"Good. I know you're a bright boy. As a matter of fact Mr. Million has sent me all the examinations he has given you, and the tapes he makes when he talks with you, did you know that? Did you ever wonder what he did with them?"

I said, "I thought he threw them away," and my father, I noticed, leaned forward as I spoke, a circumstance I found flattering at the time.

"No, I have them here." He pressed a switch. "Now remember, you must not stop talking."

But for the first few moments I was much too interested to talk.

There had appeared in the room, as though by magic, a boy considerably younger than I, and a painted wooden soldier almost as large as I was myself, which when I reached out to touch them proved as insubstantial as air. "Say something," my father said. "What are you thinking about, Number Five?"

I was thinking about the soldier, of course, and so was the younger boy, who appeared to be about three. He toddled through my arm like mist and attempted to knock it over.

They were holographs--three-dimensional images formed by the interference of two wave fronts of light--things which had seemed very dull when I had seen them illustrated by flat pictures of chessmen in my physics book; but it was some time before I connected those chessmen with the phantoms who walked in my father's library at night. All this time my father was saying, "Talk! Say something! What do you think the little boy is feeling?"

"Well, the little boy likes the big soldier, but he wants to knock him down if he can because the soldier's only a toy, really, but it's bigger than he is . . ." And so I talked, and for a long time, hours I suppose, continued. The scene changed and changed again. The giant soldier was replaced by a pony, a rabbit, a meal of soup and crackers. But the three-year-old boy remained the central figure. When the hunched man in the shabby coat came again, yawning, to take me back to my bed, my voice had worn to a husky whisper and my throat ached. In my dreams that night I saw the little boy scampering from one activity to another, his personality in some way confused with my own and my father's so that I was at once observer, observed, and a third presence observing both.

The next night I fell asleep almost at the moment Mr. Million sent us up to bed, retaining consciousness only long enough to congratulate myself on so doing. I woke when the hunched man entered the room, but it was not me whom he roused from the sheets but David. Quietly, pretending I still slept (for it had occurred to me, and seemed quite reasonable at the time, that if he were to see I was awake he might take both of us), I watched as my brother dressed and struggled to impart some sort of order to his fair tangle. When he returned I was sound asleep, and had no opportunity to question him until Mr. Million left us alone, as

he sometimes did, to eat our breakfast. I had told him my own experiences as a matter of course, and what he had to tell me was simply that he had had an evening very similar to mine. He had seen holographic pictures, and apparently the same pictures: the wooden soldier, the pony. He had been forced to talk constantly, as Mr. Million had so often made us do in debates and verbal examinations. The only way in which his interview with our father had differed from mine, as nearly as I could determine, appeared when I asked him by what name he had been called.

He looked at me blankly, a piece of toast half raised to his mouth.

I asked again, "What name did he call you by when he talked to you?"

"He called me David. What did you think?"

With the beginning of these interviews the pattern of my life changed, the adjustments I assumed to be temporary becoming imperceptibly permanent, settling into a new shape of which neither David nor I was consciously aware. Our games and stories after bedtime stopped, and David less and less often made his Panpipes of the silvertrumpet vine. Mr. Million allowed us to sleep later and we were in some subtle way acknowledged to be more adult. At about this time too he began to take us to a park where there was an archery range and provision for various games. This little park, which was not far from our house, was bordered on one side by a canal. And there, while David shot arrows at a goose stuffed with straw or played tennis, I often sat staring at the quiet, only slightly dirty water; or waiting for one of the white ships—great ships with bows as sharp as the scalpel-bills of kingfishers and four, five, or even seven masts—which were, infrequently, towed up from the harbor by ten or twelve spans of oxen.

*

* *

In the summer of my eleventh or twelfth year—I think the twelfth—we were permitted for the first time to stay after sundown in the park, sitting on the grassy, sloped margin of the

canal to watch a fireworks display. The first preliminary flight of rockets had no sooner exhausted itself half a mile above the city than David became ill. He rushed to the water and vomited, plunging his hands half up to the elbows in mud while the red and white stars burned in glory above him. Mr. Million took him up in his arms and when poor David had emptied himself we hurried home.

His disease proved not much more lasting than the tainted sandwich that had occasioned it, but while our tutor was putting him to bed I decided not to be cheated of the remainder of the display, parts of which I had glimpsed between the intervening houses as we made our way home; I was forbidden the roof after dark, but I knew very well where the nearest stair was. The thrill I felt in penetrating that prohibited world of leaf and shadow while fireflowers of purple and gold and blazing scarlet overtopped it affected me like the aftermath of a fever, leaving me short of breath, shaking, and cold in the midst of summer.

There were a great many more people on the roof than I had anticipated, the men without cloaks, hats or sticks, (all of which they had left in my father's checkrooms) and the girls, my father's employees, in costumes that displayed their rouged breasts in enclosures of twisted wire like birdcages, or gave them the appearance of great height (dissolved only when someone stood very close to them), or gowns whose skirts reflected their wearer's faces and busts as still water does the trees standing near it, so that they appeared, in the intermittent colored flashes, like the queens of strange suits in a tarot deck.

I was seen of course, since I was much too excited to conceal myself effectively; but no one ordered me back, and I suppose they assumed I had been permitted to come up to see the fireworks.

These continued for a long time. I remember one patron, a heavy, square-faced, stupid-looking man who seemed to be someone of importance, who was so eager to enjoy the company of his protégé—who did not want to go in until the display was over—that, since he insisted on privacy, twenty or thirty bushes and small trees had to be rearranged on the parterre to make a little grove around them. I helped the waiters carry some of the smaller

tubs and pots, and managed to duck into the structure as it was completed. Here I could still watch the exploding rockets and "aerial bombs" through the branches, and at the same time the patron and his protégé, who was watching them a good deal more intently than I.

My motive, as well as I can remember, was not prurience but simple curiosity. I was at that age when we are passionately interested, but the passion is one of science. Mine was nearly satisfied when I was grasped by the shirt by someone behind me and drawn out of the shrubbery.

When I was clear of the leaves I was released, and I turned expecting to see Mr. Million, but it was not he. My captor was a little gray-haired woman in a black dress whose skirt, as I noticed even at the time, fell straight from her waist to the ground. I suppose I bowed to her, since she was clearly no servant, but she returned no salutation at all, staring intently into my face in a way that made me think she could see as well in the intervals between the bursting glories as she could by their light. At last, in what must have been the finale of the display, a great rocket rose screaming on a river of flame, and for an instant she consented to look up. Then, when it had exploded in a mauve orchid of unbelievable size and brilliance, this formidable little woman grabbed me again and led me firmly toward the stairs.

While we were on the level stone pavement of the roof garden she did not, as nearly as I could see, walk at all, but rather seemed to glide across the surface like an onyx chessman on a polished board; and that, in spite of all that has happened since, is the way I still remember her: as the Black Queen, a chess queen neither sinister nor beneficent, and black only as distinguished from some White Queen I was never fated to encounter.

When we reached the stairs, however, this smooth gliding became a fluid bobbing that brought two inches or more of the hem of her black skirt into contact with each step, as if her torso were descending each step as a small boat might a rapids—now rushing, now pausing, now almost backing in the crosscurrents of turbulence.

She steadied herself on these steps not only by holding onto me, but by grasping the arm of a maid who had been waiting for

us at the stairhead and who assisted her from the other side. I had supposed, while we were crossing the roof garden, that her gliding motion had been the result, merely, of a marvelously controlled walk and good posture, but I now understood her to be in some way handicapped; and I had the impression that without the help the maid and I gave her she might have fallen headfirst.

Once we had reached the bottom of the steps her smooth progress was resumed. She dismissed the maid with a nod and led me down the corridor in the direction opposite to that in which our dormitory and classroom lay until we reached a stairwell far toward the back of the house, a corkscrew, seldom-used flight, very steep, with only a low iron banister between the steps and a six-story drop into the cellars. Here she released me and told me crisply to go down. I went down several steps, then turned to see if she was having any difficulty.

She was not, but neither was she using the stairs. With her long skirt hanging as straight as a curtain she was floating, suspended, watching me, in the center of the stairwell. I was so startled that I stopped (which made her jerk her head angrily), then began to run. As I fled around and around the spiral she revolved with me, turning toward me always a face extraordinarily like my father's, one hand always on the railing. When we had descended to the second floor she swooped down and caught me as easily as a cat takes charge of an errant kitten, and led me through rooms and passages where I had never been permitted to go until I was as confused as I might have been in a strange building. At last we stopped before a door in no way different from any other. She opened it with an old-fashioned brass key with an edge like a saw and motioned for me to go in.

The room was brightly lit, and I was able to see clearly what I had only sensed on the roof and in the corridors: that the hem of her skirt hung two inches above the floor no matter how she moved, and that there was nothing between the hem and the floor at all. She waved me to a little footstool covered with needle-point and said, "Sit down," and when I had done so she glided across to a wingbacked rocker and sat facing me. After a moment she asked, "What's your name?" and when I told her she cocked an eyebrow at me and started the chair in motion by pushing

gently with her fingers at a floor lamp that stood beside it. After a long time she said, "And what does he call you?"

"He?" I was stupid, I suppose, with lack of sleep.

She pursed her lips. "My brother."

I relaxed a little. "Oh," I said, "you're my aunt then. I thought you looked like my father. He calls me Number Five."

For a moment she continued to stare, the corners of her mouth drawing down as my father's often did. Then she said, "That number's either far too low or too high. Living, there are he and I, and I suppose he's counting the simulator. Have you a sister, Number Five?"

Mr. Million had been having us read *David Copperfield*, and when she said this she reminded me so strikingly and unexpectedly of Aunt Betsey Trotwood that I shouted with laughter.

"There's nothing absurd about it. Your father had a sister—why shouldn't you? You have none?"

"No, ma'am, but I have a brother. His name is David."

"Call me Aunt Jeannine. Does David look like you, Number Five?"

I shook my head. "His hair is curly and blond instead of like mine. Maybe he looks a little like me, but not a lot."

"I suppose," my aunt said under her breath, "he used one of my girls."

"Ma'am?"

"Do you know who David's mother was, Number Five?"

"We're brothers, so I guess she would be the same as mine, but Mr. Million says she went away a long time ago."

"Not the same as yours," my aunt said. "No. I could show you a picture of your own. Would you like to see it?" She rang a bell, and a maid came curtsying from some room beyond; my aunt whispered to her and she went out again. My aunt asked, "And what do you do all day, Number Five, besides run up to the roof when you shouldn't? Are you taught?"

I told her about my experiments (I was stimulating unfertilized frog's eggs to asexual development and then doubling the chromosomes by a chemical treatment so that a further asexual generation could be produced) and the dissections Mr. Million was by then encouraging me to do, and while I talked I happened to

drop some remark about how interesting it would be to perform a biopsy on one of the aborigines of Sainte Anne if any were still in existence, since the first explorers' descriptions differed so widely and some pioneers there had claimed the abos could change their shapes.

"Ah," my aunt said, "you know about them. Let me test you, Number Five. What is Veil's Hypothesis?"

We had learned that several years before, so I said, "Veil's Hypothesis supposes the abos to have possessed the ability to mimic men perfectly. Veil thought that when the ships came from Earth the abos killed everyone and took their places and the ships, so they're not dead at all, we are."

"You mean the Earth people are," my aunt said. "The human beings."

"Ma'am?"

"If Veil was correct, then you and I are abos from Sainte Anne, at least in origin; which I suppose is what you meant. Do you think he was right?"

"I don't think it makes any difference. He said the imitation would have to be perfect, and if it is, they're the same as we were anyway." I thought I was being clever, but my aunt smiled, rocking more vigorously. It was very warm in the close, bright little room.

"Number Five, you're too young for semantics, and I'm afraid you've been led astray by that word *perfectly*. Dr. Veil, I'm certain, meant to use it loosely rather than as precisely as you seem to think. The imitation could hardly have been exact, since human beings don't possess that talent and to imitate them *perfectly* the abos would have to lose it."

"Couldn't they?"

"My dear child, abilities of every sort must evolve. And when they do they must be utilized or they atrophy. If the abos had been able to mimic so well as to lose the power to do so that would have been the end of them, and no doubt it would have come long before the first ships reached them. Of course there's not the slightest evidence they could do anything of the sort. They simply died off before they could be thoroughly studied, and Veil, who wants a dramatic explanation for the cruelty and irrationality he

sees around him, has hung fifty pounds of theory on nothing."

This last remark, especially as my aunt seemed so friendly, appeared to me to offer an ideal opportunity for a question about her remarkable means of locomotion, but as I was about to frame it we were interrupted, almost simultaneously from two directions. The maid returned carrying a large book bound in tooled leather, and she had no sooner handed it to my aunt than there was a tap at the door. My aunt said absently, "Get that," and since the remark might as easily have been addressed to me as to the maid I satisfied my curiosity in another form by racing her to answer the knock.

Two of my father's girls, costumed and painted until they seemed more alien than any abos, stately as Lombardy poplars and inhuman as specters, with green and yellow eyes made to look the size of eggs and inflated breasts pushed almost shoulder-high, were waiting in the hall; and though they maintained an inculcated composure I was pleasantly aware that they were startled to find me in the doorway. I bowed them in, but as the maid closed the door behind them my aunt said absently, "In a moment, girls. I want to show the boy here something, then he's going to leave."

The "something" was a photograph utilizing, as I supposed, some novelty technique which washed away all color save a light brown. It was small, and from its general appearance and crumbling edges very old. It showed a girl of twenty-five or so, thin and as nearly as I could judge rather tall, standing beside a stocky young man on a paved walkway and holding a baby. The walkway ran along the front of a remarkable house, a very long wooden house only a story in height, with a porch or veranda that changed its architectural style every twenty or thirty feet so as to give almost the impression of a number of exceedingly narrow houses constructed with their side walls in contact. I mention this detail, which I hardly noticed at the time, because I have so often since my release from prison tried to find some trace of this house. When I was first shown the picture I was much more interested in the girl's face, and the baby's. The latter was in fact scarcely visible, he being nearly smothered in white wool blankets. The girl had large features and a brilliant smile which held a suggestion

of that rarely seen charm which is at once careless, poetic, and sly. Gypsy, was my first thought, but her complexion was surely too fair for that. Since on this world we are all descended from a relatively small group of colonists, we are rather a uniform population, but my studies had given me some familiarity with the original Terrestrial races, and my second guess, almost a certainty, was Celtic. "Wales," I said aloud. "Or Scotland. Or Ireland."

"What?" my aunt said. One of the girls giggled; they were seated on the divan now, their long, gleaming legs crossed before them like the varnished staffs of flags.

"It doesn't matter."

My aunt looked at me acutely and said, "You're right. I'll send for you and we'll talk about this when we've both more leisure. For the present my maid will take you to your room."

I remember nothing of the long walk the maid and I must have had back to the dormitory, or what excuses I gave Mr. Million for my unauthorized absence. Whatever they were I suppose he penetrated them, or discovered the truth by questioning the servants, because no summons to return to my aunt's apartment came, although I expected it daily for weeks afterward.

That night—I am reasonably sure it was the same night—I dreamed of the abos of Sainte Anne, abos dancing with plumes of fresh grass on their heads and arms and ankles, abos shaking their shields of woven rushes and their nephrite-tipped spears until the motion affected my bed and became, in shabby red cloth, the arms of my father's valet come to summon me, as he did almost every night, to his library.

That night, and this time I am quite certain it was the same night—that is, the night I first dreamed of the abos—the pattern of my hours with him, which had come over the four or five years past to have a predictable sequence of conversation, holographs, free association, and dismissal—a sequence I had come to think inalterable—changed. Following the preliminary talk designed, I feel sure, to put me at ease (at which it failed, as it always did), I was told to roll up a sleeve and lie down upon an old examining table in a corner of the room. My father then made me look at the wall, which meant at the shelves heaped with ragged notebooks. I felt a needle being thrust into the inner part of my arm,

but my head was held down and my face turned away, so that I could neither sit up nor look at what he was doing. Then the needle was withdrawn and I was told to lie quietly.

After what seemed a very long time, during which my father occasionally took my pulse or spread my eyelids to look at my eyes, someone in a distant part of the room began to tell a very long and confusingly involved story. My father made notes of what was said, and occasionally stopped to ask questions I found it unnecessary to answer, since the storyteller did it for me.

The drug he had given me did not, as I had imagined it would, lessen its hold on me as the hours passed. Instead it seemed to carry me progressively further from reality and the mode of consciousness best suited to preserving the individuality of thought. The peeling leather of the examination table vanished under me, and was now the deck of a ship, now the wing of a dove beating far above the world; and whether the voice I heard reciting was my own or my father's I no longer cared. It was pitched sometimes higher, sometimes lower, but then I felt myself at times to be speaking from the depths of a chest larger than my own; and his voice, identified as such by the soft rustling of the pages of his notebook, might seem the high, treble cries of the racing children in the streets as I heard them in summer when I thrust my head through the windows at the base of the library dome.



With that night my life changed again. The drugs—for there seemed to be several, and although the effect I have described was the usual one, there were also times when I found it impossible to lie still, but ran up and down for hours as I talked, or sank into blissful or indescribably frightening dreams—affected my health. I often awakened in the morning with a headache that kept me in agony all day, and I became subject to periods of extreme nervousness and apprehension. Most frightening of all, whole sections of days sometimes disappeared, so that I found myself awake and dressed, reading, walking, and even talking, with no memory at all of anything that had happened since I had

lain muttering to the ceiling in my father's library the night before.

The lessons I had had with David did not cease, but in some sense Mr. Million's role and mine were now reversed. It was I, now, who insisted on holding our classes when they were held at all; and it was I who chose the subject matter and, in most cases, questioned David and Mr. Million about it. But often when they were at the library or the park I remained in bed reading, and I believe there were many times when I read and studied from the time I found myself conscious in my bed until my father's valet came for me again.

David's interviews with our father, I should note here, suffered the same changes as my own and at the same time; but since they were less frequent—and they became less and less frequent as the hundred days of summer wore away to autumn and at last to the long winter—and he seemed on the whole to have less adverse reactions to the drugs, the effect on him was not nearly as great.

If at any single time, it was during this winter that I came to the end of childhood. My new ill health forced me away from childish activities, and encouraged the experiments I was carrying out on small animals, and my dissections of the bodies Mr. Million supplied in an unending stream of open mouths and staring eyes. Too, I studied or read, as I have said, for hours on end; or simply lay with my hands behind my head while I struggled to recall, perhaps for whole days together, the narratives I had heard myself give my father. Neither David nor I could ever remember enough even to build a coherent theory of the nature of the questions asked us, but I have still certain tableaux fixed in my memory which I am sure I have never seen, and I believe these are my visualizations of suggestions whispered while I bobbed and dove through those altered states of consciousness.

My aunt, who had previously been so remote, now spoke to me in the corridors and even visited our room. I learned that she controlled the internal arrangements of our house, and through her I was able to have a small laboratory of my own set up in the same wing. But I spent the winter, as I have described, mostly at my enamel dissecting table or in bed. The white snow drifted half up the glass of the window, clinging to the bare stems of the

silvertrumpet vine. My father's patrons, on the rare occasions when I saw them, came in with wet boots, the snow on their shoulders and their hats, puffing and red-faced as they beat their coats in the foyer. The orange trees were gone, the roof garden no longer used, and the courtyard under our window only late at night when half a dozen patrons and their protégés, whooping with hilarity and wine, fought with snowballs—an activity invariably concluded by stripping the girls and tumbling them naked in the snow.

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Spring surprised me, as she always does those of us who remain most of our lives indoors. One day, while I still thought, if I thought about the weather at all, in terms of winter, David threw open the window and insisted that I go with him to the park—and it was April. Mr. Million went with us, and I remember that as we stepped out the front door into the little garden that opened into the street, a garden I had last seen banked with the snow shoveled from the path, but which was now bright with early bulbs and the chiming of the fountain, David tapped the iron dog on its grinning muzzle and recited:

“And thence the dog

With fourfold head brought to these realms of light.”

I made some trivial remark about his having miscounted.

“Oh, no. Old Cerberus has four heads, don't you know that? The fourth's her maidenhead, and she's such a bitch no dog can take it from her.” Even Mr. Million chuckled, but I thought afterward, looking at David's ruddy good health and the foreshadowing of manhood already apparent in the set of his shoulders, that if, as I had always thought of them, the three heads represented Maître, Madame, and Mr. Million, that is, my father, my aunt (David's *maidenhead*, I suppose), and my tutor, then indeed a fourth would have to be welded in place soon for David himself.

The park must have been a paradise for him, but in my poor

health I found it bleak enough and spent most of the morning huddled on a bench, watching David play squash. Toward noon I was joined, not on my own bench, but on another close enough for there to be a feeling of proximity, by a dark-haired girl with one ankle in a cast. She was brought there, on crutches, by a sort of nurse or governess who seated herself, I felt sure deliberately, between the girl and me. This unpleasant woman was, however, too straight-backed for her chaperonage to succeed completely. She sat on the edge of the bench, while the girl, with her injured leg thrust out before her, slumped back and thus gave me a good view of her profile, which was beautiful; and occasionally, when she turned to make some remark to the creature beside her, I could study her full face—carmine lips and violet eyes, a round rather than an oval face, with a broad point of black hair dividing the forehead; archly delicate black eyebrows and long, curling lashes. When a vendor, an old woman, came selling Cantonese egg rolls (longer than your hand, and still so hot from the boiling fat that they needed to be eaten with great caution as though they were in some way alive) I made her my messenger and, buying one for myself, sent her with two scalding delicacies to the girl and her attendant monster.

The monster, of course, refused; the girl, I was charmed to see, pleaded, her huge eyes and bright cheeks eloquently proclaiming arguments I was just too far away to hear but could follow in pantomime: it would be a gratuitous insult to a blameless stranger to refuse; she was hungry and had intended to buy an egg roll in any event—how thriftless to object when what she had wished for was tendered free! The vending woman, who clearly delighted in her role as go-between, announced herself on the point of weeping at the thought of being forced to refund my gold (actually a bill of small denomination nearly as greasy as the paper in which her rolls were wrapped, and considerably dirtier), and eventually their voices grew loud enough for me to hear the girl's, which was a clear and very pleasing contralto. In the end, of course, they accepted; the monster conceded me a frigid nod, and the girl winked at me behind her back.

Half an hour later when David and Mr. Million, who had been watching him from the edge of the court, asked if I wanted lunch,

I told them I did, thinking that when we returned I could take a seat closer to the girl without being brazen about it. We ate, I (at least so I fear) very impatiently, in a clean little café close to the flower market; but when we came back to the park the girl and her governess were gone.

We returned to the house, and about an hour afterward my father sent for me. I went with some trepidation, since it was much earlier than was customary for our interview—before the first patrons had arrived, in fact, while I usually saw him only after the last had gone. I need not have feared. He began by asking about my health, and when I said it seemed better than it had been during most of the winter he began, in a self-conscious and even pompous way, as different from his usual fatigued incisiveness as could be imagined, to talk about his business and the need a young man had to prepare himself to earn a living. He said, “You are a scientific scholar, I believe.”

I said I hoped I was in a small way, and braced myself for the usual attack upon the uselessness of studying chemistry or biophysics on a world like ours where the industrial base was so small: of no help at the civil service examinations, does not even prepare one for trade, and so on. He said instead, “I’m glad to hear it. To be frank, I asked Mr. Million to encourage you in that way as much as he could. He would have done it anyway, I’m sure; he did with me. These studies will not only be of great satisfaction to you, but will”—he paused, cleared his throat, and massaged his face and scalp with his hands—“be valuable in all sorts of ways. And they are, as you might say, a family tradition.”

I said, and indeed felt, that I was very happy to hear that.

“Have you seen my lab? Behind the big mirror there?”

I hadn’t, though I had known that such a suite of rooms existed beyond the sliding mirror in the library, and the servants occasionally spoke of his “dispensary” where he compounded doses for them, examined monthly the girls we employed, and occasionally prescribed treatment for “friends” of patrons, men recklessly imprudent who had failed (as the wise patrons had not) to confine their custom to our establishment exclusively. I told him I should very much like to see it.

He smiled. “But we are wandering from our topic. Science is

of great value; but you will find, as I have, that it consumes more money than it produces. You will want apparatus and books and many other things, as well as a livelihood for yourself. We have a not unprofitable business here, and though I hope to live a long time—thanks in part to science—you are the heir and it will be yours in the end.”

(So I was older than David!)

“. . . every phase of what we do. None of them, believe me, are unimportant.”

I had been so surprised, and in fact elated, by my discovery, that I had missed a part of what he said. I nodded, which seemed safe.

“Good. I want you to begin by answering the front door. One of the maids has been doing it, and for the first month or so she’ll stay with you, since there’s more to be learned there than you think. I’ll tell Mr. Million, and he can make the arrangements.”

I thanked him, and he indicated that the interview was over by opening the door of the library. I could hardly believe, as I went out, that he was the same man who devoured my life in the early hours of almost every morning.

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I did not connect this sudden elevation in status with the events in the park. I now realize that Mr. Million, who has, quite literally, eyes in the back of his head, must have reported to my father that I had reached the age at which desires in childhood subliminally fastened to parental figures begin, half consciously, to grope beyond the family.

In any event, that same evening I took up my new duties and became what Mr. Million called the “greeter” and David (explaining that the original sense of the word was related to *portal*) the “porter” of our house—thus assuming in a practical way the functions symbolically executed by the iron dog in our front garden. The maid who had previously carried them out, a girl named Nerissa who had been selected because she was not only one of the prettiest but one of the tallest and strongest of the maids as well,

a large-boned, long-faced, smiling girl with shoulders broader than most men's, remained, as my father had promised, to help. Our duties were not onerous, since my father's patrons were all men of some position and wealth, not given to brawling or loud arguments except under unusual circumstances of intoxication; and for the most part they had visited our house already dozens, and in a few cases even hundreds, of times. We called them by nicknames that were used only here (of which Nerissa informed me *sotto voce* as they came up the walk), hung up their coats, and directed them—or if necessary conducted them—to the various parts of the establishment. Nerissa flounced (a formidable sight, as I observed, to all but the most heroically proportioned patrons), allowed herself to be pinched, took tips, and talked to me afterward, during slack periods, of the times she had been “called upstairs” at the request of some connoisseur of scale, and the money she had made that night. I laughed at jokes and refused tips in such a way as to make the patrons aware that I was a part of the management. Most patrons did not need the reminder, and I was often told that I strikingly resembled my father.

When I had been serving as a receptionist in this way for only a short time, I think on only the third or fourth night, we had an unusual visitor. He came early one evening, but it was the evening of so dark a day, one of the last really wintry days, that the garden lamps had been lit for an hour or more and the occasional carriages that passed on the street beyond, though they could be heard, could not be seen. I answered the door when he knocked, and as we always did with strangers, asked him politely what he wished.

He said, “I should like to speak to Dr. Aubrey Veil.”

I am afraid I looked blank.

“This is Six Sixty-six Saltimbanque?”

It was, of course; and the name of Dr. Veil, although I could not place it, touched a chime of memory. I supposed that one of our patrons had used my father's house as an *adresse de convenance*, and since this visitor was clearly legitimate, and it was not desirable to keep anyone arguing in the doorway despite the partial shelter afforded by the garden, I asked him in; then I sent Nerissa for coffee so that we might have a few moments of

private talk in a receiving room that opened off the foyer. It was a room very seldom used, and the maids had been remiss in dusting it, as I saw as soon as I opened the door. I made a mental note to speak to my aunt about it, and as I did so, I recalled where it was that I had heard Dr. Veil mentioned. My aunt, on the first occasion when I had spoken to her, had referred to his theory that we might in fact be the natives of Sainte Anne, having murdered the original Terrestrial colonists and displaced them so thoroughly as to forget our own past.

The stranger had seated himself in one of the musty, gilded armchairs. He wore a beard, very black and more full than the current style, and would have been a handsome man if the skin of his face—what could be seen of it—had not been of so colorless a white as almost to constitute a disfigurement. His dark clothing seemed abnormally heavy, like felt, and I recalled having heard from some patron that a star-crosser from Sainte Anne had splashed down in the bay yesterday; I asked if he had perhaps been on board it. He looked startled for a moment, then laughed. “You’re a wit, I see. And living with Dr. Veil you’d be familiar with his theory. No, I’m from Earth. My name is Marsch.” He gave me his card, and I read it twice before the meaning of the delicately embossed abbreviations registered in my mind. My visitor was a scientist, a doctor of philosophy in anthropology, from Earth.

I said, “I wasn’t trying to be witty. I thought you might really have come from Sainte Anne. Here most of us have a kind of planetary face, except for the gypsies and criminal tribes, and you don’t seem to fit the pattern.”

He said, “I’ve noticed what you mean; you seem to have it yourself.”

“I’m supposed to look a great deal like my father.”

“Ah,” he said. He stared at me. Then, “Are you cloned?”

“Cloned?” I had read the term, but only in conjunction with botany, and as has happened to me often when I have especially wanted to impress someone with my intelligence, nothing came. I felt like a stupid child.

“Parthenogenetically reproduced, so that the new individual—or individuals, you can have a thousand if you want—will have a

genetic structure identical to the parent. It's anti-evolutionary, so it's illegal on Earth, but I don't suppose things are as closely watched out here."

"You're talking about human beings?"

He nodded.

"I've never heard of it. Really I doubt if you'd find the necessary technology here; we're quite backward compared to Earth. Of course, my father might be able to arrange something for you."

"I don't want to have it done."

Nerissa came in with the coffee then, effectively cutting off anything further Dr. Marsch might have said. Actually, I had added the suggestion about my father more from force of habit than anything else, and thought it very unlikely that he could pull off any such biochemical tour de force, but there was always the possibility, particularly if a large sum was offered. As it was we fell silent while Nerissa arranged the cups and poured, and when she had gone Marsch said appreciatively, "Quite an unusual girl." His eyes, I noticed, were a bright green, without the brown tones most green eyes have.

I was wild to ask him about Earth and the new developments there, and it had already occurred to me that the girls might be an effective way of keeping him here, or at least of bringing him back. I said, "You should see some of them. My father has wonderful taste."

"I'd rather see Dr. Veil. Or is Dr. Veil your father?"

"Oh, no."

"This is his address, or at least the address I was given. Number Six Sixty-six Saltimbanque Street, Port-Mimizon, Département de la Main, Sainte Croix."

He appeared quite serious, and it seemed possible that if I told him flatly that he was mistaken he would leave. I said, "I learned about Veil's Hypothesis from my aunt. She seemed quite conversant with it. Perhaps later this evening you'd like to talk to her about it."

"Couldn't I see her now?"

"My aunt sees very few visitors. To be frank, I'm told she quarreled with my father before I was born, and she seldom leaves her own apartments. The housekeepers report to her there and

she manages what I suppose I must call our domestic economy, but it's very rare to see Madame outside her rooms, or for any stranger to be let in."

"And why are you telling me this?"

"So that you'll understand that with the best will in the world it may not be possible for me to arrange an interview for you. At least, not this evening."

"You could simply ask her if she knows Dr. Veil's present address, and if so what it is."

"I'm trying to help you, Dr. Marsch. Really I am."

"But you don't think that's the best way to go about it?"

"No."

"In other words if your aunt were simply asked, without being given a chance to form her own judgment of me, she wouldn't give me information even if she had it?"

"It would help if we were to talk a bit first. There are a great many things I'd like to learn about Earth."

For an instant I thought I saw a sour smile under the black beard. He said, "Suppose I ask you first—"

He was interrupted—again—by Nerissa, I suppose because she wanted to see if we required anything further from the kitchen. I could have strangled her when Dr. Marsch halted in midsentence and said instead, "Couldn't this girl ask your aunt if she would see me?"

I had to think quickly. I had been planning to go myself and, after a suitable wait, return and say that my aunt would receive Dr. Marsch later, which would have given me an additional opportunity to question him while he waited. But there was at least a possibility (no doubt magnified in my eyes by my eagerness to hear of new discoveries from Earth) that he would not wait—or that, when and if he did eventually see my aunt, he might mention the incident. If I sent Nerissa I would at least have him to myself while she ran her errand, and there was an excellent chance—or at least so I imagined—that my aunt would in fact have some business which she would want to conclude before seeing a stranger. I told Nerissa to go, and Dr. Marsch gave her one of his cards after writing a few words on the back.

"Now," I said, "what was it you were about to ask me?"

"Why, this house, on a planet that has been inhabited less than two hundred years, seems so absurdly old."

"It was built a hundred and forty years ago, but you must have many on Earth that are far older."

"I suppose so. Hundreds. But for every one of them there are ten thousand that have been up less than a year. Here, almost every building I see seems nearly as old as this one."

"We've never been crowded here, and we haven't had to tear down; that's what Mr. Million says. And there are less people here now than there were fifty years ago."

"Mr. Million?"

I told him about Mr. Million, and when I finished he said, "It sounds as if you've got a ten nine unbound simulator here, which should be interesting. Only a few have ever been made."

"A ten nine simulator?"

"A billion, ten to the ninth power. The human brain has several billion synapses, of course; but it's been found that you can simulate its action pretty well—"

It seemed to me that no time at all had passed since Nerissa had left, but she was back. She curtsied to Dr. Marsch and said, "Madame will see you."

I blurted, "Now?"

"Yes," Nerissa said artlessly, "Madame said right now."

"I'll take him then. You mind the door."

I escorted Dr. Marsch down the dark corridors, taking a long route to have more time, but he seemed to be arranging in his mind the questions he wished to ask my aunt as we walked past the spotted mirrors and warped little walnut tables, and he answered me in monosyllables when I tried to question him about Earth.

At my aunt's door I rapped for him. She opened it herself, the hem of her black skirt hanging emptily over the untrodden carpet, but I do not think he noticed that. He said, "I'm really very sorry to bother you, Madame, and I only do so because your nephew thought you might be able to help me locate the author of Veil's Hypothesis."

My aunt said, "I am Dr. Veil, please come in," and shut the door behind him.

* * *

I mentioned the incident to Phaedria the next time we met, but she was more interested in learning about my father's house. Phaedria was the girl who had sat near me while I watched David play squash. She had been introduced to me on my next visit to the park by no less than the monster herself, who had helped her to a seat beside me and, miracle of miracles, promptly retreated to a point which, though not out of sight, was at least out of ear-shot. Phaedria had thrust her broken ankle out before her, halfway across the graveled path, and smiled a most charming smile. "You don't object to my sitting here?" She had perfect teeth.

"I'm delighted."

"You're surprised too. Your eyes get big when you're surprised, did you know that?"

"I am surprised. I've come here looking for you several times, but you haven't been here."

"We've come looking for you, and you haven't been here either, but I suppose one can't really spend a great deal of time in a park."

"I would have," I said, "if I'd known you were looking for me. I went here as much as I could anyway. I was afraid that she"—I jerked my head at the monster—"wouldn't let you come back. How did you persuade her?"

"I didn't," Phaedria said. "Can't you guess? Don't you know anything?"

I confessed that I did not. I felt stupid, and I was stupid, at least in the things I said, because so much of my mind was caught up not in formulating answers to her remarks but in committing to memory the lilt of her voice, the purple of her eyes, even the faint perfume of her skin and the soft, warm touch of her breath on my cool cheek.

"So you see," Phaedria was saying, "that's how it is with me. When Aunt Uranie—she's only a poor cousin of mother's really—got home and told him about you he found out who you are, and here I am."

"Yes," I said, and she laughed.

Phaedria was one of those girls raised between the hope of marriage and the thought of sale. Her father's affairs, as she her-

self said, were "unsettled." He speculated in ship cargoes, mostly from the south—drugs and slaves. He owed, most of the time, large sums which the lenders could not hope to collect unless they were willing to allow him more to recoup. He might die a pauper, but in the meanwhile he had raised his daughter with every detail of education and plastic surgery attended to. If, when she reached marriageable age, he could afford a good dowry, she would link him with some wealthy family. If he were pressed for money instead, a girl so reared would bring fifty times the price of a common street child. Our family, of course, would be ideal for either purpose.

"Tell me about your house," she said. "Do you know what the kids call it? The Cave Canem, or sometimes just the Cave. The boys all think it's a big thing to have been there and they lie about it. Most of them haven't."

But I wanted to talk about Dr. Marsch and the sciences of Earth, and I was nearly as anxious to find out about her own world, "the kids" she mentioned so casually, her school and family, as she was to learn about us. Also, although I was willing to detail the services my father's girls rendered their benefactors, there were some things, such as my aunt's floating down the stairwell, that I was adverse to discussing. But we bought egg rolls from the same old woman to eat in the chill sunlight, and exchanged confidences, and somehow parted not only lovers but friends, promising to meet again the next day.

At some time during the night, I believe at almost the same time that I returned—or to speak more accurately *was returned* since I could scarcely walk—to my bed after a session of hours with my father, the weather changed. The musked exhalation of late spring or early summer crept through the shutters, and the fire in our little grate seemed to extinguish itself for shame almost at once. My father's valet opened the window for me and there poured into the room that fragrance that tells of the melting of the last snows beneath the deepest and darkest evergreens on the north sides of mountains. I had arranged with Phaedria to meet at ten, and before going to my father's library I had posted a note, asking that I be awakened an hour earlier, on the *escritoire* beside my bed; and that night I slept with the fragrance in my nostrils

and the thought—half plan, half dream—that by some means Phad-dria and I would elude her aunt entirely and find a deserted lawn where blue and yellow flowers dotted the short grass.

When I woke it was an hour past noon, and rain drove in sheets past the window. Mr. Million, who was reading a book on the far side of the room, told me that it had been raining like that since six, and for that reason he had not troubled to wake me. I had a splitting headache, as I often did after a long session with my father, and took one of the powders he had prescribed to relieve it. They were gray, and smelled of anise.

"You look unwell," Mr. Million said.

"I was hoping to go to the park."

"I know." He rolled across the room toward me, and I recalled that Dr. Marsch had called him an "unbound" simulator. For the first time since I had satisfied myself about them when I was quite small I bent over (at some cost to my head) and read the almost obliterated stampings on his main cabinet. There was only the name of a cybernetics company on Earth and, in French as I had always supposed, his name: M. Million—"Monsieur" or "Mister" Million. Then, as startling as a blow from behind to a man musing in a comfortable chair, I remembered that a dot was employed in some algebras for multiplication. He saw my change of expression at once. "A thousand-million-word core capacity," he said. "An English billion or a French milliard, the *M* being the Roman numeral for one thousand, of course. I thought you understood that some time ago."

"You are an unbound simulator. What is a bound simulator, and whom are you simulating—my father?"

"No." The face in the screen, Mr. Million's face as I had always thought of it, shook its head. "Call me, call the person simulated, at least, your great-grandfather. He—I—am dead. In order to achieve simulation it is necessary to examine the cells of the brain, layer by layer, with a beam of accelerated particles so that the neural patterns can be reproduced, we say 'core imaged,' in the computer. The process is fatal."

I asked after a moment, "And a bound simulator?"

"If the simulation is to have a body that looks human the mechanical body must be linked—'bound'—to a remote core, since

the smallest billion-word core cannot be made even approximately as small as a human brain." He paused again, and for an instant his face dissolved into myriad sparkling dots, swirling like dust motes in a sunbeam. "I am sorry. For once you wish to listen but I do not wish to lecture. I was told, a very long time ago, just before the operation, that my simulation—this—would be capable of emotion in certain circumstances. Until today I had always thought they lied." I would have stopped him if I could, but he rolled out of the room before I could recover from my surprise.

For a long time, I suppose an hour or more, I sat listening to the drumming of the rain and thinking about Phaedria and about what Mr. Million had said, all of it confused with my father's questions of the night before, questions which had seemed to steal their answers from me so that I was empty, and dreams had come to flicker in the emptiness, dreams of fences and walls and the concealing ditches called ha-has, that contain a barrier you do not see until you are about to tumble on it. Once I had dreamed of standing in a paved court fenced with Corinthian pillars so close-set that I could not force my body between them, although in the dream I was only a child of three or four. After trying various places for a long time I had noticed that each column was carved with a word—the only one that I could remember was "carapace"—and that the paving stones of the courtyard were mortuary tablets like those set into the floors in some of the old French churches, with my own name and a different date on each.

This dream pursued me even when I tried to think of Phaedria, and when a maid brought me hot water—for I now shaved twice a week—I found that I was already holding my razor in my hand, and had in fact cut myself with it so that the blood had streaked my nightclothes and run down onto the sheets.

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* *

The next time I saw Phaedria, which was four or five days afterward, she was engrossed by a new project in which she enlisted both David and me. This was nothing less than a theatrical company, composed mostly of girls her own age, which was to

present plays during the summer in a natural amphitheater in the park. Since the company, as I have said, consisted principally of girls, male actors were at a premium, and David and I soon found ourselves deeply embroiled. The play had been written by a committee of the cast, and—invariably—revolved about the loss of political power by the original French-speaking colonists. Phaedria, whose ankle would not be mended in time for our performance, would play the crippled daughter of the French governor, David her lover (a dashing captain of chasseurs), and I the governor himself—a part I accepted readily because it was a much better one than David's, and offered scope for a great deal of fatherly affection toward Phaedria.

The night of our performance, which was early in June, I recall vividly for two reasons. My aunt, whom I had not seen since she had closed the door behind Dr. Marsch, notified me at the last moment that she wished to attend and that I was to escort her. And we players had grown so afraid of having an empty house that I had asked my father if it would be possible for him to send some of his girls—who would thus lose only the earliest part of the evening, when there was seldom much business in any event. To my great surprise he consented (I suppose because he felt it would be good advertising), stipulating only that they should return at the end of the third act if he sent a messenger saying they were needed.

Because I would have to arrive at least an hour early to make up, it was no more than late afternoon when I called for my aunt. She showed me in herself, and immediately asked my help for her maid, who was trying to wrestle some heavy object from the upper shelf of a closet. It proved to be a folding wheelchair, and under my aunt's direction we set it up. When we had finished she said abruptly, "Give me a hand in, you two," and taking our arms lowered herself into the seat. Her black skirt, lying emptily against the leg boards of the chair like a collapsed tent, showed legs no thicker than my wrists; but also an odd thickening, almost like a saddle, below her hips. Seeing me staring she snapped, "Won't be needing that until I come back, I suppose. Lift me up a little. Stand in back and get me under the arms."

I did so, and her maid reached unceremoniously under my

aunt's skirt and drew out a little leather-padded device on which she had been resting. "Shall we go?" my aunt sniffed. "You'll be late."

Our play went smoothly enough, with predictable cheers from members of the audience who were, or at least wished to be thought, descended from the original French. The audience, in fact, was better than we had dared hope, five hundred or so besides the inevitable sprinkling of pickpockets, police, and streetwalkers. The incident I most vividly recall came toward the latter half of the first act, when for ten minutes or so I sat with few lines at a desk listening to my fellow actors. Our stage faced west, and the setting sun had left the sky a welter of lurid color: purple-reds striped gold and flame and black. Against this violent ground, which might have been the massed banners of hell, there began to appear, in ones and twos, like the elongate shadows of fantastic grenadiers crenellated and plumed, the heads, the slender necks, the narrow shoulders, of a platoon of my father's demimondaines; arriving late, they were taking the last seats at the upper rim of our theater, encircling it like the soldiery of some ancient, bizarre government surrounding a treasonous mob.

They sat at last, my cue came, and I forgot them; and that is all I can now remember of our first performance, except that at one point some motion of mine suggested to the audience a mannerism of my father's and there was a shout of misplaced laughter—and that at the beginning of the second act Sainte Anne rose, with its sluggish rivers and great, grassy meadowmeres clearly visible, flooding the audience with green light; and at the close of the third I saw my father's crooked little valet bustling among the upper rows, and the girls, green-edged black shadows, filing out.

We produced three more plays that summer, all with some success, and David and Phaedria and I became an accepted partnership, with Phaedria dividing herself more or less equally between us—whether by her own inclination or her parents' orders I could never be quite sure. When her ankle knit she was a companion fit for David in athletics, a better player of all the ball and racket games than any of the other girls who came to the park; but she would as often drop everything and come to sit with me,

where she sympathized with (though she did not actually share) my interest in botany and biology, and gossiped, and delighted in showing me off to her friends, since my reading had given me a sort of talent for puns and repartee.

It was Phaedria who suggested, when it became apparent that the ticket money from our first play would be insufficient for the costumes and scenery we coveted for our second, that at the close of future performances the cast circulate among the audience to take up a collection; and this, of course, in the press and bustle easily lent itself to the accomplishment of petty thefts for our cause. Most people, however, had too much sense to bring to our theater, in the evening, in the gloomy park, more money than was required to buy tickets and perhaps an ice or a glass of wine during intermission; so no matter how dishonest we were the profit remained small, and we, and especially Phaedria and David, were soon talking of going forward to more dangerous and lucrative adventures.

At about this time, I suppose as a result of my father's continued and intensified probing of my subconscious, a violent and almost nightly examination whose purpose was still unclear to me and which, since I had been accustomed to it for so long, I scarcely questioned, I became more and more subject to frightening lapses of conscious control. I would, so David and Mr. Million told me, seem quite myself though perhaps rather more quiet than usual, answering questions intelligently if absently, and then, suddenly, come to myself, start, and stare at the familiar rooms, the familiar faces, among which I now found myself, perhaps after the mid-afternoon, without the slightest memory of having awakened, dressed, shaved, eaten, gone for a walk.

Although I loved Mr. Million as much as I had when I was a boy, I was never able, after that conversation in which I learned the meaning of the familiar lettering on his side, quite to reestablish the old relationship. I was always conscious, as I am conscious now, that the personality I loved had perished years before I was born; and that I addressed an imitation of it, fundamentally mathematical in nature, responding as that personality might to the stimuli of human speech and action. I could never determine whether Mr. Million is really aware in that sense which would

give him the right to say, as he always has, "I think" and "I feel." When I asked him about it he could only explain that he did not know the answer himself, that having no standard of comparison he could not be positive whether his own mental processes represented true consciousness or not; and I, of course, could not know whether this answer represented the deepest meditation of a soul somehow alive in the dancing abstractions of the simulation, or whether it was merely triggered, a phonographic response, by my question.

Our theater, as I have said, continued through the summer and gave its last performance with the falling leaves drifting, like the obscure, perfumed old letters from some attic, upon our stage. When the curtain calls were over we who had written and acted the plays of our season were too disheartened to do more than remove our costumes and cosmetics, and drift, with the last of our departing audience, down the whippoorwill-haunted paths to the city streets and home. I was prepared, as I remember, to take up my duties at my father's door, but that night he had stationed his valet in the foyer to wait for me and I was ushered directly into the library, where he explained brusquely that he would have to devote the latter part of the evening to business and for that reason would speak to me (as he put it) early. He looked tired and ill, and it occurred to me, I think for the first time, that he would one day die—and that I would, on that day, become at once both rich and free.

What I said under the drugs that evening I do not of course recall, but I remember as vividly as if I had only this morning awakened from it the dream that followed. I was on a ship, a white ship like one of those the oxen pull, so slowly the sharp prows make no wake at all, through the green water of the canal beside the park. I was the only crewman, and indeed the only living man aboard. At the stern, grasping the huge wheel in such a flaccid way that it seemed to support and guide and steady him rather than he it, stood the corpse of a tall, thin man whose face, when the rolling of his head presented it to me, was the face that floated in Mr. Million's screen. This face, as I have said, was very like my father's, but I knew the dead man at the wheel was not he.

I was aboard the ship a long time. We seemed to be running free, with the wind a few points to port and strong. When I went aloft at night, masts and spars and rigging quivered and sang in the wind, and sail upon sail towered above me, and sail upon white sail spread below me, and more masts clothed in sails stood before me and behind me. When I worked on deck by day, spray wet my shirt and left tear-shaped spots on the planks which dried quickly in the bright sunlight.

I cannot remember ever having really been on such a ship, but perhaps, as a very small child, I was; for the sounds of it, the creaking of the masts in their sockets, the whistling of the wind in the thousand ropes, the crashing of the waves against the wooden hull, were all as distinct, and as real, as much *themselves*, as the sounds of laughter and breaking glass overhead had been when, as a child, I had tried to sleep; or the bugles from the citadel which sometimes, then, woke me in the morning.

I was about some work, I do not know just what, aboard this ship. I carried buckets of water with which I dashed clotted blood from the decks, and I pulled at ropes which seemed attached to nothing—or rather, firmly tied to immovable objects still higher in the rigging. I watched the surface of the sea from bow and rail, from the mastheads, and from atop a large cabin amidships, but when a starcrosser, its entry shields blinding bright with heat, plunged hissing into the sea far off I reported it to no one.

And all this time the dead man at the wheel was talking to me. His head hung limply, as though his neck were broken, and the jerkings of the wheel he held, as big waves struck the rudder, sent it from one shoulder to the other, or back to stare at the sky, or down. But he continued to speak, and the few words I caught suggested that he was lecturing upon an ethical theory whose postulates seemed doubtful even to him. I felt a dread of hearing this talk and tried to keep myself as much as possible toward the bow, but the wind at times carried the words to me with great clarity, and whenever I looked up from my work I found myself much nearer the stern, sometimes in fact almost touching the dead steersman, than I had supposed.

After I had been on this ship a long while, so that I was very tired and very lonely, one of the doors of the cabin opened and

my aunt came out, floating quite upright about two feet above the tilted deck. Her skirt did not hang vertically as I had always seen it, but whipped in the wind like a streamer so that she seemed on the point of blowing away. For some reason I said, "Don't get close to that man at the wheel, Aunt. He might hurt you."

She answered, as naturally as if we had met in the corridor outside my bedroom, "Nonsense. He's far past doing anyone any good, Number Five, or any harm either. It's my brother we have to worry about."

"Where is he?"

"Down there." She pointed at the deck as if to indicate that he was in the hold. "He's trying to find out why the ship doesn't move."

I ran to the side and looked over, and what I saw was not water but the night sky. Stars—innumerable stars—were spread at an infinite distance below me, and as I looked at them I realized that the ship, as my aunt had said, did not make headway or even roll, but remained heeled over, motionless. I looked back at her and she told me, "It doesn't move because he has fastened it in place until he finds out why it doesn't move," and at this point I found myself sliding down a rope into what I supposed was the hold of the ship. It smelled of animals. I had awakened, though at first I did not know it.

My feet touched the floor, and I saw that David and Phaedria were beside me. We were in a huge, loftlike room, and as I looked at Phaedria, who was very pretty but tense and biting her lips, a cock crowed.

David said, "Where do you think the money is?" He was carrying a tool kit.

And Phaedria, who I suppose had expected him to say something else, or in answer to her own thoughts, said, "We'll have lots of time; Marydol is watching." Marydol was one of the girls who appeared in our plays.

"If she doesn't run away. Where do you think the money is?"

"Not up here. Downstairs behind the office." She had been crouching, but she rose now and began to creep forward. She was all in black, from her ballet slippers to a black ribbon binding her black hair, with her white face and arms in striking contrast,

and her carmine lips an error, a bit of color left by mistake. David and I followed her.

Crates were scattered, widely separated, on the floor; and as we passed them I saw that they held poultry, a single bird in each. It was not until we were nearly to the hatch in the floor at the opposite corner of the room that I realized that these birds were gamecocks. Then a shaft of sun from one of the skylights struck a crate and the cock rose and stretched himself, showing fierce red eyes and plumage as gaudy as a macaw's. "Come on," Phaedria said, "the dogs are next," and we followed her down the ladder. Pandemonium broke out on the floor below.

The dogs were chained in stalls, with dividers too high for them to see the dogs on either side, and wide aisles between the rows of stalls. They were all fighting dogs, but of every size from ten-pound terriers to mastiffs larger than small horses, brutes with heads as misshapen as the growths that appear on old trees and jaws that could sever both a man's legs at a bite. The din of the barking was incredible, a solid substance that shook us as we descended the ladder, and at the bottom I took Phaedria's arm and tried to indicate by signs that we should leave at once. She shook her head and then, when I was unable to understand what she said, wrote on a dusty wall with her moistened forefinger, "They do this all the time—a noise in the street—anything."

Access to the floor below was by stairs, reached through a heavy but unbolted door which I think had been installed largely to exclude the din. I felt better when we had closed it behind us even though the noise was still very loud. I had fully come to myself by this time, and I should have explained to David and Phaedria that I did not know where I was or what we were doing there, but shame held me back. And in any event I could guess easily enough what our purpose was. We had often talked—talk I had considered at the time to be more than half empty boasting—about a single robbery that would free us from the necessity of further petty crime.

Where we were I discovered later when we left; and how we had come to be there I pieced together from casual conversations. The building had been originally designed as a warehouse, and stood on the Rue des Egouts close to the bay. Its owner supplied

those enthusiasts who staged combats of all kinds for sport, and was credited with maintaining the largest assemblage of these creatures in the Department. Phaedria's father, who for a fee would assume a part of any shipping risk, had taken her with him when he called on this man, who had just disposed of a quantity of merchandise; and, since the place was known not to open its doors until after the last Angelus, we had come the next day a little after the second and entered through one of the skylights.

I find it difficult to describe what we saw when we descended from the floor of the dogs to the next, which was the second floor of the building. I had seen fighting slaves many times before when Mr. Million, David and I had traversed the slave market to reach the library; but never more than one or two together, heavily manacled. Here they lay, sat, and lounged everywhere, and for a moment I wondered why they did not tear one another to pieces, and the three of us as well. Then I saw that each was held by a short chain stapled to the floor, and it was not difficult to tell, from the scraped and splintered circles in the boards, just how far the slave in the center could reach. Such furniture as they had, straw pallets and a few chairs and benches, was either too light to do harm if thrown or very stoutly made and spiked down. I had expected them to shout and threaten us as I had heard they threatened each other in the pits before closing, but they seemed to understand that as long as they were chained they could do nothing. Every head turned toward us as we came down the steps, but we had no food for them, and after that first examination they were far less interested in us than the dogs had been.

"They aren't people, are they?" Phaedria said. She was walking erectly as a soldier on parade now, and looking at the slaves with interest; studying her, it occurred to me that she was taller and less plump than the Phaedria I pictured to myself when I thought of her. She was not just a pretty but a beautiful girl. "They're a kind of animal, really," she said.

From my studies I was better informed, and I told her that they had been human as infants—in some cases even as children or older—and that they differed from normal people only as a result of surgery (some of it on their brains) and chemically

induced alterations in their endocrine systems. And of course in appearance, because of their scars.

"Your father does that sort of thing to little girls, doesn't he? For your house?"

David said, "Only once in a while. It takes a lot of time, and most people prefer normals, even when they prefer pretty odd normals."

"I'd like to see some of them. I mean the ones he's worked on."

I was still thinking of the fighting slaves around us, and said, "Don't you know about these things? I thought you'd been here before. You knew about the dogs."

"Oh, I've seen them before, and the man told me about them. I suppose I was just thinking out loud. It would be awful if they were still people."

Their eyes followed us, and I wondered if they could understand her.

The ground floor was very different from the ones above. The walls were paneled, there were framed pictures of dogs and cocks, and of the slaves, and curious animals. The windows, opening toward Egouts Street and the bay, were high and narrow and admitted only slender beams of the bright sunlight to pick out of the gloom the arm alone of a rich, red leather chair, a square of maroon carpet no bigger than a book, a half-full decanter. I took three steps into this room and knew that we had been discovered. Striding toward us was a tall, high-shouldered young man—who halted, with a startled look, just when I did. He was my own reflection in a gilt-framed pier glass, and I felt the momentary dislocation that comes when a stranger, an unrecognized shape, turns or moves his head and is some familiar friend glimpsed, perhaps for the first time, from outside. The sharp-chinned, grim-looking boy I had seen when I did not know him to be myself had been myself as Phaedria and David, Mr. Million and my aunt, saw me.

"This is where he talks to customers," Phaedria said. "If he's trying to sell something he has his people bring them down one at a time so you don't see the others, but you can hear the dogs bark even from way down here, and he took Papa and I upstairs and showed us everything."

David asked, "Did he show you where he keeps the money?"

"In back. See that tapestry? It's really a curtain, because while Papa was talking to him a man came that owed him for something and paid, and he went through there with it."

The door behind the tapestry opened on a small office, with still another door in the wall opposite. There was no sign of a safe or strongbox. David broke the lock on the desk with a pry bar from his tool kit, but there was only the usual clutter of papers, and I was about to open the second door when I heard a sound, a scraping or shuffling, from the room beyond.

For a minute or more none of us moved. I stood with my hand on the latch. Phaedria, behind me and to my left, had been looking under the carpet for a cache in the floor—she remained crouched, her skirt a black pool. From somewhere near the broken desk I could hear David's breathing. The shuffling came again, and a board creaked. David said very softly, "It's an animal."

I drew my fingers away from the latch and looked at him. He was still gripping the pry bar and his face was pale, but he smiled. "An animal tethered in there, shifting its feet. That's all."

I said, "How do you know?"

"Anybody in there would have heard us, especially when I cracked the desk. If it were a person he would have come out, or if he were afraid he'd hide and be quiet."

Phaedria said, "I think he's right. Open the door."

"Before I do, if it isn't an animal?"

David said, "It is."

"But if it isn't?"

I saw the answer on their faces; David gripped his pry bar, and I opened the door.

The room beyond was larger than I had expected, but bare and dirty. The only light came from a single window high in the far wall. In the middle of the floor stood a big chest, of dark wood bound with iron, and before it lay what appeared to be a bundle of rags. As I stepped from the carpeted office the rags moved and a face, a face triangular as a mantis', turned toward me. Its chin was hardly more than an inch from the floor, but under deep brows the eyes were tiny scarlet fires.

"That must be it," Phaedria said. She was looking not at the

face but at the iron-banded chest. "David, can you break into that?"

"I think so," David said, but like me, he was watching the ragged thing's eyes. "What about that?" he said after a moment, and gestured toward it. Before Phaedria or I could answer, its mouth opened showing long, narrow teeth, gray-yellow. "Sick," it said.

None of us, I think, had thought it could speak. It was as though a mummy had spoken. Outside a carriage went past, its iron wheels rattling on the cobbles.

"Let's go," David said. "Let's get out."

Phaedria said, "It's sick. Don't you see, the owner's brought it down here where he can look in on it and take care of it. It's sick."

"And he chained his sick slave to the cash box?" David cocked an eyebrow at her.

"Don't you see? It's the only heavy thing in the room. All you have to do is go over there and knock the poor creature in the head. If you're afraid, give me the bar and I'll do it myself."

"I'll do it."

I followed him to within a few feet of the chest. He gestured at the slave imperiously with the steel pry bar. "You! Move away from there."

The slave made a gurgling sound and crawled to one side, dragging his chain. He was wrapped in a filthy, tattered blanket and seemed hardly larger than a child, though I noticed that his hands were immense.

I turned and took a step toward Phaedria, intending to urge that we leave if David were unable to open the chest in a few minutes. I remember that before I heard or felt anything I saw her eyes open wide, and I was still wondering why, when David's kit of tools clattered on the floor and David himself fell with a thud and a little gasp. Phaedria screamed, and all the dogs on the third floor began to bark.

All this, of course, took less than a second. I turned to look almost as David fell. The slave had darted out an arm and caught my brother by the ankle, and then in an instant had thrown off his blanket and bounded on top of him.

I caught him by the neck and jerked him backward, thinking that he would cling to David and that it would be necessary to tear him away, but the instant he felt my hands he flung David aside and writhed like a spider in my grip. *He had four arms.*

I saw them flailing as he tried to reach me, and I let go of him and jerked back as if a rat had been thrust at my face. That instinctive repulsion saved me; he drove his feet backward in a kick which, if I had still been holding him tightly enough to give him a fulcrum, would have surely ruptured my liver or spleen and killed me.

Instead it shot him forward and me back, gasping for breath. I fell and rolled, and was outside the circle permitted him by his chain; David had already scrambled away, and Phaedria was well out of his reach.

For a moment, while I shuddered and tried to sit up, the three of us simply stared at him. Then David quoted wryly:

“Arms and the man I sing, who forc’d by fate,
And haughty Juno’s unrelenting hate,
Expell’d and exil’d, left the Trojan shore.”

Neither Phaedria nor I laughed, but Phaedria let out her breath in a long sigh and asked me, “How did they do that? Get him like that?”

I told her I supposed they had transplanted the extra pair after suppressing his body’s natural resistance to the implanted foreign tissue, and that the operation had probably replaced some of his ribs with the donor’s shoulder structure. “I’ve been teaching myself to do the same sort of thing with mice—on a much less ambitious scale, of course—and the striking thing to me is that he seems to have full use of the grafted pair. Unless you’ve got identical twins to work with, the nerve endings almost never join properly, and whoever did this probably had a hundred failures before he got what he wanted. That slave must be worth a fortune.”

David said, “I thought you threw your mice out. Aren’t you working with monkeys now?”

I wasn’t, although I hoped to; but whether I was or not, it

seemed clear that talking about it wasn't going to accomplish anything. I told David that.

"I thought you were hot to leave."

I had been, but now I wanted something else much more. I wanted to perform an exploratory operation on that creature much more than David or Phaedria had ever wanted money. David liked to think that he was bolder than I, and I knew when I said, "You may want to get away, but don't use me as an excuse, brother," that that would settle it.

"All right, how are we going to kill him?" He gave me an angry look.

Phaedria said, "It can't reach us. We could throw things at it."

"And he could throw the ones that missed back."

While we talked, the thing, the four-armed slave, was grinning at us. I was fairly sure it could understand at least a part of what we were saying, and I motioned to David and Phaedria to indicate that we should go back into the room where the desk was. When we were there I closed the door. "I didn't want him to hear us. If we had weapons on poles, spears of some kind, we might be able to kill him without getting close. What could we use for the sticks? Any ideas?"

David shook his head, but Phaedria said, "Wait a minute, I remember something." We both looked at her and she knitted her brows, pretending to search her memory and enjoying the attention.

"Well?" David asked

She snapped her fingers. "Window rods. You know, long things with a little hook on the end. Remember the windows out there where he talks to customers? They're high up in the wall, and while he and Papa were talking one of the men who works for him brought one and opened a window. They ought to be around somewhere."

We found two after a five-minute search. They looked satisfactory: about six feet long and an inch and a quarter in diameter, of hardwood. David flourished his and pretended to thrust at Phaedria, then asked me, "Now what do we use for points?"

The scalpel I always carried was in its case in my breast pocket, and I fastened it to the rod with electrical tape, but we could find

nothing to make a second spearhead for David until he himself suggested broken glass.

"You can't break a window," Phaedria said, "they'd hear you outside. Besides, won't it just snap off when you try to get him with it?"

"Not if it's thick glass. Look here, you two."

I did, and saw—again—my own face. He was pointing toward the large mirror that had surprised me when I came down the steps. While I looked, his shoe struck it and it shattered with a crash that set the dogs barking again. He selected a long, almost straight, triangular piece and held it up to the light, where it flashed like a gem. "That's about as good as they used to make them from agate and jasper on Sainte Anne, isn't it?"



By prior agreement we approached from opposite sides. The slave leaped to the top of the chest, and from there watched us quite calmly, his deep-set eyes turning from David to me until at last when we were both quite close David rushed him.

He spun around as the glass point grazed his ribs, and caught David's spear by the shaft and jerked him forward. I thrust at him but missed, and before I could recover he had dived from the chest and was grappling with David on the far side. I bent over it and jabbed down at him, and it was not until David screamed that I realized I had driven my scalpel into his thigh. I saw the blood, bright arterial blood, spurt up and drench the shaft, and let it go and threw myself over the chest on top of them.

He was ready for me, on his back and grinning, with his legs and all four arms raised like a dead spider's. I am certain he would have strangled me in the next few seconds if it had not been that David, how consciously I do not know, threw one arm across the creature's eyes so that he missed his grip and I fell between those outstretched arms.



There is not a great deal more to tell. He jerked free of David and, pulling me to him, tried to bite my throat; but I hooked a thumb in one of his eye sockets and held him off. Phaedria, with more courage than I would have credited her with, put David's glass-tipped spear into my free hand and I stabbed him in the neck—I believe I severed both jugulars and the trachea before he died. We put a tourniquet on David's leg and left without either the money or the knowledge of technique I had hoped to get from the body of the slave. Marydol helped us get David home, and we told Mr. Million he had fallen while we were exploring an empty building—though I doubt that he believed us.

There is one other thing to tell about that incident—I mean the killing of the slave—although I am tempted to go on and describe instead a discovery I made immediately afterward that had, at the time, a much greater influence on me. It is only an impression, and one that I have, I am sure, distorted and magnified in recollection. While I was stabbing the slave, my face was very near his and I saw (I suppose because of the light from the high windows behind us) my own face reflected and doubled in the corneas of his eyes, and it seemed to me that it was a face very like his. I have been unable to forget, since then, what Dr. Marsch told me about the production of any number of identical individuals by cloning, and that my father had, when I was younger, a reputation as a child broker. I have tried since my release to find some trace of my mother, the woman in the photograph shown me by my aunt; but that picture was surely taken long before I was born—perhaps even on Earth.

The discovery I spoke of I made almost as soon as we left the building where I killed the slave, and it was simply this: that it was no longer autumn, but high summer. Because all four of us—Marydol had joined us by that time—were so concerned about David, and busy concocting a story to explain his injury, the shock was somewhat blunted, but there could be no doubt of it. The weather was warm with that torpid, damp heat peculiar to summer. The trees I remembered nearly bare were in full leaf and filled with orioles. The fountain in our garden no longer played, as it always did after the danger of frost and burst pipes had come,

with warmed water: I dabbled my hand in the basin as we helped David up the path, and it was as cool as dew.

My periods of unconscious action then, my sleepwalking, had increased to devour an entire winter and the spring, and I felt that I had lost myself.

When we entered the house, an ape which I thought at first was my father's sprang to my shoulder. Later Mr. Million told me that it was my own, one of my laboratory animals I had made a pet. I did not know the little beast, but scars under his fur, and the twist of his limbs, showed he knew me.

(I have kept Popo ever since, and Mr. Million took care of him for me while I was imprisoned. He climbs still, in fine weather, on the gray and crumbling walls of this house; and as he runs along the parapets and I see his hunched form against the sky I think, for a moment, that my father is still alive, and that I may be summoned again for the long hours in his library—but I forgive my pet that.)

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My father did not call a physician for David, but treated him himself; and if he was curious about the manner in which he had received his injury he did not show it. My own guess—for whatever it may be worth, this late—is that he believed I had stabbed him in some quarrel. I say this because he seemed, after this, apprehensive whenever I was alone with him. He was not a fearful man, and he had been accustomed for years to deal occasionally with the worst sort of criminals; but he was no longer at ease with me—he guarded himself. It may have been, of course, merely the result of something I had said or done during the forgotten winter.

Both Marydol and Phaedria, as well as my aunt and Mr. Million, came frequently to visit David, so that his sickroom became a sort of meeting place for us all, only disturbed by my father's occasional visits. Marydol was a slight, fair-haired, kind-hearted girl, and I became very fond of her. Often when she was ready to go home I escorted her, and on the way back stopped at the slave market, as Mr. Million and David and I had done so often, to buy

fried bread and the sweet black coffee and to watch the bidding. The faces of slaves are the duller in the world; but I would find myself staring into them, and it was a long time, a month at least, before I understood why I did. A young male, a sweeper, was brought to the block. His face as well as his back had been scarred by the whip, and his teeth were broken; but I recognized him: the scarred face was my own or my father's. I spoke to him and would have bought and freed him, but he answered me in the servile way of slaves and I turned away in disgust and went home.

That night when my father had me brought to the library, for the first time in several nights. I watched our reflections in the mirror that concealed the entrance to his laboratories. He looked younger than he was; I older. We might almost have been the same man, and when he faced me and I, staring over his shoulder, saw no image of my own body, but only his arms and mine, we might have been the fighting slave.

I cannot say who first suggested that we kill him. I only remember that one evening, as I prepared for bed after taking Marydol and Phaedria to their homes, I realized that earlier when the three of us, with Mr. Million and my aunt, had sat around David's bed, we had been talking of that.

Not openly, of course. Perhaps we had not admitted even to ourselves what it was we were thinking. My aunt had mentioned the money he was supposed to have hidden; and Phaedria, then, a yacht luxurious as a palace; David talked about hunting in the grand style, and the political power money could buy.

And I, saying nothing, had thought of the hours and weeks, and the months he had taken from me; of the destruction of my *self*, which he had gnawed at night after night. I thought of how I might enter the library that night and find myself when next I woke an old man and perhaps a beggar.

Then I knew that I must kill him, since if I told him those thoughts while I lay drugged on the peeling leather of the old table he would kill *me* without a qualm.

While I waited for his valet to come I made my plan. There would be no investigation, no death certificate for my father. I would replace him. To our patrons it would appear that nothing had changed. Phaedria's friends would be told that I had quarreled

with him and left home. I would allow no one to see me for a time, and then, in makeup, in a dim room, speak occasionally to some favored caller. It was an impossible plan, but at the time I believed it possible and even easy. My scalpel was ready. The body could be destroyed in his own laboratory.

He read it in my face. He spoke to me as he always had, but I think he knew. There were flowers in the room, something that had never been before, and I wondered if he had not known even earlier and had them brought in, as for a special event. Instead of telling me to lie on the leather-covered table he gestured toward a chair and seated himself at his writing desk. "We will have company today," he said.

I looked at him.

"You're angry with me. I've seen it growing in you. Don't you know who—"

He was about to say something further when there was a tap at the door, and when he called, "Come in!" it was opened by Nerissa, who ushered in a demimondaine and Dr. Marsch. I was surprised to see him; still more surprised to see one of the girls in my father's library. She seated herself beside Marsch in a way that showed he was her benefactor for the night.

"Good evening, Doctor," my father said. "Have you been enjoying yourself?"

Marsch smiled, showing large, square teeth. He wore clothing of the most fashionable cut now, but the contrast between his beard and the colorless skin of his cheeks was as remarkable as ever. "Both sensually and intellectually," he said. "I've seen a naked girl, a giantess twice the height of a man, walk through a wall."

I said, "That's done with holographs."

He smiled again. "I know. And I have seen a great many other things as well. I was going to recite them all, but perhaps I would only bore my audience; I will content myself with saying that you have a remarkable establishment—but you know that."

My father said, "It is always flattering to hear it again."

"And now are we going to have the discussion we spoke of earlier?"

My father looked at the demimondaine; she rose, kissed Dr.

Marsch, and left the room. The heavy library door swung shut behind her with a soft click.

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Like the sound of a switch, or old glass breaking.

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I have thought since, many times, of that girl as I saw her leaving: the high-heeled platform shoes and grotesquely long legs, the backless dress dipping an inch below the coccyx. The bare nape of her neck; her hair piled and teased and threaded with ribbons and tiny lights. As she closed the door she was ending, though she could not have known it, the world she and I had known.

"She'll be waiting when you come out," my father said to Marsch.

"And if she's not, I'm sure you can supply others." The anthropologist's green eyes seemed to glow in the lamp light. "But now, how can I help you?"

"You study race. Could you call a group of similar men thinking similar thoughts a race?"

"And women," Marsch said smiling.

"And here," my father continued, "here on Sainte Croix, you are gathering material to take back with you to Earth?"

"I am gathering material, certainly. Whether or not I shall return to the mother planet is problematical."

I must have looked at him sharply; he turned his smile toward me, and it became, if possible, even more patronizing than before. "You're surprised?"

"I've always considered Earth the center of scientific thought," I said. "I can easily imagine a scientist leaving it to do field work, but—"

"But it is inconceivable that one might want to stay in the field? Consider my position. You are not alone—happily for me—in respecting the mother world's gray hairs and wisdom. As an Earth-

trained man I've been offered a department in your university at almost any salary I care to name, with a sabbatical every second year. And the trip from here to Earth requires twenty years of Newtonian time; only six months subjectively for me, of course, but when I return, if I do, my education will be forty years out of date. No, I'm afraid your planet may have acquired an intellectual luminary."

My father said, "We're straying from the subject, I think."

Marsch nodded. "But I was about to say that an anthropologist is peculiarly equipped to make himself at home in any culture—even in so strange a one as this family has constructed about itself. I think I may call it a family, since there are two members resident besides yourself. You don't object to my addressing the pair of you in the singular?"

He looked to me as if expecting a protest, then when I said nothing: "I mean your son David—that, and not brother is his real relationship to your continuing personality—and the woman you call your aunt. She is in reality daughter to an earlier—shall we say version?—of yourself."

"You're trying to tell me I'm a cloned duplicate of my father, and I see both of you expect me to be shocked. I'm not. I've suspected it for some time."

My father said, "I'm glad to hear that. Frankly, when I was your age the discovery disturbed me a great deal; I came into my father's library—this room—to confront him, and I intended to kill him."

Dr. Marsch asked. "And did you?"

"I don't think that matters—the point is that it was my intention. I hope that having you here will make things easier for Number Five."

"Is that what you call him?"

"It's more convenient since his name is the same as my own."

"He is your fifth clone-produced child?"

"My fifth experiment? No." My father's hunched, high shoulders, wrapped in the dingy scarlet of his old dressing gown, made him look like some savage bird, and I remembered having read, in a book of natural history, of one called the red-shouldered hawk. His pet moneky, grizzled now with age, had climbed onto

the desk. "No, more like my fiftieth, if you must know. I used to do them for drill. You people who have never tried it think the technique is simple because you've heard it can be done, but you don't know how difficult it is to prevent spontaneous differences. Every gene dominant in myself had to remain dominant, and people are not garden peas—few things are governed by simple Mendelian pairs."

Marsch asked, "You destroyed your failures?"

I said, "He sold them. When I was a child I used to wonder why Mr. Million stopped to look at the slaves in the market. Since then I've found out." My scalpel was still in its case in my pocket; I could feel it.

"Mr. Million," my father said, "is perhaps a bit more sentimental than I—besides, I don't like to go out. You see, Doctor, your supposition that we are all truly the same individual will have to be modified. We have our little variations."

Dr. Marsch was about to reply, but I interrupted him. "Why?" I said. "Why David and me? Why Aunt Jeannine a long time ago? Why go on with it?"

"Yes," my father said, "why? We ask the question to ask the question."

"I don't understand you."

"I seek self-knowledge. If you want to put it this way, *we* seek self-knowledge. You are here because I did and do, and I am here because the individual behind me did—who was himself originated by the one whose mind is simulated in Mr. Million. And one of the questions whose answers we seek is why we seek. But there is more than that." He leaned forward, and the little ape lifted its white muzzle and bright, bewildered eyes to stare into his face. "We wish to discover why we fail, why others rise and change and we remain here."

I thought of the yacht I had talked about with Phaedria and said, "I won't stay here." Dr. Marsch smiled.

My father said, "I don't think you understand me. I don't necessarily mean here physically, but *here*, socially and intellectually. I have traveled, and you may, but—"

"But you end here," Dr. Marsch said.

"We end at this level!" It was the only time, I think, that I ever

saw my father excited. He was almost speechless as he waved at the notebooks and tapes that thronged the walls. "After how many generations? We do not achieve fame or the rule of even this miserable little colony planet. Something must be changed, but what?" He glared at Dr. Marsch.

"You are not unique," Dr. Marsch said, then smiled. "That sounds like a truism, doesn't it? But I wasn't referring to your duplicating yourself. I meant that since it became possible, back on Earth during the last quarter of the twentieth century, it has been done in such chains a number of times. We have borrowed a term from engineering to describe it, and call it the process of relaxation—a bad nomenclature, but the best we have. Do you know what relaxation in the engineering sense is?"

"No."

"There are problems which are not directly soluble, but which can be solved by a succession of approximations. In heat transfer, for example, it may not be possible to calculate initially the temperature at every point on the surface of an unusually shaped body. But the engineer, or his computer, can assume reasonable temperatures, see how nearly stable the assumed values would be, then make new assumptions based on the result. As the levels of approximation progress, the successive sets become more and more similar until there is essentially no change. That is why I said the two of you are essentially one individual."

"What I want you to do," my father said impatiently, "is to make Number Five understand that the experiments I have performed on him, particularly the narcotherapeutic examinations he resents so much, are necessary. That if we are to become more than we have been we must find out—" He had been almost shouting, and he stopped abruptly to bring his voice under control. "That is the reason he was produced, the reason for David too—I hoped to learn something from an outcrossing."

"Which was the rationale, no doubt," Dr. Marsch said, "for the existence of Dr. Veil as well, in an earlier generation. But as far as your examinations of your younger self are concerned, it would be just as useful for him to examine you."

"Wait a moment," I said. "You keep saying that he and I are

identical. That's incorrect. I can see that we're similar in some respects, but I'm not really like my father."

"There are no differences that cannot be accounted for by age. You are what? Eighteen? And you"—he looked toward my father—"I should say are nearly fifty. There are only two forces, you see, which act to differentiate between human beings: they are heredity and environment, nature and nurture. And since the personality is largely formed during the first three years of life it is the environment provided by the home which is decisive. Now every person is born into *some* home environment, though it may be such a harsh one that he dies of it; and no person, except in this situation we call anthropological relaxation, provides that environment himself—it is furnished for him by the preceding generation."

"Just because both of us grew up in this house—"

"Which you built and furnished and filled with the people you chose. But wait a moment. Let's talk about a man neither of you has ever seen, a man born in a place provided by parents quite different from himself: I mean the first of you . . ."

I was no longer listening. I had come to kill my father, and it was necessary that Dr. Marsch leave. I watched him as he leaned forward in his chair, his long white hands making incisive little gestures, his cruel lips moving in a frame of black hair: I watched him and I heard nothing. It was as though I had gone deaf, or as if he could communicate only by his thoughts, and I, knowing the thoughts were silly lies, had shut them out. I said, "You are from Sainte Anne."

He looked at me in surprise, halting in the midst of a soundless sentence. "I have been there, yes. I spent a year on Sainte Anne before coming here."

"You were born there. You studied your anthropology there from books written on Earth a hundred years ago. You are an abo, or at least half abo; but we are men."

Marsch glanced at my father, then said, "The abos are gone. They've been extinct for almost a century."

"You didn't believe that when you came to see my aunt."

"I've never accepted Veil's Hypothesis. I called on everyone

here who had published anything in my field. Really, I don't have time to listen to this."

"You are an abo and not from Earth."

And in a short time my father and I were alone.

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Most of my sentence I served in a labor camp in the Tattered Mountains. It was a small camp, housing usually only a hundred and fifty prisoners—sometimes less than eighty when the winter deaths had been bad. We cut wood and burned charcoal, and made skis when we found good birch. Above the timberline we gathered a saline moss supposed to be medicinal and knotted long plans for rock slides that would crush the stalking machines that were our guards—though somehow the moment never came, the stones never slid. The work was hard, and these guards administered exactly the mixture of severity and fairness some prison board had decided upon when they were programmed and the problem of brutality and favoritism by hirelings was settled forever, so that only well-dressed men at meetings could be cruel or kind.

Or so they thought. I sometimes talked to my guards for hours about Mr. Million, and once I found a piece of meat, and once a cake of hard sugar, brown and gritty as sand, hidden in the corner where I slept.

A criminal may not profit by his crime, but the court—so I was told much later—could find no proof that David was indeed my father's son, and made my aunt his heir.

She died, and a letter from an attorney informed me that by her favor I had inherited "a large house in the city of Port-Mimizon, together with the furniture and chattels appertaining thereto." And that this house "located at 666 Saltimbanque, is presently under the care of a robot servitor." Since the robot servitors under whose direction I found myself did not allow me writing materials, I could not reply.

Time passed on the wings of birds. I found dead larks at the feet of north-facing cliffs in autumn, at the feet of south-facing cliffs in spring.

I received a letter from Mr. Million. Most of my father's girls had left during the investigation of his death; the remainder he had been obliged to send away when my aunt died, finding that as a machine he could not enforce the necessary obedience. David had gone to the capital. Phaedria had married well. Marydol had been sold by her parents. The date on his letter was three years later than the date of my trial, but how long the letter had been in reaching me I could not tell. The envelope had been opened and resealed many times and was soiled and torn.

A seabird, I believe a gannet, came fluttering down into our camp after a storm, too exhausted to fly. We killed and ate it.

One of our guards went berserk, burned fifteen prisoners to death and fought the other guards all night with swords of white and blue fire. He was not replaced.

I was transferred with some others to a camp farther north where I looked down chasms of red stone so deep that if I kicked a pebble in I could hear the rattle of its descent grow to a roar of slipping rock—and hear that, in half a minute, fade with distance, yet never strike the bottom lost somewhere in darkness.

I pretended the people I had known were with me. When I sat shielding my basin of soup from the wind, Phaedria sat upon a bench nearby and smiled and talked about her friends. David played squash for hours on the dusty ground of our compound, slept against the wall near my own corner. Marydol put her hand in mine while I carried my saw into the mountains.

In time they all grew dim, but even in the last year I never slept without telling myself, just before sleep, that Mr. Million would take us to the city library in the morning; never woke without fearing that my father's valet had come for me.

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Then I was told that I was to go, with three others, to another camp. We carried our food, and nearly died of hunger and exposure on the way. From there we were marched to a third camp where we were questioned by men who were not prisoners like ourselves but free men in uniforms who made notes of our

answers and at last ordered that we bathe, and burned our old clothing, and gave us a thick stew of meat and barley.

I remember very well that it was then I allowed myself to realize, at last, what these things meant. I dipped my bread into my bowl and pulled it out soaked with the fragrant stock, with bits of meat and grains of barley clinging to it; and I thought then of the fried bread and coffee at the slave market not as something of the past but as something in the future, and my hands shook until I could no longer hold my bowl, and I wanted to rush shouting at the fences.

In two more days we, six of us now, were put into a mule cart that drove on winding roads always downhill until the winter that had been dying behind us was gone, and the birches and firs were gone, and the tall chestnuts and oaks beside the road had spring flowers under their branches.

The streets of Port-Mimizon swarmed with people. I would have been lost in a moment if Mr. Million had not hired a chair for me, but I made the bearers stop, and bought (with money he gave me) a newspaper from a vendor so that I could know the date with certainty at last.

My sentence had been the usual one of two to fifty years, and though I had known the month and year of the beginning of my imprisonment, it had been impossible to know, in the camps, the number of the current year, which everyone counted, and no one knew. A man took fever, and in ten days, when he was well enough again to work, said that two years had passed or had never been. Then you yourself took fever. I do not recall any headline, any article from the paper I bought. I read only the date at the top, all the way home.

It had been nine years.

I had been eighteen when I had killed my father. I was now twenty-seven. I had thought I might be forty.

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The flaking gray walls of our house were the same. The iron dog with his three wolf-heads still stood in the front garden, but

the fountain was silent and the beds of fern and moss were full of weeds. Mr. Million paid my chairmen and unlocked with a key the door that was always guard-chained but unbolted in my father's day—but as he did so an immensely tall and lanky woman who had been hawking pralines in the street came running toward us. It was Nerissa, and I now had a servant and might have had a bedfellow if I wished, though I could pay her nothing.



And now I must, I suppose, explain why I have been writing this account, which has already been the labor of days; and I must even explain why I explain. Very well then. I have written to disclose myself to myself, and I am writing now because I will, I know, sometime read what I am now writing and wonder.

Perhaps by the time I do, I will have solved the mystery of myself; or perhaps I will no longer care.

It has been three years since my release. This house, when Nerissa and I reentered it, was in a very confused state, my aunt having spent her last days, so Mr. Million told me, in a search for my father's supposed hoard. She did not find it, and I do not think it is to be found; knowing his character better than she, I believe he spent most of what his girls brought him on his experiments and apparatus. I needed money badly myself at first, but the reputation of the house brought people. Seeking buyers or seeking to buy. It is hardly necessary, as I told myself when we began, to do more than introduce them, and I have a good staff now. Phaedria lives with us and works too; the brilliant marriage was a failure after all. Last night while I was working in my surgery I heard her at the library door. I opened it and she had the child with her. Someday they'll want us.

Edward Bryant

JODY AFTER THE WAR

LIGHT LAY bloody on the mountainside. From our promontory jutting above the scrub pine, we looked out over the city. Denver spread from horizon to horizon. The tower of the U.S. Capitol Building caught the sun blindingly. We watched the contrail of a Concorde II jetliner making its subsonic approach into McNicholls Field, banking in a sweeping curve over the pine-lined foothills. Directly below us, a road coiled among rocks and trees. A camp-fire fed smoke into the November air. The wind nudged the smoke trail our way and I smelled the acrid tang of wood smoke. We watched the kaleidoscope of cloud shadows crosshatch the city.

Jody and I sat close, my arm around her shoulders. No words, no facial expressions as afternoon faded out to dusk. My feet gradually went to sleep.

"Hey."

"Mmh?" she said, startled.

"You look pensive."

Her face stayed blank.

"What are you thinking?"

"I'm not. I'm just feeling." She turned back to the city. "What are you thinking?"

"Uh, not much," I said. Lie; I'd been thinking about survivors. "Well, thinking how beautiful you are." Banal, but only half an evasion. I mean she *was* beautiful. Jody was imprinted in my mind the first time I saw her, when I peered up out of the anesthetic fog and managed to focus on her standing beside my hospital bed: the half-Indian face with the high cheekbones. Her eyes the color of dark smoke. I couldn't remember what she'd worn then. To-

day she wore faded blue jeans and a blue chambray work shirt, several sizes too large. No shoes. Typically, she had climbed the mountain barefoot.

Without looking back at me, she said, "You were thinking more than that."

I hesitated. I flashed a sudden mental image of Jody's face the way she had described it in her nightmares: pocked with red and black spots that oozed blood and pus, open sores that gaped where her hair had grown, her skin . . .

Jody squeezed my hand. It was as if she were thinking, that's all right, Paul, if you don't want to talk to me now, that's fine.

I never was any good with evasions, except perhaps with myself. Survivors. Back after the A-bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese had called them *hibakusha*—which translates roughly as "sufferers." Here in America we just called them survivors, after the Chinese suicided their psychotic society in the seventies, and destroyed most of urban America in the process. I guess I was lucky; I was just a kid in the middle of Nevada when the missiles hit. I'd hardly known what happened east of the Mississippi and west of the Sierras. But Jody had been with her parents somewhere close to Pittsburgh. So she became a survivor; one of millions. Most of them weren't even hurt in the bombings. Not physically.

Jody was a survivor. And I was lonely. I had thought we could give each other something that would help. But I wasn't sure anymore. I wondered if I had a choice after all. And I was scared.

Jody leaned against me and shared the warmth of my heavy windbreaker. The wind across the heaped boulders of the mountainside was chill, with the sun barely down. Jody pressed her head under my chin. I felt the crisp hair against my jaw. She rested quietly for a minute, then turned her face up toward mine.

"Remember the first time?"

"Here?"

She nodded. "A Sunday like this, only not so cold. I'd just gotten in from that Hayes Theatre assignment in Seattle when you phoned. I hadn't even unpacked. Then you called and got me up here for a picnic." She smiled. In the new shadows her teeth were very white. "What a god-awful time."

That picnic. A summer and about fourteen hundred miles had separated us while she set up PR holograms of *Hamlet* and I haunted Denver phone booths.

Then here on the mountainside we'd fought bitterly. We had hurt each other with words and Jody had begun to cry and I'd held her. We kissed and the barbed words stopped. Through her tears, Jody whispered that she loved me and I told her how much I loved her. That was the last time either of us said those words. Funny how you use a word so glibly when you don't really understand it; then switch to euphemisms when you do.

"You're very far away."

"It's nothing." I fished for easy words. "The usual," I said. "My future with Ma Bell, going back to school, moving to Seattle to try writing for the network." Everything but—*Liar!* sneered something inside. Why didn't you include damaged chromosomes in the list, and leukemia, and paranoia, and frigidity, and . . . ? *Shut up!*

"Poor Paul," Jody said. "Hemmed in. Doesn't know which way to turn. For Christmas I think I'll get you a lifesize 'gram from *Hamlet*. I know a guy at the Hayes who can get me one."

"Hamlet, right. That's me." I lightly kissed her forehead. "There, I feel better. You ought to be a therapist."

Jody looked at me strangely and there was a quick silence I couldn't fill.

She smiled then and said, "All right, I'm a therapist. Be a good patient and eat. The thermos won't keep the coffee hot all night."

She reached into the canvas knapsack I'd packed up the mountain and took out the thermos and some foil parcels. "Soybeef," she said, pointing to the sandwiches. "The salt's in with the hard-boiled eggs. There's cake for dessert."

Filling my stomach was easier than stripping my soul, so I ate. But the taste died in my mouth when I thought about Jody fixing meals all the rest of our lives. Food for two, three times a day, seven days a week, an average of thirty days a . . . Always unvarying. Always food for two. God, I wanted children! I concentrated on chewing.

After the meal, we drank beer and watched the city below as five million Denverites turned on their lights. I knew I was getting

too high too fast when I confused pulling the tabs off self-cooling beer cans with plucking petals from daisies.

She loves me.

Funny how melodrama crops up in real life. *My* life. Like when I met her.

It was about a year before, when I'd just gotten a job with Mountain Bell as a SMART—that's their clever acronym for Service Maintenance and Repair Trainee. In a city the size of Denver there are more than half a million public pay phones, of which at least a third are out of order at any given time; vandals mostly, sometimes mechanical failure. Someone has to go out and spot-check the phones, then fix the ones that are broken. That was my job. Simple.

I'd gone into a bad area, Five Points, where service was estimated to be eighty percent blanked out. I should have been smart enough to take a partner along, or maybe to wear blackface. But I was a lot younger then. I ended up on a bright Tuesday afternoon, sprawled in my own blood on the sidewalk in front of a grocery store after a Chicano gang had kicked the hell out of me.

After about an hour somebody called an ambulance. Jody. On the phone I'd just repaired before I got stomped. She'd wandered by with a field crew on some documentary assignment, snapping holograms of the poverty conditions.

She loves me not.

I remembered what we'd quarreled about in September. Back in early August a friend of Jody's and mine had come back from Seattle. He was an audio engineer who'd worked free-lance with the Hayes Theatre. He'd seen Jody.

"Man, talk about wild!" my friend said. "She must've got covered by everything with pants from Oregon to Vancouver." He looked at my face. "Uh, you have something going with her?"

She loves me.

"What's so hard to understand?" Jody had said. "Didn't you ever meet a survivor before? Didn't you ever think about survivors? What it's like to see death so plainly all around?" Her voice was low and very intense. "And what about feeling you ought never to have babies, and not wanting even to come close to taking the chance?" Her voice became dull and passionless. "Then

there was Seattle, Paul, and there's the paradox. The only real defense against death is not to feel. But I *want* to feel sometimes and that's why—" She broke off and began to cry. "Paul, that's why there were so many of them. But they couldn't—I can't make it. Not with anyone."

Confused, I held her.

"I want you."

And it didn't matter which of us had said that first.

She loves me not.

"Why don't you ever say what you think?"

"It's easy," I said, a little bitter. "Try being a lonely stoic all your life. It gets to be habit after a while."

"You think I don't know?" She rolled over, turned to the wall. "I'm trying to get through." Her voice was muffled by the blankets.

"Yeah. Me too."

She sat up suddenly, the sheets falling away from her. "Listen! I told you it would be like this. You can have me. But you have to accept what I am."

"I will."

Neither of us said anything more until morning.

She loves me.

Another night she woke up screaming. I stroked her hair and kissed her face lightly.

"Another one?"

She nodded.

"Bad?"

"Yes."

"You want to talk about it?"

There was hesitation, then a slow nod.

"I was in front of a mirror in some incredibly baroque old bedroom," she said. "I was vomiting blood and my hair was coming out and falling down on my shoulders. It wound around my throat and I couldn't breathe. I opened my mouth and there was blood running from my gums. And my skin—it was completely covered with black and red pustules. They—" She paused and closed her eyes. "They were strangely beautiful." She whimpered. "The

worst—" She clung to me tightly. "Oh, God! The worst part was that I was pregnant."

She roughly pushed herself away and wouldn't let me try to comfort her. She lay on her back and stared at the ceiling. Finally, childlike, she took my hand. She held my fingers very tight all the rest of the night.

She loves me not.

But she did, I thought. She does. In her own way, just as you love her. It's never going to be the way you imagined it as a kid. But you love her. Ask her. Ask her now.

"What's going on?" Jody asked, craning her neck to look directly below our ledge. Far down we saw a pair of headlights, a car sliding around the hairpin turns in the foothills road. The whine of a racing turbine rasped our ears.

"I don't know. Some clown in a hurry to park with his girl."

The car approached the crest of a hill and for an instant the headlights shone directly at us, dazzling our eyes. Jody jerked back and screamed. "The sun! So bright! God, Pittsburgh—" Her strength seemed to drain; I lowered her gently to the ledge and sat down beside her. The rock was rough and cold as the day's heat left. I couldn't see Jody's face, except as a blur in the darkness. There was light from the city and a little from the stars, but the moon hadn't risen.

"Please kiss me."

I kissed her and used the forbidden words. "I love you."

I touched her breast; she shivered against me and whispered something I couldn't quite understand. A while later my hand touched the waist of her jeans and she drew away.

"Paul, no."

"Why not?" The beer and my emotional jag pulsed in the back of my skull. I ached.

"You know."

I knew. For a while she didn't say anything more, nor did I. We felt tension build its barrier. Then she relaxed and put her cheek against mine. Somehow we both laughed and the tension eased.

Ask her. And I knew I couldn't delay longer. "Damn it," I said, "I still love you. And I know what I'm getting into." I paused to

breathe. "After Christmas I'm taking off for Seattle. I want you to marry me there."

I felt her muscles tense. Jody pulled away from me and got to her feet. She walked to the end of the ledge and looked out beyond the city. She turned to face me and her hands were clenched.

"I don't know," she said. "At the end of summer I'd have said 'no' immediately. Now—"

I sat silent.

"We'd better go," she said after a while, her voice calm and even. "It's very late."

We climbed down from the rocks then, with the November chill a well of silence between us.

Carol Emshwiller

AL

SORT OF a plane crash in an uncharted region of the park.

We were flying fairly low over the mountains. We had come to the last ridge when there, before us, appeared this incredible valley . . .

Suddenly the plane sputtered. (We knew we were low on gas but we had thought to make it over the mountains.

"I think I can bring her in." (John's last words.)

I was the only survivor.

A plane crash in a field of alfalfa, across the road from it the Annual Fall Festival of the Arts. An oasis on the edge of the parking area. One survivor. He alone, Al, who has spent considerable time in France, Algeria and Mexico, his paintings without social relevance (or so the critics say) and best in the darker colors, not a musician at all yet seems to be one of us. He, a stranger, wandering in a land he doesn't remember and not one penny of our kind of money, creeping from behind our poster, across from it the once-a-year art experience for music lovers. Knowing him as I do now, he must have been wary then, view from our poster: ENTRANCE sign, vast parking lot, our red and white tent, our EXIT on the far side, maybe the sound of a song, a frightening situation under the circumstance, all the others dead and Al having been unconscious for who knows how long? (the scar from that time is still on his cheek) stumbling across the road then and into our ticket booth.

"Hi."

I won't say he wasn't welcome. Even then we were wondering were we facing stultification? Already some of our rules had become rituals. Were we, we wondered, doomed to a partial relevance in our efforts to make music meaningful in our time? And now Al, dropped to us from the skies (no taller than Tom Disch, no wider and not quite so graceful). Later he was to say: "Maybe the artful gesture is lost forever."

We had a girl with us then as secretary, a long-haired changeling child, actually the daughter of a prince (there still are princes) left out in the picnic area of a western state forest to be found and brought up by some old couple in the upper middle class (she still hasn't found this out for sure, but has always suspected something of the sort) so when *I* asked Al to *my* (extra) bedroom it was too late. (By that time he had already pounded his head against the wall some so he seemed calm and happy and rather well adjusted to life in our valley.) The man from the Daily asked him how did he happen to become interested in art? He said he came from a land of cultural giants east of our outermost islands where the policemen were all poets. That's significant in two ways.

About the artful gesture being lost, so many lost arts and soft, gray birds, etc., etc., etc. (The makers of toe shoes will have to go when the last toe dancer dies.)

However, right then, there was Al, mumbling to us in French, German and Spanish. We gave him two tickets to our early evening concert even though he couldn't pay except in what looked like pesos. Second row, left side. (Right from the beginning there was something in him I couldn't resist.) We saw him craning his neck there, somehow already with our long-haired girl beside him. She's five hundred years old though she doesn't look a day over sixteen and plays the virginal like an angel. Did her undergraduate work at the University of Utah (around 1776 I would say). If she crossed the Alleghenies *now* she'd crumble into her real age and die, so later on I tried to get them to take a trip to the Ann Arbor Film Festival together, but naturally she had something else to do. Miss Haertzler.

*As our plane came sputtering down I saw the tents below,
a village of nomads, God knows how far from the nearest out-*

post of civilization. They had, no doubt, lived like this for thousands of years.

These thoughts went rapidly through my mind in the moments before we crashed and then I lost consciousness.

"COME, COME YE SONS OF ART." That's what our poster across the street says—quotes, that is. Really very nice in dayglo colors. "COME, COME AWAY . . ." etc., on to "TO CELEBRATE, TO CELEBRATE THIS TRIUMPHANT DAY," which meant to me, in some symbolic way even at that time, the day Al came out from behind it and stumbled across the road to our booth, as they say: "A leading force, even then, among the new objectivists and continues to play a major role among them up to the present time" (which was a few years ago). Obtained his bachelor's degree in design at the University of Michigan with further study at the Atelier Chaumière in Paris. He always says, "Form speaks." I can say I knew him pretty well at that time. I know he welcomes criticism but not too early in the morning. Ralph had said (he was on the staff of the Annual Fall Festival), "Maybe artistic standards are no longer relevant." (We were wondering at the time how to get the immediacy of the war into our concerts more meaningfully than the *1812 Overture*. Also something of the changing race relations.) Al answered, but just then a jet came by or some big oil truck and I missed the key word. That leaves me still not understanding what he meant. The next morning the same thing happened and it may have been more or less the answer to everything.

By then we had absorbed the major San Francisco influences. These have remained with us in some form or other up to the present time.

I would like you, Tom Disch, to write a poem about this plane crash in an uncharted region, but really, you know, kind of alfalfa field thing. I'd like the Annual Fall Festival of the Arts (and literature, too, if you must) in it and SONS OF ART. I know you can do it, can do anything which is a very nice way to be and being twenty-eight too and having your kind of future which isn't everyone's, not Al's either in spite of some similarities. Al is, after all, more my age, so even Al might be wishing to be Tom Disch

though he wouldn't give up his long hooked nose and very black hair even for a tattooed eagle on his chest. Tom is kind of baroque and jolly. Al is more somber. Both having had quite an influence on all of us already. Jolly, somber. Somber, jolly. To be shy or not to be or less so than Al? He changed the art exhibit we had in the vestibule to his kind of art as soon as Miss Haertzler went to bed with him. We had a complete new selection of paintings by Friday afternoon, all hung in time for the early performance (Ralph hung them) and by then, or at least by Saturday night, I knew I was, at last, really in love for the first time in my life.

When I came to I found we had crashed in a cultivated field planted with some sort of weedlike bush entirely unfamiliar to me. I quickly ascertained that my three companions were beyond my help, then extricated myself from the wreckage and walked to the edge of the field. I found myself standing beneath a giant stele where strange symbols swirled in brilliant, jewellike colors. Weak and dazed though I was, I felt a surge of delight. Surely, I thought, the people who made this cannot be entirely uncivilized.

Miss Haertzler took her turn onstage like the rest of us. She was the sort who would have cut off her right breast the better to bow the violin, but, happily, she played the harpsichord. Perhaps Al wouldn't have minded anyway. Strange man. From some entirely different land and I could never quite figure out where. Certainly he wouldn't have minded. She played only the very old and the very new, whereas I had suddenly discovered Beethoven (over again) and talked about Romanticism during our staff meetings. Al said, "In some ways a return to Romanticism is like a return to the human figure." I believe he approved of the idea.

He spent the first night, Tuesday night that was, the twenty-second, in our red and white tent under the bleachers at the back. A touch of hay fever woke him early.

By Wednesday Ralph and I had already spent two afternoons calculating our losses owing to the rain, and I longed for a new experience of some sort that would lift me out of the endless problems of the Annual Fall Festival of the Arts. I returned dutifully,

however, to the area early the next day to continue my calculations in the quiet of the morning and found him there.

“Me, Al. You?” Pointing finger.

“Ha, ha.” (I *must* get rid of my nervous laugh!)

I wanted to redefine my purposes not only for his sake, but for my own.

I wanted to find out just what role the audience should play.

I wanted to figure out, as I mentioned before, how we could best incorporate aspects of the war and the changing race relations into our concerts.

I wondered how to present musical experiences in order to enrich the lives of others in a meaningful way, how to engage, in other words, their total beings.

I wanted to expand their musical horizons.

“I’ve thought about these things all year,” I said, “ever since I knew I would be a director of the Annual Fall Festival. I also want to mention the fact,” I said, “that there’s a group from the college who would like to disrupt the unity of our performances (having other aims and interests), but,” I told him, “the audience has risen to the occasion, at least by last night, when we had, not only good weather, but money and an enthusiastic reception.”

“I have recognized,” he replied, “here in this valley, a fully realized civilization with a past history, a rich present, and a future all its own, and I have understood, even in my short time here, the vast immigration to urban areas that must have taken place and that must be continuing into the present time.”

How could I help falling in love with him? He may have spent the second night in Miss Haertzler’s bed (if my conjectures are correct) but, I must say, it was with me he had all his discussions.

I awoke the next morning extremely hungry, with a bad headache and with sniffles and no handkerchief yet, somehow, in spite of this, in fairly good spirits though I did long for a good hot cup of almost anything. Little did I realize then, or I might not have felt so energetic, the hardships I was to encounter here in this strange, elusive, never-never land. Even just getting something to eat was to prove difficult.

Somewhat later that day I asked him out to lunch and I wish I could describe his expression eating his first grilled cheese and bacon, sipping his first clam chowder . . .

Ralph, I tell you, this really happened and just as if we haven't *all* crash-landed here in some sort of unknown alfalfa field. As if we weren't *all* penniless or about to be, waiting for you to ask us out to lunch. Three of our friends are dead and already there are several misunderstandings. You may even be in love with me for all I know, though that may have been before I had gotten to be your boss in the Annual Fall Festival.

That afternoon I gave Al a job, Ralph, cleaning up candy wrappers and crumpled programs with a nail on a stick and I invited him to our after-performance party for the audience. Paid him five dollars in advance. That's how much in love I was, so there's no sense in you coming over anymore. Besides, I'm tired of people who play instruments by blowing.

I found the natives to be a grave race, sometimes inattentive, but friendly and smiling, even though more or less continuously concerned about the war. The younger ones frequently live communally with a charming innocence, by threes or fours or even up to sixes or eights in quite comfortable apartments, sometimes forming their own family groups from a few chosen friends, and, in their art, having a strange return to the very old or the primitive along with their logical and very right interest in the new, though some liked Beethoven.

We had invited the audience to our party after the performance. The audience was surprised and pleased. It felt privileged. It watched us now with an entirely different point of view and it wondered at its own transformation while I wondered I hadn't thought of doing this before and said so to Al as the audience gasped, grinned, clapped, fidgeted and tried to see into the wings.

We had, during that same performance, asked the audience to come forward, even to dance if it was so inclined. We had discussed this thoroughly beforehand in our staff meetings. It wasn't as though it were not a completely planned thing, and we had

thought some Vivaldi would be a good way to start them off. Al had said, "Certainly something new must happen every day." Afterward I said to the audience, "Let me introduce Al, who has just arrived by an unfortunate plane crash from a far-off land, a leading force among the new objectivists, but penniless at the moment, sleeping out under our bleachers . . ." However, that very night I heard that Miss Haertzler and Al went for a walk after our party up to the gazebo on the hill or either they went rowing on the lake, and Tom Disch said, though not necessarily referring to them, "Those are two, thin, young people in the woods and they're quite conscious that they don't have clothes on and that they're very free spirits." And he said, "She has a rather interesting brassiere," though that was at a different time, and also, "I wonder if he's a faggot because of the two fingers coming down so elegantly."

I found it hard to adjust to some of the customs of this hardy and lively people. This beautiful, slim young girl invited me to her guest room on my second night there and then entered as I lay in bed, dropping her simple, brightly colored shift at her feet. Underneath she wore only the tiniest bit of pink lace, and while I was wondering was she, perhaps, the king's daughter or the chief's mistress? what dangers would I be opening myself up to? and thinking besides that this was my first night in a really comfortable bed after a very enervating two days, also my first night with a full stomach and would I be able to? then she moved, not toward me, but to the harpsichord . . .

I had much to learn.

Mornings, sometimes as early as nine thirty, Al could be found painting in purples, browns, grays and blacks in the vestibule area at the front of our tent. The afternoons many of us, Al included, frequently spent lounging on the grass outside the tent (on those days it didn't rain), candidly confessing the ages of, and the natures of our very first sexual experiences and discussing other indiscretions, with the sounds of the various rehearsals as our background music. (Miss Haertzler's first sexual experience,

from what I've been told, may have actually taken place fairly recently and in our own little red ticket booth.) During the evening concerts I can still see Al, as though it were yesterday, in his little corner backstage scribbling on his manifesto of the new art:

"Why should painting remain shackled by outmoded laws? Let us proclaim, here and at once, a new world for art where each work is judged by its own internal structures, by the manifestations of its own being, by its self-established decrees, by its self-generated commands.

"Let us proclaim the universal properties of the thing itself without the intermediary of fashion.

"Let us proclaim the fragment, the syllable, the single note (or sound) as the supreme elements out of which everything else flows . . ."

And so forth.

(Let us also proclaim what Tom Disch has said: "I don't understand people who have a feeling of comfortableness about art. There's a kind of art that they feel comfortable seeing and will go and see that kind of thing again and again. I get very bored with known sensations. . . .")

But, even as he worked, seemingly so contented, and even as he welcomed color TV, the discovery of DNA and the synthesizing of an enzyme, Al had his doubts and fears just like anyone else.

Those mountains that caught the rays of the setting sun and burned so red in the evenings! That breath-taking view! How many hours have I spent gazing at them when I should have been writing on my manifesto, aching with their beauty and yet wondering whether I would ever succeed in crossing them? How many times did my conversation at that time contain hidden references to bearers and guides? Once I learned of a trail that I might follow by myself if I could get someone to furnish me with a map. It was said only to be negotiable through the summer to the middle of October and to be too steep for mule or motorcycle. Later on I became acquainted with a middle-aged, homosexual flute player named Ralph A. who was willing to answer all my questions quite candidly. We became good friends and, as I got to know

him better, I was astounded at the sophistication of his views on the nature of the universe. He was a gentle, harmless person, tall and tanned from a sun lamp. Perhaps I should mention that he never made any sexual advances to me, that I was aware of at any rate.

“After the meeting between Ralph A. and Al W.,” the critics write, “Ralph A.’s work underwent an astonishing change. Obviously he was impressed by the similarities between art and music and he attempted to interpret in musical terms those portions of Al W.’s manifesto that would lend themselves to this transposition. His ‘Three Short Pieces for Flute, Oboe and Prepared Piano’ is, perhaps, the finest example of his work of this period.”

By then Al had lent his name to our town’s most prestigious art gallery. We had quoted him often in our programs. I had discussed with him the use of public or private funds for art. I had also discussed, needless to say, the problem of legalized abortion and whether the state should give aid to parochial schools. Also the new high-yield rice. I mentioned our peace groups including our Women’s March for Peace. I also tried to tell him Miss Haertzler’s real age and I said that, in spite of her looks, it would be very unlikely that she could ever have any children, whereas I, though not particularly young anymore, could at least do that, I’m (fairly) sure.

And then, all too soon, came the day of the dismantling of the Annual Fall Festival tent and the painting over of our billboard, which Al did (in grays, browns, purples and blacks), making it into an ad for the most prestigious art gallery, and I, I was no longer a director of anything at all. The audience, which had grown fat and satiated on our sounds, now walked in town as separate entities . . . factions . . . fragments . . . will-o’-the-wisps . . . meaningless individuals with their separate reactions. Al walked with them, wearing his same old oddly cut clothes as unself-consciously as ever, and, as ever, with them, but not of them. He had worked for us until the very last moment, but now I had no more jobs to give. Tom Disch had had a job as a copywriter for a while and made quite a bit of money, but he gave it all up for the sake of literature and I expected Al to give up these

little jobs for the sake of his art as soon as he had some money. The trouble was, he couldn't find another little job to tide him over and while the critics and many others, too, liked his paintings, no one wanted to buy them. They were fairly expensive and the colors were too somber. I helped him look into getting a grant, but in the end it went to a younger man (which I should have anticipated). I gave him, at about that time, all my cans of corned-beef hash even though I knew he still spent some time in Miss Haertzler's guest room, though, by then, a commune (consisting of six young people of both sexes in a three-room apartment) had accepted him as one of them. (I wonder sometimes that he never asked Miss Haertzler to marry him, but he may have been unfamiliar with marriage as we know it. We never discussed it that I remember and not too many people in his circle of friends were actually married to each other.)

Ralph had established himself as the local college musical figure, musician in residence, really, and began to walk with a stoop and a slight limp and to have a funny way of clearing his throat every third or fourth word. I asked him to look into a similar job for Al, but they already had an artist in residence, a man in his sixties said to have a fairly original eye and to be profoundly concerned with the disaffection of the young, so they couldn't do a thing for Al for at least a year, they said, aside from having him give a lecture or two, but even that wouldn't be possible until the second semester.

Those days I frequently saw Al riding around on a borrowed motor scooter (sometimes not even waving), Miss Haertzler on the back with her skirts pulled up. He still painted. The critics have referred to this time in his life as one of hardship and self-denial while trying to get established.

Meanwhile it grew colder.

Miss Haertzler bought him a shearling lamb jacket. Also one for herself. I should have suspected something then, but I knew it was the wrong time of year for a climb. There was already a little bit of snow on the top of the highest of our mountains and the weatherman had forecast a storm front on the way that was or was not to be there by that night or the next afternoon. We all thought it was too early for a blizzard.

I was to find Miss (Vivienne) Haertzler an excellent traveling companion. Actually a better climber than I was myself in many ways and yet, for all that vigor, preserving an essential femininity. Like many others of her race, she had small hands and feet and a fair-skinned look of transparency and yet an endurance that matched my own. But I did notice about her that day an extraordinary anxiety that wasn't in keeping with her nature at all (nor of the natives in general). I didn't give a second thought, however, to any of the unlikely rumors I had heard, but I assumed it was due to the impending storm that we hoped would hide all traces of our ascent.

A half a day later a good-sized group of our more creative people were going after one of the most exciting minds in the arts with bloodhounds. A good thing for Miss Haertzler, too, since the two of them never even got halfway. I saw them back in town a few days afterward still looking frostbitten and it wasn't long after that that I had a very pleasant discussion with Al. I had asked him out to our town's finest Continental restaurant. We talked, among other things, about alienation in our society, population control, impending world famine and other things of international concern including the anxiety prevalent among our people of impending atomic doom. In passing I mentioned a psychologist I had once gone to for certain anxieties of my own of a more private nature. Soon after that I heard that Al was in therapy himself and had nearly conquered his perennial urge to cross the mountains and, as the psychologist put it, leave our happy valley in his efforts to escape from something in himself. It would be a significant moment in both modern painting and modern music (and perhaps in literature, too, Tom Disch might say) when Al would finally be content to remain in his new-found artistic milieu. I can't help but feel that the real beginning of Al's participation (sponsored) within our culture as a whole was right here on my couch in front of the fireplace with a cup of hot coffee and a promise of financial assistance from two of our better-known art patrons. It was right here that he began living out some sort of universal human drama of life and death in keeping with his special talents.

Alexei Panshin

NOW I'M WATCHING ROGER

NOW I'M watching Roger. Roger is hanging face-down in his ropes overhead and looking at me. He isn't saying anything and I'm not speaking.

I wish I had the time to spare in relaxation that he does, but I'm kept constantly busy. There are a million things here to do. If I had Roger's free time, I'd know how to put it to good use. I wouldn't idle.

I wonder about Roger's experiments. The only time he ever seems to work on them is during our regular telecast to Earth. I asked him about his experiments once, but he didn't take notice. He jumped up into his ropes. He's very well practiced at it now. If I had more time perhaps I could make flying leaps to the top of the dome, too.

Roger is too silent. He never speaks up when Jack does something to annoy me, and this encourages Jack to take more advantage. Roger will never settle anything, and I've saved him from Jack I don't know how many times. But how do you ask a man to back you? He either sees the need or he doesn't. It isn't proper to ask, so I don't.

On the other hand, if he's going to play the silent game, there's no reason why I shouldn't play it, too. The only time I'll speak is when I stir from my silent work to drag Jack off his back. But I don't expect he will notice.

To taunt me, Jack takes off his black hat during our telecasts. He's charming and plausible. If you believe him, we would be

happy to stay another eight months on the moon. I'm not sure I could juggle things that long, though I'll grant that Jack might.

When it is my turn, I nod and wave to Earth. I tell them we're keeping busy. Roger works away at his experiments in the background. He waves to the camera but he doesn't say anything.

When the telecast is over, Jack puts his black hat back on again. He spent an entire evening making it out of paper and coloring it black with ink. I didn't watch because I was busy working. Jack knows the black hat annoys me, but I'm not saying anything or taking any notice.

He may be plausible in public, but Roger and I know him better. He only eats the good parts of things and leaves the rest—I imagine he was indulged. And he's a glutton. I pointed it out when he left only the rind from the Christmas fruitcake and his antics lasted for a month. He started by leaving crusts and bits of cracker on my plate and grew even more blatant when I refused to take any notice. At the end, he was gobbling with both hands and flinging food about.

I do have an audio of several episodes but it isn't easy to tell what is happening.

I have a number of recordings of Jack. None of Roger except for background.

In one recording, I say, "Jack, you haven't been sterilizing." It is a point I am particular about.

"It's true, Clarence 'Clancy' Ballou, I haven't been. I've decided to give it up. I'll take my chances with the moon. Let the moon take its chances with me. I wouldn't mind giving it a dose of something."

"That's against policy," I say.

"Screw policy, Clarence. Maybe you're too nice for this work. There's the universe, as regular as a clock. Then there's us, life, an out-of-place accident. We're anarchy, disorder. No matter how tough the universe makes the rules, life will survive and spread. The moon is only the first step. Someday we'll spread to the stars and take over everything. We'll rip the guts out of the universe. We'll strip-mine the stars. Life will prevail. It's our destiny to crap up the works."

“You make us sound evil. That’s what the regulations are for, to ensure that we don’t contaminate other worlds.”

“You don’t understand, Clarence. We are evil. And it’s up to us to make the most of it.”

“But I’m good. I’ve always been good.”

“Learn better.”

It was after that that he made his black paper hat. It’s supposed to be a reminder to me, but it isn’t really necessary. I know which of us is which.

Jack is outside. I’ve been counting our sacks of garbage. I believe that two are missing. I fear the worst.

Was it sterilized? Not if he didn’t sterilize it.

I fear the worst.

Just before the telecast, I say to Jack, “What about the garbage?”

“What garbage?”

“I know about the garbage. Unless you stop burying it outside, I’m going to have to tell them back home.”

He takes off his black hat. He combs his hair and practices his smile.

“I’ve been counting,” I say.

On the telecast, I’m cautious. I say that some garbage is missing.

They ask Jack about it. Jack is in charge of accounting for the garbage. He says that it is all there.

I call on Roger. Roger smiles and waves from the background for the camera.

Jack smiles and tells the audience about garbage accounting procedures. He is very plausible. He thanks me for raising the question.

After the telecast, he says, “I have a higher loyalty.” And he puts his black hat back on.

What can I do?

Another sack of garbage is missing.

I don’t know what to do.

Roger just fell off the bench. Since I enforced safety regulations

and made him stop sleeping in his ropes, he has taken to biting his fingernails and falling off the bench.

I've been thinking about Jack. I've been thinking about the moon infected with life. I've been thinking about people like Jack overcrawling the universe.

Jack is larger than I am.

I've just made myself a white hat.

Another sack of garbage is missing. Sometimes I think Jack is not completely sane.

I have taken charge of garbage accounting. I think I'll rest easier now that it is in my hands.

In future, I think that the answer must lie in unbreachable refuse containers. And a tight check system to see that everything gets deposited. But even these cannot be enough if the irresponsible aren't weeded out beforehand. The power of life must rest in hands that respect it. I'm not sure how that can be ensured, but I will think about it until the rotation changes.

This new job means one more intrusion on my time, but it's necessary. Those who can do are condemned to do to the limit of their strength.

I explained on the telecast to Earth tonight as best I could. I told them the problem and how I had solved it. I'm sure I didn't tell it well—Jack was always the raconteur—but they seemed to understand. Roger looked up from his work long enough to nod and wave to the people back home.

I think things are under control.

Things are much smoother now. The change in Roger has been amazing. He is more active now. He works with greater concentration. He listens to my advice and nods. He has even been outside the dome for the first time in months.

That is the good side. On the negative side, he has taken to his ropes again. I haven't the time or the heart to speak to him about it.

I'm very busy.

I just counted and counted again to be sure. One of Jack's fourteen sacks is missing; I believe a foot. I don't know how it could have happened. The right foot, I think. We must get unbreachable refuse containers.

Now I'm watching Roger. Roger is hanging in his ropes and watching me.

Jack M. Dann

WHIRL CAGE

"I'M GOIN'TA tell it, I'm goin'ta tell it *now*," screamed the roly-poly, middle-aged ragamuffin. For an instant the crowd cowered around him, a mangy lion bemused by a snake, then rippled, roared, climbed the ragamuffin and strangled him before he remembered what he had to tell.

An old woman rose from the crowd instead, wisps of gray hair swimming behind her. She rode atop the crowd, neatly balanced and erect. "Yes, yes, it's all true," she said. "They come in . . . yes yes, Sadaday they were here. Everything was fine 'fore they come; now we got to run from them and their things."

The crowd was heavy beneath her, but friable, and it crumpled, swallowing first her arm, then face, cotton hair, paste shoulders, and yellowed buttocks. She drowned silently, overwhelmed by flesh.

Raymond Mantle stood before the undulating mass of faces, all screaming at once, now that Cassandra had disappeared. He knew they were wary of the gleaming camera plate that covered his forehead and eyes. The threads of metal and the surface-perfect plastiglass reflected the mid-afternoon sun like a mirror.

The crowd filled the streets as far back as he could see, and it was also behind him, out of sight, but pushing toward him, closing in. He felt it, he sensed it, yet he could not let them know or he would lose control and they would bolt and trample him. He concentrated, as he had been told, and thought of things soft and warm. He was in a glass canoe on a rolling lake, drenched with sun, eating, and dreaming, and sleeping.

The crowd accepted the spell he tossed at them and hushed,

but it was not enough. He waited until he could only hear their whispers and breathing. "All right," he said. "I am still ready. Tell me, tell us what it is like to be in this hell on Earth." (That was for the hometown audience.) "Tell me more—I will help you." He had to believe what he said or they would sense his disbelief and make it their own. The recording mechanism buzzed comfortably, vibrating slightly against his temples.

Mantle remained visibly calm, but inside, in the pulp, anxiety festered. Beginning as a mental chill, it turned to claustrophobia, then to mindless fear. He wanted to help them; he had to help them, yet he knew he could not help them. His mind raced away with this revelation, screeching, and screaming, and laughing. He assumed a more relaxed position, shifted his weight to one leg, tried to control the sudden stiffness in his neck, tried to forget the bubbling screams of panic in his head.

The recorder chuckled. The crowd quickened its pace, pushed across the street, crossed the invisible boundary line.

They sensed his fear, his uncertainty, his loss of control, and they fed upon it. He was an outsider; he was not a part of them, but he had cast such a soft shadow that they had listened; he had reached out and they had replied. But they had also massed behind him, one mind, ubiquitous, patient, waiting for him to slip into an outsider, an outsider without spells or shadows—something they would have to swallow and digest.

Mantle could not contain his fear; they were too close. He panicked and ran toward Smith Street. Remembering another time, he tried to stop, to regain control. He raced back through the years to a dark beach under the water where he had screamed into his faceplate to his friend dying in the curdling sand. It was the same sensation, the same cramped howling.

He rushed through a dim alley. He could not stop, every thought only strengthened the blank tidal wave inches behind him.

They marched from Jay Street in clumps, supporting lovers who lay atop their human beds and screamed *peace* and *follow us* as they passed their brothers welling into shape on Fulton Street. The older ones ran screaming down Schermerhorn Street, less reserved and without slogans. There were no leaders, only magnetized pieces of a puzzle being drawn into place.

Mantle crouched in a narrow, dusty alleyway twelve blocks from the crowded intersection where he had spoken to the crowd. He could hear screaming all around him, but it was not very close yet; he still had time. Careful, he told himself. If you keep your head you may still get out of this. He swallowed some of the pounding in his throat. He pushed the camera mount back into place and took a small ovoid microphone from his pocket. Holding it to his mouth, he called his field tank, repeating his location every few seconds.

A broken segment of the crowd found him and grew; slowly at first, two by two, four by four, sixteen by sixteen; they smelled his fear. He repeated his location while they silently converged upon him.

They shouted as they filed into the alley, toy soldiers wound up and aimed in his direction.

He froze and the scene turned white as he dropped to his knees and reclined into a shock position. "No, you fool," he said to hear his voice, his familiar, raspy, commanding voice.

His glands opened up, flushing him with flashes of will and vitality. He got up and ran.

They rushed after him screaming, *Outsider, Outsider, where's your shadow, got no shadow, gotta get a shadow, shadow, shadow, we gonna kill you, better find a shadow, better find a shadow.* Pushing into the alleyway like a storm wave, they sang of victory and dogcatchers. *Kill the dogcatcher, pull off his head, pull off the wires, the wires, from the wirehead.*

He ran to the end of the alley. A metal door was barely visible behind a mountain of garbage, newspapers, rotted wood crates, heaps of shattered window glass, and broken furniture. Five feet above the door was a window large enough for a thin man to squeeze through, its broken glass clinging to the frame.

He climbed the broken furniture and pushed his fingers into the garbage. As he rose, it sank below him, fell on top of him, but not before he grabbed the windowsill. He pulled, bones cracking at the shoulders, and lifted himself through the window in a splash of blood and glass.

The crowd mounted the heap and fell down upon itself, mashing the litter into the ground, crushing the wood, grinding the

glass. Finally they climbed on top of each other, substituting their bodies for the garbage handholds of furniture and crates, reaching for the red-rimmed window.

Streets away, the field tank, Mantle's base, zigzagged through the streets, its electrical web promising a heavy shock to anyone in its path. The tank's front panel was tightly shut.

The tank stopped across the street and the mob cracked under the window, falling upon itself, leaving a fat, beetle-skinned woman dangling from the window-ledge. The crowd hushed, trembled, and scattered out of the alleyway, tiny spiders crawling over each other, into the streets, the holes in the ground, the buildings above.

Mantle had found his way out of the building through an inconspicuous side door. His camera was still on as he ran in the direction of the Manhattan Bridge.

As he ran he heard his name boomed from a loudspeaker.

Mantle. Give us your location.

Mantle felt for the ovoid microphone, his tiny communicator, but his pocket had been ripped away. In its place he felt crusted blood. He ran toward the sound.

Mantle. Our location is the corner of Jay and Fulton. Can you reach us?

Yes, he thought, I'm going to reach you. I'm going to get out of this hellhole and breathe, feel salt breezes, step on grass, see a natural horizon. He drew mental pictures of Josiane, his blond Belgian wife, standing in front of their thatched house in Bougainville before the present became reality. He sketched his twin daughters, oval-eyed and pale-skinned, somersaulting into his arms.

They are here, he thought. I'm walking on their graves. I killed them. He slowed down to rest, to clear them from his mind. They refused to go. They followed him, skin cracking from their faces, pale eyes turned brittle, hunched over, knuckles dragging on the ground. He had brought them here, back to the greatest city in the world, and had left them. And now he had returned, only to fail again, and leave again, taking only their ghosts in his memory.

As he turned a corner, nearer now to the tank, an intense white flash transformed the buildings, rubble, screaming clumps of peo-

ple, crushed automobiles, crashed twin jets, rumpled dolls, and twisted cables into a two-dimensional line drawing, lighthanded and bleached, its lifelikeness compressed into a few deft strokes. A deafening blast of sound followed. And another flash-blast took its turn, and then another. He pressed himself against a building wall and waited while the blasts echoed against the rotted buildings.

He could wait no longer. Shielding his eyes from the blasts, he ran toward the tank. There was no precedent for a tank to fire into a crowd, Mantle told himself. The crowds could not help themselves, could not help what they were, what they had become.

The crowds could not harm a field tank, Mantle thought. Not even with *their* numbers. The crowds were, at most, an annoyance to the tanks: they would press around the tanks, shouting, pounding, making passage impossible without crushing hundreds; but the electric webs had disposed of that problem.

Yet when Mantle arrived, the tank was crippled, a gaping hole parted fore from aft, and a green-helmeted sergeant lay sprawled beside it, his arm tucked under his back, his mouth a lake of blood. From the buildings rising into pinpoints, reflecting the setting sun, the tiny bombs dropped, now that the larger ones had been used up. The area around the tank was dotted with puddles of fire, sizzling, hissing, exploding into clouds of blue sparks.

The crowd cheered each burst. It was Christmas and New Year's and Easter all at once.

Mantle could see a twisted shape hanging out an eleventh-story window, its arm outstretched, dangling a needle-bomb over the tank. So they're finally fighting back, he thought. How many armories were there in the city? A shiver grew from the base of his spine and spent itself below his neck.

The crowd raised the bleeding body and chanted, *Dogcatcher's dying, dying, dying*. The tank was a melted gray clot of metal. It bubbled and rivulets of silver lava flowed across the street, filling the gaping craters, snuffing out the glowing embers inside.

A family skittered past Mantle, half human, half dressed—a blond Belgian with two children, dirty, swollen, fair-skinned. Mantle turned from the phantasm and ran. He ran from himself, he ran from a crowd that was all around him, he ran from his children

who begged him. The crowd, pushing toward the tank, thinned out as Mantle ran the other way. Behind him the explosions began again, melting foundations, cracking skyscrapers, rupturing the ground.

Mantle did not slow down until he became lightheaded from exhaustion. Then he walked aimlessly, keeping to the main thoroughfares; there was no place to go. The settling evening was calm: the wind softly whistled between the buildings, the heat rose from the cement, a blue-white star winked above him, and the full moon shimmered as a trail of cirrus passed across its face.

The wheeze of the wind unnerved him; shadows seemed to spring from every corner, from every doorway, yet he could not see anyone in the streets. Block after block, building after building, it was the same cardboard desolation. Unconsciously, he yearned to hear something besides the clatter of his heels and the wheezing of the wind, to fear something alive.

He heard something stir ahead. He stopped, listened, strained his eyes.

He heard a soft whisper. *You killed them, you killed them. We saw you. We watched you. You left them, you left them and ran, ran.* Another small voice joined the first. *Run away 'cause they're dead, dead, dying, dying.*

Mantle ran from the voices. I came back, he said to himself, then out loud, "I came back." The whisper followed him. It screamed, it railed, it rose through the dead buildings.

You left them, you ran, runner. We were watching, we were waiting. Watching, waiting, watching, waiting. Runrun, now run-run that way, run this way runrun into the subway run; we're in the tunnels, in the elevators, in the bank vaults, in the candy stores, in the cracks in the cement. So runrun; we're waiting: running-waiting, running-waiting.

As Mantle ran he raised his head toward the infected moon, his eyes focused on the bleeding image shrouded in captured clouds. Three gnarled figures ran beside him, pale in the moonlight, yellow teeth snapping at the air.

They had begun to move into the streets, crashing into the stillness, pouring, merging with themselves, splitting, sucking

flesh-soft debris into their vortex. Pressing, bloated figures flooded around Mantle, running with him, trapping him in a cage of movement.

You-them, you-them, you-them, you left, you left them. Floorsucker. We are waiting, we are waiting. Waiting for the floorsucker, waiting for, waiting for.

Mantle stumbled. The crowd poured over him, scratching at his eyes, snapping his bones, stripping his skin. Mantle huddled into a ball, his arms over his gaping eyes, legs against his chin. He opened his mouth, forcing the decayed, putrescent shout out of his bleeding throat. And he screamed, exhaling thick streamers of sound until he became only an instrument for his scream.

The diggers, the scratchers, the gougers shrank away from him, clots of his flesh warm in their hands. They shouted, magnifying Mantle's lone strident scream. Unable to contain themselves, mouths open like hungry birdlings, the spectators joined the deafening chorus.

The scream Mantle created was continuous, only the instruments, the individuals ran out of breath, to inhale, and slowly exhale, filling the spaces left by their breathless companions. *Oooooommmmm* was the latent singsong—the *Ooooo* rising on the sound curve until it reached the *mmmm* which fell away into a grumble.

The pieces, the groups, the instruments converging, pushing into each other, raised Mantle above them. Mantle, his palms pressed against his drained orbits, convulsed and gagged on his distended tongue. He was the missing fragment forced into place: the newly coronated directing force. With sudden purpose he outstretched his arm, watching it fossilize before him, willing his weakened joints into stiffness.

From his vantage point atop the crowd, Mantle could see the vastness of his legions milling past the pincushions of dark-windowed spires reaching into the night sky. Mantle, the petrified god, the hollow king, drew their energy, swam in their ecstasy, and drowned as he took his position in the natural order. Before him, out of sight, the sun readied itself to eclipse the evening.

Gardner R. Dozois

A KINGDOM BY THE SEA

For the Democratic National Convention

EVERY DAY, Mason would stand with his hammer and kill cows. The place was big—a long, high-ceilinged room, one end open to daylight, the other end stretching back into the depths of the plant. It had white, featureless walls—painted concrete—that were swabbed down twice a day, once before lunch and once after work. The floor could be swabbed too—it was stone, and there was a faucet you could use to flood the floor with water. Then you used a stiff-bristled broom to swish the water around and get up the stains. That was known as Gling a floor in the Army. Mason had been in the Army. He called it Gling. So did the three or four other veterans who worked that shift, and they always got a laugh out of explaining to the college boys the plant hired as temporary help why the work they'd signed up to do was called that. The college boys never knew what Gling was until they'd been shown, and they never understood the joke either, or why it was called that. They were usually pretty dumb.

There was a drain in the floor to let all the water out after the place had been Gled. In spite of everything, though, the room would never scrub up quite clean; there'd always be some amount of blood left staining the walls and floor at the end of the day. About the best you could hope to do was grind it into the stone so it became unrecognizable. After a little of this, the white began to get dingy, dulling finally to a dirty, dishwater gray. Then they'd paint the room white again and start all over.

The cycle took a little longer than a year, and they were about

halfway through it this time. The men who worked the shift didn't really give a shit whether the walls were white or not, but it was a company regulation. The regs insisted that the place be kept as clean as possible for health reasons, and also because that was supposed to make it a psychologically more attractive environment to function in. The workmen wouldn't have given a shit about their psychological environment either, even if they'd known what one was. It was inevitable that the place would get a little messy during a working day.

It was a slaughterhouse, although the company literature always referred to it as a meat-packing plant.

The man who did the actual killing was Mason: the focal point of the company, of all the meat lockers and trucks and canning sections and secretaries and stockholders; their lowest common denominator. It all started with him.

He would stand with his hammer at the open end of the room, right at the very beginning of the plant, and wait for the cows to come in from the train yard. He had a ten-pound sledge for a hammer, long and heavy, with serrated rubber around the handle to give him a better grip. He used it to hit the cows over the head. They would herd the cows in one at a time, into the chute, straight up to Mason, and Mason would swing his hammer down and hit the cow between the eyes with tremendous force, driving the sledge completely through the bone and into the brain, killing the cow instantly in its tracks. There would be a gush of warm, sticky blood, and a spatter of purplish brain matter; the cow would go to its front knees, as if it were curtsying; then its hind-quarters would collapse and drag the whole body over onto one side with a thunderous crash—all in an eyeblink. One moment the cow would be being prodded in terror into the chute that led to Mason, its flanks lathered, its muzzle flecked with foam, and then—almost too fast to watch—the lightning would strike, and it would be a twitching ruin on the stone floor, blood oozing sluggishly from the smashed head.

After the first cow of the day, Mason would be covered with globs and spatters of blood, and his arms would be drenched red past the elbows. It didn't bother him—it was a condition of his job, and he hardly noticed it. He took two showers a day,

changed clothes before and after lunch; the company laundered his white working uniforms and smocks at no expense. He worked quickly and efficiently, and never needed more than one blow to kill. Once Mason had killed the cow, it was hoisted on a hook, had its throat cut, and was left for a few minutes to bleed dry. Then another man came up with a long, heavy knife and quartered it. Then the carcass was further sliced into various portions, each portion was impaled on a hook and carried away by a clanking overhead conveyor belt toward the meat lockers and packing processes that were the concerns of the rest of the plant.

The cows always seemed to know what was about to happen to them—they would begin to moan nervously and roll their eyes in apprehension as soon as they were herded from the stock car on the siding. After the first cow was slaughtered, their apprehension would change to terror. The smell of the blood would drive them mad. They would plunge and bellow and snort and buck; they would jerk mindlessly back and forth, trying to escape. Their eyes would roll up to show the whites, and they would spray foam, and their sides would begin to lather. At this point, Mason would work faster, trying to kill them all before any had a chance to sweat off fat. After a while, they would begin to scream. Then they would have to be prodded harshly toward Mason's hammer. At the end, after they had exhausted themselves, the last few cows would grow silent, shivering and moaning softly until Mason had a chance to get around to them, and then they would die easily with little thrashing or convulsing. Often, just for something to do, Mason and the other workmen would sarcastically talk to the cows, make jokes about them, call them by pet names, tell them—after the fashion of a TV variety-skit doctor—that everything was going to be all right and that it would only hurt for a minute, tell them what dumb fucking bastards they were—"That's right, sweetheart. Come here, you big dumb bastard. Papa's got a surprise for you"—tell them that they'd known goddamn well what they were letting themselves in for when they'd enlisted. Sometimes they would bet on how hard Mason could hit a cow with his big hammer, how high into the air the brain matter would fly after the blow. Once Mason had won a buck from Kaplan by hitting a cow so hard that he had driven

it to its knees. They were no more callous than ordinary men, but it was a basically dull, basically unpleasant job, and like all men with dull, unpleasant jobs, they needed something to spice it up, and to keep it far enough away. To Mason, it was just a job, no better or worse than any other. It was boring, but he'd never had a job that wasn't boring. And at least it paid well. He approached it with the same methodical uninterest he had brought to every other job he ever had. It was his job, it was what he did.

Every day, Mason would stand with his hammer and kill cows.

It is raining: a sooty, city rain that makes you dirty rather than wet. Mason is standing in the rain at the bus stop, waiting for the bus to come, as he does every day, as he has done every day for the past six years. He has his collar up against the wind, hands in pockets, no hat: his hair is damp, plastered to his forehead. He stands somewhat slouched, head slumped forward just the tiniest bit—he is tired, the muscles in his shoulders are knotted with strain, the back of his neck burns. He is puzzled by the excessive fatigue of his body; uneasy, he shifts his weight from foot to foot—standing here after a day spent on his feet is murder; it gets him in the thighs, the calves. He has forgotten his raincoat again. He is a big man, built thick through the chest and shoulders, huge arms, wide, thick-muscled wrists, heavy-featured, resigned face. He is showing the first traces of a future pot belly. His feet are beginning to splay. His personnel dossier (restricted) states that he is an unaggressive underachiever, energizing at low potential, anally oriented (plodding, painstaking, competent), highly compatible with his fellow workers, shirks decision-making but can be trusted with minor responsibility, functions best as part of a team, unlikely to cause trouble: a good worker. He often refers to himself as a slob, though he usually tempers it with laughter (as in: “Christ, don’t ask a poor slob like me about stuff like that,” or, “Shit, I’m only a dumb working slob”). He is beginning to slide into the downhill side of the middle thirties. He was born here, in an immigrant neighborhood, the only Presbyterian child in a sea of foreign Catholics—he had to walk two miles to Sunday school. He grew up in this gray factory city—sloughed through high school, the Army, drifted from job to job, town to town, dish-

washing, waiting tables, working hardhat (jukeboxes, backrooms, sawdust, sun, water from a tin pail), work four months, six, a year, take to the road, drift: back to his hometown again after eight years of this, to his old (pre-Army) job, full circle. This time when the restlessness comes, after a year, he gets all the way to the bus terminal (sitting in the station at three o'clock in the morning, colder than hell, the only other person in the huge, empty hall a drunk asleep on one of the benches) before he realizes that he has no place to go and nothing to do if he gets there. He does not leave. He stays: two years, three, four, six now, longer than he has ever stayed anywhere before. Six years, slipping up on him and past before he can realize it, suddenly gone (company picnics, Christmas, Christ—taxes again already?), time blurring into an oily gray knot, leaving only discarded calendars for fossils. He will never hit the road again; he is here to stay. His future has become his past without ever touching the present. He does not understand what has happened to him, but he is beginning to be afraid.

He gets on the bus for home.

In the cramped, sweaty interior of the bus, he admits for the first time that he may be getting old.

Mason's apartment was on the fringe of the heavily built-up district, in a row of dilapidated six-story brownstones. Not actually the slums, not like where the colored people lived (Mason doggedly said colored people, even when the boys at the plant talked of niggers), not like where the kids, the beatniks lived, but a low-rent district, yes. Laboring people, low salaries. The white poor had been hiding here since 1920, peering from behind thick faded drapes and cracked Venetian blinds. Some of them had never come out. The immigrants had disappeared into this neighborhood from the boats, were still here, were still immigrants after thirty years, but older and diminished, like a faded photograph. All the ones who had not pulled themselves up by their bootstraps to become crooked politicians or gangsters or dishonest lawyers—all forgotten: a gritty human residue. The mailboxes alternated names like Goldstein and Kowalczyk and Ricciardi. It was a dark, hushed neighborhood, with few big stores, no movies,

no real restaurants. A couple of bowling alleys. The closest civilization approached was a big concrete housing project for disabled war veterans a block or two away to the east, and a streamlined-chromeplated-neonflashing shopping center about half a mile to the west, on the edge of a major artery. City lights glowed to the north; highrises marched across the horizon south: H. G. Wells Martians, acres of windows flashing importantly.

Mason got off the bus. There was a puddle at the curb and he stepped in it. He felt water soak into his socks. The bus snapped its doors contemptuously shut behind him. It rumbled away, farting exhaust smoke into his face. Mason splashed toward his apartment, wrapped in rain mist, moisture beading on his lips and forehead. His shoes squelched. The wet air carried heavy cooking odors, spicy and foreign. Someone was banging garbage cans together somewhere. Cars hooted mournfully at him as they rushed by.

Mason ignored this, fumbling automatically for his keys as he came up to the outside door. He was trying to think up an excuse to stay home tonight. This was Tuesday, his bowling night; Kaplan would be calling in a while, and he'd have to tell him something. He just didn't feel like bowling; they could shuffle the league around, put Johnson in instead. He clashed the key against the lock. Go in, damn it. This would be the first bowling night he'd missed in six years, even last fall when he'd had the flu—Christ, how Emma had bitched about that, think he'd risen from his deathbed or something. She always used to worry about him too much. Still, after six years. Well, fuck it, he didn't feel like it, was all; it wasn't going to hurt anything, it was only a practice session anyway. He could afford to miss a week. And what the fuck was wrong with the lock? Mason sneered in the dark. How many years is it going to take to learn to use the right key for the front door, asshole? He found the proper key (the one with the deep groove) with his thumb and clicked the door open.

Course, he'd have to tell Kaplan something. Kaplan'd want to know why he couldn't come, try to argue him into it. (Up the stairwell, around and around.) Give him some line of shit. At least he didn't have to make up excuses for Emma anymore—she would've wanted to know why he wasn't going, if he felt good,

if he was sick, and she'd be trying to feel his forehead for fever. A relief to have her off his back. She'd been gone almost a month. Now all he had to worry about was what to tell fucking Kaplan. (Old wood creaked under his shoes. It was stuffy. Muffled voices leaked from under doorways as he passed, pencil beams of light escaped from cracks. Dust motes danced in the fugitive light.)

Fuck Kaplan anyway, he didn't have to justify his actions to Kaplan. Just tell him he didn't want to, and the hell with him. The hell with all of them.

Into the apartment: one large room, partially divided by a low counter into kitchen and living room—sink, refrigerator, stove and small table in the kitchen; easy chair, coffee table and portable television in the living room; a small bedroom off the living room and a bath. Shit, he'd have to tell Kaplan something after all, wouldn't he? Don't want the guys to start talking. And it is weird to miss a bowling night. Mason took off his wet clothes, threw them onto the easy chair for Emma to hang up and dry. Then he remembered that Emma was gone. Finally left him—he couldn't blame her much, he supposed. He was a bum, it was true. He supposed. Mason shrugged uneasily. Fredricks promoted over him, suppose he didn't have much of a future—he didn't worry about it, but women were different, they fretted about stuff like that, it was important to them. And he wouldn't marry her. Too much of a drifter. But family stuff, that was important to a woman. Christ, he couldn't really blame her, the dumb cunt—she just couldn't understand. He folded his clothes himself, clumsily, getting the seam wrong in the pants. You miss people for the little things. Not that he really cared whether his pants were folded right or not. And, God knows, she probably missed him more than he did her; he was more independent—sure, he didn't really need anybody but him. Dumb cunt. Maybe he'd tell Kaplan that he had a woman up here, that he was getting laid tonight. Kaplan was dumb enough to believe it. He paused, hanger in hand, surprised at his sudden vehemence. Kaplan was no dumber than anybody else. And why couldn't he be getting laid up here? Was that so hard to believe, so surprising? Shit, was he supposed to curl up and fucking die because his girl'd left, even a longtime (three years) girl? Was that what Kaplan and the rest of those

bastards were thinking? Well, then, call Kaplan and tell him you're sorry you can't make it, and then describe what a nice juicy piece of ass you're getting, make the fucker eat his liver with envy because he's stuck in that damn dingy bowling alley with those damn dingy people while you're out getting laid. Maybe it'll even get back to Emma. Kaplan will believe it. He's dumb enough.

Mason took a frozen pizza out of the refrigerator and put it into the oven for his supper. He rarely ate meat, didn't care for it. None of his family had. His father had worked in a meat-packing plant too—the same one, in fact. He had been one of the men who cut up the cow's carcass with knives and cleavers. "Down to the plant," he would say, pushing himself up from the table and away from his third cup of breakfast coffee, while Mason was standing near the open door of the gas oven for warmth and being wrapped in his furry hat for school, "I've got to go down to the plant."

Mason always referred to the place as a meat-packing plant.

(Henderson had called it a slaughterhouse, but Henderson had quit.)

The package said fifteen minutes at 450, preheated. Maybe he shouldn't tell Kaplan that he was getting laid, after all. Then everybody'd be asking him questions tomorrow, wanting to know who the girl was, how she was in the sack, where he'd picked her up, and he'd have to spend the rest of the day making up imaginary details of the affair. And suppose they found out somehow that he hadn't had a woman up here after all? Then they'd think he was crazy, making up something like that. Lying. Maybe he should just tell Kaplan that he was coming down with the flu. Or a bad cold. He *was* tired tonight. (death) Maybe he actually was getting the flu. From overwork, or standing around in the rain too long, or something. Maybe that was why he was so fucking tired—Christ, exhausted—why he didn't feel like going bowling. Sure, that was it. And he didn't have to be ashamed of being sick: he had a fine work record, only a couple of days missed in six years. Everybody gets sick sometime, that's the way it is. They'd understand.

Fuck them if they didn't.

Mason burned the pizza slightly. By the time he pulled it out

with a washcloth, singeing himself in the process, it had begun to turn black around the edges, the crust and cheese charring. But not too bad. Salvageable. He cut it into slices with a roller. As usual, he forgot to eat it quickly enough, and the last pieces had cooled off when he got around to them—tasting now like cardboard with unheated spaghetti sauce on it. He ate them anyway. He had some beer with the pizza, and some coffee later. After eating, he still felt vaguely unsatisfied, so he got a package of Fig Newtons from the cupboard and ate them too. Then he sat at the table and smoked a cigarette. No noise—nothing moved. Stasis.

The phone rang: Kaplan.

Mason jumped, then took a long, unsteady drag on his cigarette. He was trembling. He stared at his hand, amazed. Nerves. Christ. He was working too hard, worrying too much. Fuck Kaplan and all the rest of them. Don't tell them anything. You don't have to. Let them stew. The phone screamed again and again: three times, four times, six. Don't answer it, Mason told himself, whipping up bravura indignation to cover the sudden inexplicable panic, the fear, the horror. You don't have to account to them. Ring (*scream*), ring (*scream*), ring (*scream*). The flesh crawled on his stomach, short hair bristled along his back, his arms. Stop, dammit, stop, *stop*. "Shut up!" he shouted, raggedly, half rising from the chair.

The phone stopped ringing.

The silence was incredibly evil.

Mason lit another cigarette, dropping the first match, lighting another, finally getting it going. He concentrated on smoking, the taste of the smoke and the feel of it in his lungs, puffing with staccato intensity (*IthinkIcanIthinkIcanIthinkIcanIthinkIcan*). Something was very wrong, but he suppressed that thought, pushed it deeper. A tangible blackness: avoid it. He was just tired, that's all. He'd had a really crummy, really rough day, and he was tired, and it was making him jumpy. Work seemed to get harder and harder as the weeks went by. Maybe he was getting old, losing his endurance. He supposed it had to happen sooner or later. But shit, he was only thirty-eight. He wouldn't have believed it, or even considered it, before today.

"You're getting old," Mason said, aloud. The words echoed in the bare room.

He laughed uneasily, nervously, pretending scorn. The laughter seemed to be sucked into the walls. Silence blotted up the sound of his breathing.

He listened to the silence for a while, then called himself a stupid asshole for thinking about all this asshole crap, and decided that he'd better go to bed. He levered himself to his feet. Ordinarily he would watch television for a couple of hours before turning in, but tonight he was fucked up—too exhausted and afraid. Afraid? What did he have to be scared of? It was all asshole crap. Mason stacked the dirty dishes in the sink and went into the bedroom, carefully switching off all the other lights behind him. Darkness followed him to the bedroom door.

Mason undressed, put his clothes away, sat on the bed. There was a dingy transient hotel on this side of the building, and its red neon sign blinked directly into Mason's bedroom window, impossible to block out with any thickness of curtain. Tonight he was too tired to be bothered by it. It had been a bad day. He would not think about it, any of it. He only wanted to sleep. Tomorrow would be different; tomorrow would be better. It would have to be. He switched off the light and lay back on top of the sheet. Neon shadows beat around the room, flooding it rhythmically with dull red.

Fretfully, he began to fall asleep in the hot room, in the dark.

Almost to sleep, he heard a woman weeping in his mind.

The weeping scratched at the inside of his head, sliding randomly in and out of his brain. Not really the sound of weeping, not actually an audible sound at all, but rather a feeling, an essence of weeping, of unalterable sadness. Without waking, he groped for the elusive feelings, swimming down deeper and deeper into his mind—like diving below a storm-lashed ocean at night, swimming down to where it is always calm and no light goes, down where the deep currents run. He was only partially conscious, on the borderline of dream where anything seems rational and miracles are commonplace. It seemed only reasonable, only fair that, in his desolation, he should find a woman in his head.

He did not question this, he did not find it peculiar. He moved toward her, propelled and guided only by the urge to be with her, an ivory feather drifting and twisting through vast empty darkness, floating on the wind, carried by the currents that wind through the regions under the earth, the tides that march in Night. He found her, wrapped in the underbelly of himself like a pearl: a tiny exquisite irritant. Encased in amber, he could not see, but he knew somehow that she was lovely, as perfect and delicate as the bud of a flower opening to the sun, as a baby's hand. He comforted her as he had comforted Emma on nights when she'd wake up crying: reaching through darkness toward sadness, wrapping it in warmth, leaching the fear away with presence, spreading the pain around between them to thin it down. She seemed startled to find that she was not alone at the heart of nothing, but she accepted him gratefully, and blended him into herself, blended them together, one stream into another, a mingling of secret waters in the dark places in the middle of the world, in Night, where shadows live. She was the thing itself, and not its wrapping, as Emma had been. She was ultimate grace—moving like silk around him, moving like warm rain within him. He merged with her forever.

And found himself staring at the ceiling.

Gritty light poured in through the window. The hotel sign had been turned off. It was morning.

He grinned at the ceiling, a harsh grin with no mirth in it: skin pulling back and back from the teeth, stretching to death's-head tautness.

It had been a dream.

He grinned his corpse grin at the morning.

Hello morning. Hello you goddamned son of a bitch.

He got up. He ached. He was lightheaded with fatigue: his head buzzed, his eyelids were lead. It felt as if he had not slept at all.

He went to work.

It is still raining. Dawn is hidden behind bloated spider clouds. Here, in the factory town, miles of steel mills, coke refineries, leather-tanning plants, chemical scum running in the gutters, it

will rain most of the year: airborne dirt forming the nucleus for moisture, an irritant to induce condensation—producing a listless rain that fizzles down endlessly, a deity pissing. The bus creeps through the mists and drizzle like a slug, parking lights haloed by dampness. Raindrops inch down the windowpane, shimmering and flattening when the window buzzes, leaving long wet tracks behind them. Inside, the glass has been fogged by breath and body heat, making it hard to see anything clearly. The world outside has merged into an infinity of lumpy gray shapes, dinosaur shadows, here and there lights winking and diffusing wetly—it is a moving collage done in charcoal and watery neon. The men riding the bus do not notice it—already they seem tired. It is 7 a.m. They sit and stare dully at the tips of their shoes, or the back of the seat in front of them. A few read newspapers. One or two talk. Some sleep. A younger man laughs—he stops almost immediately. If the windows were clear, the rain collage of light and shadow would be replaced by row after row of drab, crumbling buildings, gas stations decked with tiny plastic flags, used car lots with floodlights, hamburger stands, empty schoolyards with dead trees poking up through the pavement, cyclone-fenced recreation areas that children never use. No one ever bothers to look at that either. They know what it looks like.

Usually Mason prefers the aisle seat, but this morning, prompted by some obscure instinct, he sits by the window. He is trying to understand his compulsion to watch the blurred landscape, trying to verbalize what it makes him think of, how it makes him feel. He cannot. Sad—that's the closest he can come. Why should it make him sad? Sad, and there is something else, something he gropes for but it keeps slipping away. An echo of reawakening fear, in reaction to his groping. It felt like, it was kind of like— Uneasily, he presses his palm to the window, attempts to rub away some of the moisture obscuring the glass. (This makes him feel funny too. Why? He flounders, grasping at nothing—it is gone.) A patch of relatively clear glass appears as he rubs, a swath of sharper focus surrounded by the oozing myopia of the collage. Mason stares out at the world, through his patch of glass. Again he tries to grasp something—again he fails. It all looks wrong some-

how. It makes him vaguely, murkily angry. Buildings crawl by outside. He shivers, touched by a septic breath of entropy. Maybe it's— If it was like— He cannot. Why is it wrong? What's wrong with it? That's the way it's always looked, hasn't it? Nothing's changed. What could you change it to? What the fuck is it *supposed* to be like? No words.

Raindrops pile up on the window again and wash away the world.



At work, the dream continued to bother Mason throughout the day. He found that he couldn't put it out of his mind for long—somehow his thoughts always came back to it, circling constantly like the flies that buzzed around the pools of blood on the concrete floor. He tried thinking about pussy, his ultimate hole card, but that only seemed to make it worse. Mason became annoyed, and slightly uneasy. It wasn't healthy to be so wrapped up in a fucking dream. It was sick, and you had to be sick in the head to fool around with it. It was sick—it made him angry to think about the slime and sickness of it, and faintly nauseous. He didn't have that slime in his head. No, the dream had bothered him because Emma was gone. It was rough on a guy to be alone again after living with somebody for so long. He should go out and actually pick up some broad instead of just thinking about it—should've had one last night so he wouldn't've had to worry about what to tell Kaplan. Sweep the cobwebs out of his brain. Sitting around that damn house night after night, never doing anything—no wonder he felt funny, had crazy dreams.

At lunch—sitting at the concrete, Formica-topped table, next to the finger-smudged plastic faces of the coffee machine, the soft drink machine, the sandwich machine, the ice cream machine (Out of Order) and the candy bar machine—he toyed with the idea of telling Russo about the dream, playing it lightly, maybe getting a few laughs out of it. He found the idea amazingly unpleasant. He was reluctant to tell anybody anything about the dream. To his amazement, he found himself getting angry at the thought. Russo

was a son of a bitch anyway. They were all son of a bitches. He snapped at Russo when the Italian tried to draw him into a discussion he and Kaplan were having about cars. Russo looked hurt.

Mason mumbled something about a hangover in apology and gulped half of his steaming coffee without feeling it. His tuna salad sandwich tasted like sawdust, went down like lead. A desolate, inexplicable sense of loss had been growing in him throughout the morning as he became more preoccupied with the dream. He *couldn't* have been this affected by a dream, that was crazy—there had to be more to it than that, it had to be more than just a dream, and he wasn't crazy. So it couldn't have been a dream completely, somehow. He missed the girl in the dream. How could he miss someone who didn't exist? That was crazy. But he did miss her. So maybe the girl wasn't completely a dream somehow, or he wouldn't miss her like that, would he? That was crazy too. He turned his face away and played distractedly with crumbs on the Formica tabletop. No more of this: it was slimy, and it made his head hurt to think about it. He wouldn't think about it anymore.

That afternoon he took to listening while he worked. He caught himself at it several times. He was listening intently, for nothing. No, not for nothing. He was listening for her.

On the bus, going home, Mason is restless, as if he were being carried into some strange danger, some foreign battlefield. His eyes gleam slightly in the dark. The glare of oncoming car headlights sweeps over him in oscillating waves. Straps swing back and forth like scythes. All around him, the other passengers sit silently, not moving, careful not to touch or jostle the man next to them. Each in his own space: semi-visible lumps of flesh and shadow. Their heads bob slightly with the motion of the bus, like dashboard ornaments.

When Mason got home, he had frozen pizza for supper again, though he'd been intending to have an omelet. He also ate some more Fig Newtons. It was as though he were half-consciously trying to reproduce the previous night, superstitiously repeating all the details of the evening in hopes of producing the same result. So he ate pizza, shaking his head at his own stupidity and swear-

ing bitterly under his breath. He ate it nevertheless. And as he ate, he listened for the scratching—hating himself for listening, but listening—only partially believing that such a thing as the scratching even existed, or ever had, but listening. Half of him was afraid that it would not come; half was afraid that it would. But nothing happened.

When the scratching at his mind did come again it was hours later, while he was watching an old movie on the Late Show, when he had almost managed to forget. He stiffened, feeling a surge of terror (and feeling something else that he was unable to verbalize), even the half of his mind that had wanted it to come screaming in horror of the unknown now that the impossible had actually happened. He fought down terror, breathing harshly. This couldn't be happening. Maybe he was crazy. A flicker of abysmal fear. Sweat started on his forehead, armpits, crotch.

Again, the scratching: bright feelings sliding tentatively into his head, failing to catch and slipping out, coming back again—like focusing a split-image lens. He sat back in the easy chair; old springs groaned, the cracked leather felt hot and sticky against his T-shirted back. He squeezed the empty beer can, crumpling it. Automatically he put the empty into the six-pack at the foot of the chair. He picked up another can and sat with it unopened in his lap. The sliding in his head made him dizzy and faintly nauseated—he squirmed uneasily, trying to find a position that would lessen the vertigo. The cushion made a wet sucking noise as he pulled free of it: the dent made by his back in the leather began to work itself back to level, creaking and groaning, only to re-form when he let his weight down again. Jarred by motion, the ashtray he'd been balancing on his knee slipped and crashed face-down to the rug in an explosion of ashes.

Mason leaned forward to pick it up, stopped, his attention suddenly caught and fixed by the television again. He blinked at the grainy, flickering black-and-white images; again he felt something that he didn't know how to say, so strongly that the sliding in his head was momentarily ignored.

It was one of those movies they'd made in the late '20's-'30's where everything was perfect. The hero was handsome, suave, impeccably dressed; he had courage, he had style, he could fit in

anywhere, he could solve any problem—he never faltered, he never stepped on his own dick. He was Quality. The heroine matched him: she was sophisticated, refined, self-possessed—a slender, aristocratic sculpture in ice and moonlight. She was unspeakably lovely. They were both class people, posh people: the ones who ran things, the ones who mattered. They had been born into the right families on the right side of town, gone to the right schools, known the right people—got the right jobs. Unquestioned superiority showed in the way they moved, walked, planted their feet, turned their heads. It was all cool, planned and poised, like a dancer. They knew that they were the best people, knew it without having to think about it or even knowing that they knew it. It was a thing assumed at birth. It was a thing you couldn't fake, couldn't put on: something would trip you up everytime, and the other ones on top would look through you and see what you really were and draw a circle that excluded you out (never actually saying anything, which would make it worse), and you would be left standing there with your dick hanging out, flushed, embarrassed, sweating—too coarse, doughy, unfinished—twisting your hat nervously between knobby, clumsy hands. But that would never happen to the man and woman on television.

Mason found himself trembling with rage, blind with it, shaking as if he were going to tear himself to pieces, falling apart and not knowing why, amazed and awed by his own fury, his guts knotting, his big horny hands clenching and unclenching at the injustice, the monstrousness, the slime, the millions of lives pissed away, turning his anger over and over, churning it like a murky liquid, pounding it into froth.

They never paid any dues. They never sweated, or defecated. Their bodies never smelled bad, never got dirty. They never had crud under their fingernails, blisters on their palms, blood staining their arms to the elbows. The man never had five o'clock shadow; the woman never wore her hair in rollers like Emma, or had sour breath, or told her lover to take out the garbage. They never farted. Or belched. They did not have sex—they *made love*, and it was all transcendental pleasure: no indignity of thrashing bodies, clumsily intertwining limbs, fumbling and straining, incoherent words and coarse animal sounds; and afterward he would

be breathing easily, her hair would be in place, there would be no body fluids, the sheets would not be rumpled or stained. And the world they moved through all their lives reflected their own perfection: it was beautiful, tidy, ordered. Mansions. Vast lawns. Neatly painted, tree-lined streets. And style brought luck too. The gods smiled at them, a benign fate rolled dice that always came up sevens, sevens, sevens. They skated through life without having to move their feet, smiling, untouched, gorgeous, like a parade float: towed by others. They broke the bank of every game in town. Everything went their way. Coincidence became a contortionist to finish in their favor.

Because they had class. Because they were on top.

Mason sat up, gasping. He had left the ashtray on the floor. Numbly, he set the beer can down beside it. His hand was trembling. He felt as if he had been kicked in the stomach. *They* had quality. He had nothing. He could see everything now: everything he'd been running from all his life. He was shit. No way to deny it. He lived in a shithouse, he worked in a shithouse. His whole world was a vast shithouse: dirty black liquid bubbling prehistorically; rich feisty odors of decay. He was surrounded by shit, he wallowed in it. He *was* shit. Already, he realized, it made no difference that he had ever lived. You're nothing, he told himself, you're shit. You ain't never been anything but shit. You ain't never going to be anything but shit. Your whole life's been nothing but shit.

No.

He shook his head blindly.

No.

There was only one thing in his life that was out of the ordinary, and he snatched at it with the desperation of a drowning man.

The sliding, the scratching in his head that was even now becoming more insistent, that became almost overwhelming as he shifted his attention back to it. That was strange, wasn't it? That was unusual. And it had come to him, hadn't it? There were millions and millions of other people in the world, but it had picked *him*—it had come to him. And it was real, it wasn't a dream. He wasn't crazy, and if it were just a dream he'd have to be. So it was real, and the girl was real. He had somebody else

inside his head. And if that was real, then that was something that had never happened to anybody else in the world before—something he'd never even heard about before other than some dumb sci-fi movies on TV. It was something that even *they* had never done, something that made him different from every man in the world, from every man who had ever lived. It was his own personal miracle.

Trembling, he leaned back in the chair. Leather creaked. This was his miracle, he told himself, it was good, it wouldn't harm him. The bright feelings themselves were good: somehow they reminded him of childhood, of quiet gardens, of dust motes spinning in sunlight, of the sea. He struggled for calm. Blood pounded at his throat, throbbed in his wrists. He felt (the memory flooding, incredibly vivid—ebbing) the way he had the first time Sally Rogers had let him spread her meaty, fragrant thighs behind the hill during noon class in the seventh grade: lightheaded, scared, shaking with tension, madly impatient. He swallowed, hesitating, gathering courage. The television babbled unnoticed in the background. He closed his eyes and let go.

Colors swallowed him in a rush.

She waited for him there, a there that became *here* as his knowledge of his physical environment faded, as his body ceased to exist, the soothing blackness broken only by random after-images and pastel colors scurrying in abstract, friendly patterns.

She was *here*—simultaneously *here* and very far away. Like him, she both filled all of *here* and took up no space at all—both statements were equally absurd. Her presence was nothing but that: no pictures, no images, nothing to see, hear, touch or smell. That had all been left in the world of duration. Yet somehow she radiated an ultimate and catholic femininity, an archetypal essence, a quicksilver mixture of demanding fire and an ancient racial purpose as unshakable and patient as ice—and he knew it was the (girl? woman? angel?) of his previous “dream,” and no other.

There were no words *here*, but they were no longer needed. He understood her by empathy, by the clear perception of emotion that lies behind all language. There was fear in her mind—a rasp like hot iron—and a feeling of hurtling endlessly and forlornly

through vast, empty desolation, surrounded by cold and by echoing, roaring darkness. She seemed closer tonight, though still unimaginably far away. He felt that she was still moving slowly toward him, even as they met and mingled *here*, that her body was careening toward him down the path blazed by her mind.

She was zeroing in on him; this was the theory his mind immediately formed, instantly and gratefully accepted. He had thought of her from the beginning as an angel—now he conceived of her as a lost angel wandering alone through Night for ages, suddenly touched by his presence, drawn like an iron filing to a magnet, pulled from exile into the realms of light and life.

He soothed her. He would wait for her, he would be a beacon—he would not leave her alone in the dark, he would love her and pull her to the light. She quieted, and they moved together, through each other, became one.

He sank deeper into Night.

He floated in himself: a Moebius band.

In the morning, he woke in the chair. A test pattern hummed on the television. The inside of his pants was sticky with semen.

Habit drives him to work. Automatically he gets up, takes a shower, puts on fresh clothes. He eats no breakfast; he isn't hungry—he wonders, idly, if he will ever be hungry again. He lets his feet take him to the bus stop, and waits without fretting about whether or not he'd remembered to lock the door. He waits without thinking about anything. The sun is out; birds are humming in the concrete eaves of the housing project. Mason hums too, quite unconsciously. He boards the bus for work, lets the driver punch his trip ticket, and docilely allows the incoming crowd to push and jostle him to an uncomfortable seat in the back, over the wheel. There, sitting with his knees doubled up in the tiny seat and peering around with an unusual curiosity, the other passengers give him the first bad feeling of the day. They sit in orderly rows, not talking, not moving, not even looking out the window. They look like department store dummies, on their way to a new display. They are not there at all.

Mason decided to call her Lilith—provisionally at least, until the day, soon now, when he could learn her real name from her own lips. The name drifted up from his subconscious, from the residue of long, forgotten years of Sunday school—not so much because of the associations of primeval love carried by the name (although those rang on a deeper level), but because as a restless child suffering through afternoons of watered-down theology he'd always imagined Lilith to be rather pretty and sympathetic, the kind who might wink conspiratorially at him behind the back of the pious, pompous instructor: a girl with a hint of illicit humor and style, unlike the dumpy, clay-faced ladies in the Bible illustrations. So she became Lilith. He wondered if he would be able to explain the name to her when they met, make her laugh with it.

He fussed with these and other details throughout the day, turning it over in his mind—he wasn't crazy, the dream was real, Lilith was real, she was his—the same thoughts cycling constantly. He was happy in his preoccupation, self-sufficient, only partly aware of the external reality through which he moved. He contributed only monosyllabic grunts to the usual locker-room conversations about sports and Indochina and pussy, he answered questions with careless shrugs or nods, he completely ignored the daily gantlet of hellos, good-byes, how're they hangings and other ritual sounds. During lunch he ate very little and let Russo finish his sandwich without any of the traditional exclamations of amazement about the wop's insatiable appetite—which made Russo so uneasy that he was unable to finish it after all. Kaplan came in and told Russo and Mason in hushed, delighted tones that old Hamilton had finally caught the clap from that hooker he'd been running around with down at Saluzzio's. Russo exploded into the expected laughter, said *no shit?* in a shrill voice, pounded the table, grinned in jovial disgust at the thought of that old bastard Hamilton with VD. Mason grunted.

Kaplan and Russo exchanged a look over his head—their eyes were filled with the beginnings of a reasonless, instinctive fear: the kind of unease that pistons in a car's engine might feel when one of the cylinders begins to misfire. Mason ignored them; they did not exist; they never had. He sat at the stone table and chain-smoked with detached ferocity, smoking barely half of each

cigarette before using it to light another and dumping the butt into his untouched coffee to sizzle and drown. The dixie cup was filled with floating, jostling cigarette butts, growing fat and mud-colored as they sucked up coffee: a nicotine logjam. Kaplan and Russo mumbled excuses and moved away to find another table; today Mason made them feel uneasy and insignificant.

Mason did not notice that they had gone. He sat and smoked until the whistle blew, and then got up and walked calmly in to work. He worked mechanically, raising the hammer and bringing it down, his hands knowing their job and doing it without any need of volition, the big muscles in his arms and shoulders straining, his legs braced wide apart, sweat gleaming—an automaton, a clockwork golem. His face was puckered and preoccupied, as if he were constipated. He did not see the blood; his brain danced with thoughts of Lilith.

Twice that day he thought he felt her brush at his mind, the faintest of gossamer touches, but there were too many distractions—he couldn't concentrate enough. As he washed up after work, he felt the touch again: a hesitant, delicate, exploratory touch, as if someone were groping through his mind with feather fingers.

Mason trembled, and his eyes glazed. He stood, head tilted, unaware of the stream of hot water against his back and hips, the wet stone underfoot, the beaded metal walls; the soap drying on his arms and chest, the smell of heat and wet flesh, the sharp hiss of the shower jets and the gargle of water down the drain; the slap of thongs and rasp of towels, the jumbled crisscross of wet footprints left by men moving from the showers to the lockers, the stuffiness of steam and sweat disturbed by an eddy of colder air as someone opened the outer door; the rows of metal lockers beyond the showers with *Playboy* gatefolds and Tijuana pornography and family snapshots pinned to the doors, the discolored wooden benches and the boxes of foot powder, the green and white walls of the dressing room covered with company bulletins and joke-shop signs . . . Everything that went into the making of that moment, of his reality, of his life. It all faded, became a ghost, the shadow of a shadow, disappeared completely, did not exist. There was only *here*, and Lilith *here*. And their touch, infinitely closer than joined fingers. Then the world dragged him away.

He opened his eyes. Reality came back: in a babble, in a rush, mildly nauseating. He ignored it, dazed and incandescent with the promise of the night ahead. The world steadied. He stepped back into the shower stream to wash the soap from his body. He had an enormous erection. Clumsily, he tried to hide it with a towel.

Mason takes a taxi home from work. The first time.

That night he is transformed, ripped out of himself, turned inside out. It is pleasure so intense that, like pain, it cannot be remembered clearly afterward—only recollected as a severe shock: sensation translated into a burst of fierce white light. It is pleasure completely beyond his conception—his most extreme fantasy not only fulfilled but intensified. And yet for all the intensity of feeling, it is a gentle thing, a knowing, a complete sharing of emotion, a transcendental empathy. And afterward there is only peace: a silence deeper than death, but not alone. *I love you*, he tells her, really believing it for the first time with anyone, realizing that words have no meaning, but knowing that she will understand, *I love you*.

When he woke up in the morning, he knew that this would be the day.

Today she would come. The certainty pulsed through him, he breathed it like air, it beat in his blood. The knowledge of it oozed in through every pore, only to meet the same knowledge seeping out. It was something felt on a cellular level, a biological assurance. Today they would be together.

He looked at the ceiling. It was pocked with water stains; a deep crack zigzagged across flaking plaster. It was beautiful. He watched it for a half hour without moving, without being aware of the passage of time; without being aware that what he was watching was a "ceiling." Then, sluggishly, something came together in his head, and he recognized it. Today he didn't begrudge it, as he had Wednesday morning. It was a transient condition. It was of no more intrinsic importance than the wall of a butterfly's cocoon after metamorphosis.

Mason rolled to his feet. Fatigue and age had vanished. He was filled with bristly, crackling vitality, every organ, every cell seem-

ing to work at maximum efficiency: so healthy that "healthy" became an inadequate word. This was a newer, higher state.

Mason accepted it calmly, without question. His movements were leisurely and deliberate, almost slow motion, as if he were swimming through syrup. He knew where he was going, that they would find each other today—that was predestined. He was in no hurry. The same inevitability colored his thoughts. There was no need to do much thinking now, it was all arranged. His mind was nearly blank, only deep currents running. Her nearness dazzled him. Walking, he dreamed of her, of time past, of time to come.

He drifted to the window, lazily admiring the prism sprays sunlight made around the edges of the glass. The streets outside were empty, hushed as a cathedral. Not even birds to break the holy silence. Papers dervished down the center of the road. The sun was just floating clear of the brick horizon: a bloated red ball, still hazed with nearness to the earth.

He stared at the sun.

Mason became aware of his surroundings again while he was dressing. Dimly, he realized that he was buckling his belt, slipping his feet into shoes, tying knots in the shoelaces. His attention was caught by a crisscross pattern of light and shadow on the kitchen wall.

He was standing in front of the slaughterhouse. Mason blinked at the building's filigreed iron gates. Somewhere in there, he must have caught the bus and ridden it to work. He couldn't remember. He didn't care.

Walking down a corridor. A machine booms far away.

He was in an elevator. People. Going down.

Time clock.

A door. The dressing room, deep in the plant. Mason hesitated. Should he go to work today? With Lilith so close? It didn't matter—when she came, Lilith would find him no matter where he was. It was easier meanwhile not to fight his body's trained responses; much easier just to go along with them, let them carry him where they would, do what they wanted him to do.

Buttoning his work uniform. He didn't remember opening the door, or the locker. He told himself that he'd have to watch that.

A montage of surprised faces, bobbing like balloons, very far

away. Mason brushed by without looking at them. Their lips moved as he passed, but he could not hear their words.

Don't look back. They can turn you to salt, all the hollow men.

The hammer was solid and heavy in his hand. Its familiar weight helped to clear his head, to anchor him to the world. Mason moved forward more quickly. A surviving fragment of his former personality was eager to get to work, to demonstrate his regained strength and vigor for the other men. He felt the emotion through an ocean of glass, like ghost pain in an amputated limb. He tolerated it, humored it; after today, it wouldn't matter.

Mason walked to the far end of the long white room. Lilith seemed very close now—her nearness made his head buzz intolerably. He stumbled ahead, walking jerkily, as if he were forcing his way against waves of pressure. She would arrive any second. He could not imagine how she would come, or from where. He could not imagine what would happen to him, to them. He tried to visualize her arrival, but his mind, having only Disney, sci-fi and religion to work with, could only picture an ethereally beautiful woman made of stained glass descending from the sky in a column of golden light while organ music roared: the light shining all around her and from her, spraying into unknown colors as it passed through her clear body. He wasn't sure if she would have wings.

Raw daylight through the open end of the room. The nervous lowing of cattle. Smell of dung and sweat, undertang of old, lingering blood. The other men, looking curiously at him. They had masks for faces, viper eyes. Viper eyes followed him through the room. Hooves scuffed gravel outside.

Heavy-lidded, trembling, he took his place.

They herded in the first cow of the day, straight up to Mason. He lifted the hammer.

The cow approached calmly. Tranquilly she walked before the prods, her head high. She stared intently at Mason. Her eyes were wide and deep—serene, beautiful, and trusting.

Lilith, he named her, and then the hammer crashed home between her eyes.

Albert Teichner

CHRISTLINGS

DR. MAX BRUCH'S long, gaunt frame wriggled uneasily as he glanced at his watch and saw with mounting anxiety that it was a quarter to three. In fifteen minutes Harvey Putzman, the only patient he had ever dangerously disliked, would be coming through the door to throw himself on the sofa and spew spittle-laden malice at the ceiling. Putzman, the sensationally popular novelist of the newest new generation—most psychoanalysts would have considered it a professional coup to have him on their list of emotional cripples. And Putzman was willing to pay extremely high for the privilege of having his peculiar agonies privately aired. So what was there to dislike?

"Nothing except for everything," Bruch groaned aloud. Those monstrously arching nostrils, implying a lifetime of zealous picking, were only the outermost configurations of the man. What created a deeper revulsion was the ingratitude this extremely clever writer showed for everyone who had ever helped him, the parents who spoiled him, the rabbi who forgave him, the teachers and mistresses who always insisted he was a genius. His nine-hundred-page epic, *Weequahic*, had been vicious enough toward all of them, drowning with venom that whole section of Newark, New Jersey, for which it was named. But the past year's analytic sessions had shown this was not merely poetic license; Putzman in the flesh actually hated more bitterly than he had ever dared reveal on paper!

Ten minutes to go. Bruch took a little white pill from his vest pocket and went to the water cooler. The first time for the pill,

but there had to be a virgin moment in every enterprise. He gulped it down fast and returned to his swivel chair to wait.

Every patient was entitled to the best treatment possible but, from his twenty years of experience, Bruch knew referring Putzman elsewhere would not help; it was literally impossible to like Putzman in these days of his glory and chances were that the next practitioner would handle him with even more prejudice. "I must help him even if it kills me," he said through clenched teeth. There instantly followed the consoling thought that if the pill were the least bit successful with Putzman, then it would help with any case. Where before in medical history had a doctor taken the medicine instead of the patient?

Only, so far, it wasn't working.

Then Putzman was there in the room, muttering about just having left his publisher and agent. "Think they're screwing me but it's the other way around, they'll see soon!" He regarded Bruch with distaste, fell on the couch and launched into a recent dream that made Hieronymus Bosch seem *Alice in Wonderland* bowdlerized. It was something perverted about childhood teasing of the neighbor's schnauzer (why, Bruch shuddered, was there *always* that clearly visible spray of saliva?), something new to Putzman's confessional repertoire. Just as in the novels where all the protagonist's weaknesses were blamed on the "sick society" to which his audience belonged, so here Bruch somehow became responsible for Putzman's torment. The wildly exaggerated humor made Putzman's confession too self-gratifying to be believable even as Putzman's face became twisted with unhappiness. Everything the patient said was subject to the same skeptical—

Unhappiness, thought Bruch with a sudden pang, this man was desperately unhappy, suffering something worse than anything he imposed on others. It was not proper procedure, but Bruch found himself breaking in to say softly: "Harvey, you don't have to worry about that episode ever again."

"What the hell does *that* mean?" Putzman screamed, then craned around to stare at Bruch and relaxed. His head fell back as he sighed. "You're a real paradox artist, Doctor, but you're right! I never looked at it that way before." He abruptly shifted into an attack on a high school English teacher who had wanted

him to write more genteelly, but his voice was unusually calm and the attack petered out into praise of her kindness. "She did try, though, Dr. Bruch. God knows that dried-up old maid wanted me to have the success everything in her own life had denied her."

The analyst sank deeper into gloom. It was as if he were listening to his very first patient twenty years ago, feeling each word like a whiplash, the way it had been before much of the process became distant if well-intentioned routine. As the hour went on Putzman, without once taking his eyes from the ceiling, seemed to draw new strength from that gloom.

When the novelist left he had gained more emotional ground than in all previous sessions combined. Bruch called Grainger on the intercom and exclaimed: "It looks as if it's working, unbelievable!"

"What happened?"

"Well—" The red light came on. "No time, Jack, next patient's a little early but has a thing about being kept waiting. See you six fifteen."

After Putzman, Mrs. Crofton brought an almost healthy air of commonplace neurosis into the office. True, the thirty-five-year-old mother of two remained utterly frigid after eighteen months but, while she was of only average intelligence, her cultivated background made their sessions together little islands of restrained decency in days awash with psychic sewerage. Now, without his saying a word, the restraint was gone even if the decency remained as strong as ever. Waves of sweet sympathy swept Bruch and he could feel each hurt she expressed as if it were his own. When she rose to leave there were tears in her eyes. "It's changing now," she said. "I know I am starting to get better."

The two hours had been exhausting, leaving him bathed in sweat, but there was still Bernstein, the jittery furrier, to deal with. He came in chattering about the way his wife said he was *meshugge* last night because he refused to eat the vichyssoise and maybe he was, huh? The whole inane episode was then retold at a rising machine-gun rate, but once he arrived at the self-doubt part, he slowed down. By the time the hour ended and the story had been twice more repeated, Bernstein's face had relaxed and for the first time all the forehead creases were smoothed away.

At six when Bernstein was gone and Mrs. Parker, his nurse-secretary, had looked in to say she, too, was leaving, Bruch was slumped in his chair, too drained of energy to budge. "Anything the matter, Doctor?" she asked.

"Oh, no!" he grinned.

After a minute's solitary contemplation of this strange mixture of weariness and triumph he pulled himself from the chair and walked upstairs to Grainger's compact laboratory. Grainger, a short, intense-looking fellow, began pacing the floor as soon as Bruch came in. "You think it helped, you really think it—"

"I'm sure of it."

"But when did you take the pill, Max?"

"Fifteen minutes before Putzman. Finally got up nerve."

"I was sure that dosage would be harmless!" He leaned toward Bruch like an accusing attorney. "Exactly what happened?"

With a tired smile Bruch shoved him away. "Give me a chance to rest. It's exhausting, Jack, so putter around your crockery awhile."

Grainger, muttering, adjusted the flame beneath a small test tube and Bruch turned to stare out the window at the glorious blossoming of the solitary cherry tree in his garden, one of those little consolations hard-earned money could bring.

How much more consolation now lay within his grasp! Yet five months ago the whole thing would have appeared preposterous.

The inspiration had come from a biochemical journal that his old college pal, Jack Grainger, had brought him as a joke. It described worldwide experiments on Juno A, a powerful hormone trace first isolated in cow udders and later found to be universal in female mammals. Juno A increased in pregnant women, grew even stronger following parturition and ordinarily did not decline until long after the female climacteric. As a further anomaly, some childless women—nuns, nurses, governesses and teachers, most frequently—revealed even higher levels than mothers. Researchers had sometimes called Juno A the mother-love hormone, intimately associating it with woman's capacity for devotion and endurance, even though, like many other sex-linked hormones, it appeared to a minuscule extent in men also.

Putzman! Bruch had thought, only a mother drenched in such

a hormone could love Putzman! And then it hit him: Suppose Juno A's most active fraction were isolated and proved safe for males, and suppose a practicing therapist took it. Couldn't he be a better healer for that?

At first Grainger had ridiculed the question. "Juno A research is dying down, Max. It's a relatively useless vestige of mammalian evolution, like the appendix in man."

But Grainger was a biochemist with a very inquiring mind and Max had seen the way to wear him down with the most tempting of offers. "I've got plenty of money for it, Jack. You could have my country place and all the cow udders your little heart and giant mind desired. And if you achieved an adequate supply you could bring it here for final concentration." That had worked and, once hooked, Jack had proved almost frighteningly single-minded in his zeal.

"Insane!" Jack was shouting, "absolutely insane—snoring ten minutes with your eyes open and me desperate to know what's happened!"

As a pink petal danced to the ground, Bruch's eyes followed its exquisite swings along a strong air current until he was awake again. "Sorry, Jack, it's terribly exhausting when you *feel* everything the patient throws at you."

"*Everything?*"

"That's right." He pulled himself from the chair, shaking his head in wonder. "I had the impression I understood their cases much better because of that. But their improvement involved still more. You see, they almost instantly *sensed* I was totally and more actively sympathetic. Couldn't have been visual clues because two of them didn't even look at me during their transformations!"

The biochemist frowned. "You're not trotting out any ESP garbage, Max?"

"No, I don't know what kind of two-way signals this stuff generates. Come on downstairs and let's see if I'll live."

An hour later all the readings of short-term reactions were in; the pill, ten times stronger than anything they had consumed before, involved no significant metabolic changes. "Just hope the patients do as well," Bruch said.

"They're not taking the pill!"

Max sighed. "It's just that we're dealing with something completely new—"

Grainger broke in. "Max, it's not yet a shared risk—I'd like to try the full dose, too."

"Look, Jack, I'm tired, the sympathy effect's worn off, so I'll lose my temper if we have to thrash this out once again. You distill Juno, you know how scarce it is and that if it works we're going to need every grain for *professionals*."

Jack's frown was amiable. "All right, all right, you don't have to worry I'll ever dig in without your approval."

"Anyway, there's no guarantee today's success will be repeated."

But the next day it was. Once more after taking the pill he was bathed in a glow of compassion that did not hinder the practical use of his art. And in each case the patient showed all the grateful tenderness of someone secure in the knowledge of being loved. When his workday concluded, Bruch, exultant in the agony he had endured, felt as if he were descending from the cross back to human terra firma.

The following afternoon Putzman meekly entered the office and sat on the edge of the couch, staring saucer-eyed at him. "You may have taken my writing talent from me," he said. "But don't get me wrong, Dr. Bruch, I'm glad. It's as if I'd always seen everything through a stained and dirty window and now the dirt was gone and I saw the world itself, not the stains. That's more important than being admired for an inhuman pseudo-talent. I think I'm cured!"

Within a week it was evident that *all* his patients were. But not basically through the strategies Max devised, because he barely had a chance to apply his insights. Somehow his genuine concern did most of the work, leading each one to cure himself.

"We're tapping a force so fundamental, so powerful, it can change *all* human relationships!" Grainger exclaimed once. "As if everybody lived in a vast desert, miserably clustered around a few oases, and suddenly they discover all the water needed was underfoot everywhere all along! Max, I can expand our production now a little but if we made this public, let others join the search, there might be an unlimited supply!"

"No! I haven't even told Mrs. Parker, although she sees all my cases simultaneously terminated and is bewildered."

Jack glared at him. "Let *me* ask therapeutic questions for once."

Max shrugged. "Okay."

"So far have you had any adverse physical effect from the pill?"

"No."

"Has there been any positive physical effect?"

"I suppose, on balance, yes. It's incredibly exhausting to listen so thoroughly to people all day but I always have the strength to endure it because Juno A gives that as well as sensitivity. And by evening tension is gone, leaving me with the pleasurable tiredness of a job well done."

Jack was envious. "Is there any adverse psychological effect?"

"None."

"Any positive psychological effect?"

"Yes. As I said, the knowledge I've alleviated terrible suffering."

"Then why the hell deny millions of other people that blessing *now!*"

"I must be absolutely sure. I need as many cases as possible for twelve weeks."

"No, too long."

"Well—ten weeks at the least."

Grainger shook his head in disgust, then suddenly straightened from his hunched-over posture. "All right, Max, but only ten."

The following week brought a score of new patients. Mrs. Parker was quite nervous about it. "That's a terrible burden to assume—"

"No burden," he smiled, touched by her solicitude. It was less than an hour after ingesting a Juno pill and, as he felt her anxiety rise within him, he could see her reciprocally relaxing.

"Could I say something more, Dr. Bruch?"

"Certainly."

Her eyes were misty. "I've always thought you the most dedicated of doctors—"

"Oh, no, please—"

"—and many times I've said it to my husband whom I love so I'm not getting any adolescent crush when I say it but—but lately

you've been so wonderful it's almost like being with a—a saint!" She fled back to the outer office.

Embarrassed by the fervor of her outburst, Max leaned back in his office chair. More and more he was being treated like a holy figure while under Juno A's influence. Waves of love would almost smother him as each person's burden of suffering was shifted to his granite shoulders. "I'm only a man," he told the row of framed diplomas on the facing wall, "a man, not a junior Jesus. I don't have the right to claim more."

But then his next patient was entering and he knew any attempt to dissipate the childlike adulation in her eyes would only delay the release from her private hell. Through twenty years of marriage she had been cleaning her apartment over and over each day. "Yesterday I only picked up a dust rag once!" she was exulting. "Suddenly things don't look filthy endlessly!"

She was on the way to being cured and by the end of the following week not only had such compulsive symptoms disappeared but the generating root complaint itself. In fact, by then *all* the new patients were cured and the only tiny qualm Bruch had about them was their wildly adoring gratitude.

"I am not Jesus or *any* prophet," he told one patient, an aging, hard-bitten tax lawyer who certainly should have realized this on his own, "only a human scientist."

"*Only?* You may not be the Christ, Doctor, but to me you're barely lower than the angels—a, a Christling, that's how I'd put it, yes, sir!"

The wages of virtue are hard, Bruch was forced to concede, but the best thing evidently was to leave this excessive father-transference alone since so much good went with it and in the months ahead it was bound to fade. Meanwhile, there was the next list of distraught people to start considering, and this time there would be even more of them.

Again within two weeks they were cured and again there was the same mad display of gratitude to emphasize the depth of the cures. He reached the end of each working day drained of physical energy but even that quickly revived as the Juno dose faded, and he always faced the next morning adequate to the tasks ahead.

With the increasing workload he saw less of his partner. Any-

way, Jack was spending more of his time in the country laboratory. He seemed very distant during their rare meetings, utterly preoccupied with his work. One evening Max said as much.

Jack looked with unblinking eyes at him, then asked: "Still *no* side effects, right?"

"Right!"

"Great, Max, because I'm now certain there'll be *several* ways for the big pharmaceutical houses to synthesize the pure, potent fraction cheaply. An unlimited supply is assured!" Even Bruch was surprised to find himself so *unreassured*. "What's the matter now, Max? The greatest boon to humanity in unlimited—"

"Don't get me wrong, Jack, I'm terribly pleased. It's just that the idea of an unlimited, uncontrollable supply of *anything* makes me uneasy."

"Meaning," Grainger snapped, closing the discussion, "that there are no real problems—and won't be!"

But within three days this prophecy was proved doubly wrong.

On Sunday there was the call from the answering service, right in the middle of a Menuhin recording of an unaccompanied Bach partita. "You know this is the one day I'm not to be disturbed," Bruch protested.

"I really tried not to," explained the girl, "but this Mr. Putzman has phoned a dozen times and he's threatening, violent, so really mean, Doctor, that I almost called the police!"

"Thank you, miss, and good-bye!"

The record player clicked off, all that beauty unheard, and the old Putzman-inspired disgust returned; there had been no Juno A pill today.

The novelist's immediate reaction to Bruch's call was: "Took your own sweet time, didn't you?" The question mark soared into a whine. "I've got to see you *now*!"

"Perhaps you could explain—"

"No! I've got to be with you, AT&T isn't my doctor. I'm in misery and you're like every other medico-shyster when the fees stop, aren't you? Don't worry, I'll pay."

Bruch tried once more.

"I said misery, Doctor, misery caused, not cured, by you. Well?"

"All right, I'll be waiting."

"You damned well'd better be!"

Profoundly depressed, Bruch broke a Juno in two and swallowed the half dose without even a mouthful of water. Was Putzman's cure a failure?

He arrived in a fine spray of saliva. "I feel lousy. You said I'd feel better, you said—"

"Please, Harvey, sit down and tell me everything."

"Well—" His indignation collapsed. "Nothing serious anymore. I'd just like to talk to you awhile."

An hour later he was grinning and reluctantly followed Max to the door. "You're the most reassuring person I've ever seen, Doc, but of course I should stand on my own two feet, not yours." Here he began to wheedle pitifully. "I wouldn't want ever to be a burden."

"No burden," Bruch said and rushed to offer unasked advice. "Any time you're troubled call, Harvey, any time."

Monday brought a problem even more monstrous than Putzman in the form of a remark from a middle-aged nightclub comic, Ben Herbie. This man had the bulging eyes and sag-heavy skin of a classic hyperthyroid, but his hectic behavior went even beyond endocrine excess. "Am I lucky, you bet your life," he said, "am I lucky to see you, old cock. The rumors are flying around Sardi's about your cures and Lieberman's and nobody can even talk to Lieberman's nurse now!"

"Lieberman?"

"Dr. Vladimir Lieberman, the other head specialist pulling off so many miracle cures lately. Real guru stuff."

That dabbler in Jung and Adler! Bruch had always considered Lieberman definitely second-rate. But he couldn't pursue the matter now. A patient's rights came first and this man needed help even more than his audiences. He then gently chided himself for so many unkind thoughts and launched into the interview.

At noon Max phoned Grainger at the country place and asked if he were coming into town. "I don't know, Max—late this week, I guess."

"Try today, Jack, after five thirty. Got to speak to you."

There was a long pause, then a sigh. "All right. Might as well."

For the rest of the afternoon Bruch felt guilty about pressuring Jack, when Lieberman's sudden fame could have nothing to do with him. But as soon as he mentioned the other analyst late that afternoon, Grainger flushed and threw up his hands. "You were bound to find out—but I'm not ashamed."

"You mean you told him about Juno A concentrate?"

"Of course. Gave him a supply, too. Three weeks ago and he's had the same great results." Grainger did seem a bit ashamed, though. "Okay, I know that from one angle it was a sneaky betrayal. But I only gave some to one other psychiatrist."

Bruch was appalled. "You mean there were two psychiatrists *and* others?"

"Five chemists. They've all worked out great production angles in their labs."

"My God, what have you done!"

"Nothing to worry about," Grainger assured him. "Each man signed statements conceding our priority."

"Who's worried about patent infringements? Juno A's now loose in the world and we can't ever pull it back."

"Who wants to pull it back?" Grainger shouted, angrily pacing about. "Who has the *right* to pull the greatest blessing in human history back?"

"But—"

"But hell, Max! I'll admit I practiced some deceit, but only for all those who would have had to wait in needless agony while you played Hamlet!" He drew a deep breath. "And I did keep my word about self-dosing."

"Thanks for small blessings," Bruch muttered.

"Your pill's worn off, Max. Maybe you should take another before we continue."

"Double my sensitivity for the day? I'm not sure a psyche could absorb that much pain from other people. Don't you understand yet, Jack? We're cultivating an enormously risky virtue."

"No, I don't—and you don't either!"

"I understand all right that one of our first successes relapsed yesterday."

"What?" Grainger's eyes widened. "A serious relapse?"

"Well, no. It ended quickly and there haven't been others."

Jack bounced right back. "Then don't surrender to neurotic panic, friend."

Max sadly watched him go to the door. "I'm still confident. But, Jack, it *was* a betrayal."

"Yep, a thoroughly honorable betrayal," came his parting shot.

For a long time Bruch sat behind his desk, staring at the door that had closed between them. A personal trust had been violated, and concentrated Juno A fraction could no longer be stopped. And yet the chances were overwhelming that history would vindicate Grainger, weren't they?

At twenty to nine the next morning Max took the pill, and as the subtle molecules spread benevolent warmth through him, he awaited the first of today's eight new cases. Five minutes before the hour an uproar broke out in the reception room and over Mrs. Parker's protests the door was thrown open. Mrs. Crofton, hair wildly disheveled, broke into the room. "I have to see you now!" she was screaming.

The nurse waved toward a thin, small woman seated nearby. "Someone has an appointment."

Mrs. Crofton stood astride the doorsill and glared at the woman. "What do you know of this fraud? Cured, the mountebank said I was *c-u-r-e-d!*" The woman timidly started leaving.

Mrs. Parker hurried after her. "No, Mrs. Hartzfeld, Dr. Bruch will be able to see you in a moment."

"No, I just realized I won't need a consultation."

Mrs. Crofton considered him in vindictive triumph, then softened and said, "I am *so* sorry, Dr. Bruch, but I do have to see you. Suddenly I'm unhappier than ever!"

That had to be true; the wave of pain coming from her was fearfully strong. He closed the door. Nodding, he listened to her go on, expressing nothing except her boundless admiration for him, and soon she was at ease. Thirty minutes later she left, promising never to bother him again. Max followed her out to tell Mrs. Parker to set the day's schedule back a half hour, and saw with horror that *another* ex-patient was anxiously awaiting him. "Doctor," the man started pleading, "just five minutes for God's sake!"

The abbreviated session turned out exactly like Mrs. Crofton's,

and all day long more of the first-cured came for desperately needed refreshers.

Wednesday was equally bad. When, on Thursday afternoon, Putzman showed up still again, Bruch had to concede the awful truth: Juno A had created a mysterious new dependency addiction which could only be alleviated by the increasingly frequent attentions of a hypermaternal therapist.

The telephone rang, and he shuddered at the threatening pleas he was about to hear, pleas for still more maternal supplies. Instead it was Grainger, shouting more bad news: "Lieberman, two hours ago, murdered by a cured patient!"

"Could you calm down, Jack, and explain what—"

"I called and his housekeeper said a supposedly cured patient broke in this evening, demanding extra attention. She says patients have been pestering him all hours lately—you were absolutely right about Juno A being dangerous!—and this time he refused to see the man. I suppose Lieberman didn't have an active dose in him and was sick and tired of the whole mess. Anyway the patient slashed Lieberman with a razor before he was knocked out with a paperweight. My friend died on the way to the hospital."

"Incredibly shocking!"

"I'm afraid there's more. Before I called Lieberman's home I'd heard something strange on the radio. A guru-healer out in Cleveland was cut in pieces by three followers who said he'd betrayed them, and police say a new pill-cult claiming total anxiety cures is spreading in northern Ohio."

"Which means a leak somewhere, possibly underworld synthesizing of Juno A." He took a deep breath. "No, not a leak, a dam burst—all my cures have turned sour."

"And it's my fault!"

"I don't know, Jack—chances are this would have happened eventually anyway."

"No consolation there! Max, I'll have to go to the police." He paused. "First, though, I'd like to see you and set our course."

"I'll be here all evening."

Bruch descended to the ground level of his brownstone and, weighed down by despair, waited in an armchair. Once every

ten minutes he would start to get up for a Juno A pill, then would sink back. This evening there should be nothing to keep them from the maximum objectivity possible.

At ten when the front doorbell rang he rushed to the door. As he let Grainger in, he had a sensation of vague pleasure like the first distant sweetness of roses.

"A bad scene," Grainger smiled wearily, following him into the living room, "but it's bound to get better, much better."

Suddenly, for no good reason at all, Bruch felt this was so. Everything was going to be all right. Then, as the sweet sensation in his chest became overpoweringly lovely, he realized what had happened. "You took Juno A," he said, halfheartedly accusing.

"About fifteen minutes ago, but only a half dose." Jack sat down facing Max and stared at him. "After all the trouble I've caused, I owe you something."

"Oh, no, that's all right." Now he felt engulfed in waves of love, as it must have been when he rested his head on his mother's breast, and with equal love in return he eased his mind of all its burdens, talking on and on, not knowing what he was saying, only that Jack understood it all, sympathized with it all, suffered it all as if the agony were his alone. Finally Max said, "I'm so much better now. I've been carrying so many people's troubles on my shoulders and they've all slipped away somewhere!"

He must have sat there in silence another hour before he shook his head and felt the usual world starting to come back. He could see Jack Grainger holding the other half of the pill in his hand. "No, please don't," he said. "This did me a lot of good, but no more. I could become addicted, too—the liberal, humanitarian heart can destroy as well as the sadistic one. But at least I now have an idea of what's luring so many poor devils into this trap."

Jack nodded, putting the pill in his jacket pocket. "No, I won't again. But I felt I owed you temporary escape from the horror. Want to go to the police now?"

"Yes, but first we should get a few hours' sleep, I'm afraid we'd sound too incoherent now."

Jack started upstairs to the bedroom he used next to the laboratory. "I'll set my alarm for five thirty."

After sitting in the dark awhile, Bruch went up to his office to

glance over his notes before going to bed. But as he sat down behind the desk, the sleep of utter exhaustion overcame him even before he could turn on the reading lamp. Instantly and then over and over again he dreamed that his mind was open in all directions and each and every agony ever suffered in other minds was pouring through him. And then all those other minds were opening to the same range of total hell.

The angry clangor of Grainger's alarm came from a distance to shock him from the ceaseless round of torment into which he had been plunged. He was twisted like a paralyzed contortionist in his chair, left leg still asleep, right calf muscle stretching painfully.

When the first foot-thud sounded above he swiveled his chair around in the darkness of the room and looked out at the cherry tree's black silhouette, its branches desperately reaching for heaven through the first dirty smudges of a dawn that was somewhere else. Even without a Juno A dose he could feel the struggling presence of that tree's heart and a tear came down one cheek for this world in which all things created were sacrifices to each other.

Geo. Alec Effinger

LIVE, FROM BERCHTESGADEN

"IN DÜSSELDORF, as in certain other Rhinish *Hauptstädten*, there is a large, yellow-brick building very close to the railroad terminal. I am told that a great many good German *Bürger* make their periodic, Kaabic journey to this yellow institution; inside one is confronted by a bewildering array of charming and less charming photos, blurrily enticing Kodachromes of *Mädchen* that may be rung up in the manner to which one has become accustomed.

"It is sometimes difficult for the uninitiated to know how to react to this. Europe, by its very nature, is like this, in all ways and throughout its continental extent. The pure geographic propinquity of nations lulls the tourist's sense of culture. How easy it is to cross a border and find oneself immediately in an entirely different milieu of mores and folkways. It is necessary to change your ethics at the booth while you change your pounds sterling or kronor.

"Do you have inhibitions? Lose them, or be unhappy, for sooner or later you will have one or another offended. No matter how grotesque the practice, how bestial the behavior, if you live Continental long enough you will find the neighborhood where it is merely *comme il faut*. For some, it is not the superficiality of 'When in Rome . . .' but a matter of survival."

"*Mein Herr Doktor*, how is it that she speaks so? What language is it?"

"It is English she speaks, Frau Kämmer. She is delirious; oftentimes they will babble so in another language. But it is strange that she is so coherent. It is almost as if she recites."

"*Aber*, Herr Freischütz, my Gretchen knows no English. It cannot be English that she speaks."

"Far away now, beyond the political and other walls that we have built, beneath the impossible burden of years, look: Unter den Linden. Berlin! The mention of that brightest and most sophisticated of capitals did not always carry with it the indelible tinge of guilt, the subtlest pricks of fear. Unter den Linden: no other avenue in metropolitan Europe quite held the imagination of the literate world to such a degree; no other city's showplace was ever so rich with the modish, the absolute *dernier cri*. The broad, shaded way runs from the former Royal Palace down to the Vopos at Checkpoint Charlie. As in any large city, the Unter den Linden of old was frequented by the ubiquitous *Strassen-dirnen*; but, whether or not it was merely the effect of the reflection of old Berlin's loveliness, these easier matches did not offend the grace and charm of the street. It was only after the war that Berlin learned shame.

"This shame was not previously totally unknown. It was, however, unnecessary. Beginning with Carolus Magnus, or Charlemagne, the Germans began their expansion eastward—the notorious *Drang nach Osten*—late in the eighth century. To this day the land to the west of the River Elbe is known as the 'old Germany,' and the land east, the 'new Germany.' Thus, historical precedent has given way to shame; the shame is shared by those who know the old Germany, for these are immersed in the most ancient of traditions. The new Germany is comparatively younger, but no one, not the oldest *Weisskopf*, is able to remember the initial annexation. Whatever shame is felt, therefore, is hereditary in nature. It is false shame."

*

* *

"*Guten Nachmittag, Herr Doktor.*"

"*Ja, und auch Ihnen.*"

"*Wie geht es Ihnen?*"

"*Sehr gut, danke. Ihre Tochter hat gut geschlafen. Wie geht's Ihnen?*"

"*Ach, comme ça, comme ça. Pas mal.*"

"Where is Germany? Do you find Germany in the thousands of Volkswagens on the American highways? Is Germany to be found by searching amongst the sausages and waltzes and *Buddenbrooks* of the world? Where is Germany? What, now, is Germany?"

"Germany has traded *Weltschmerz* for *ethischer Fortschritt*. The sensuousness of the Italians, the chauvinism of the French, the snobbery of the British, the unbridled passions of the Danish and the Swedes, the inscrutability of the Finnish, all these are as nothing compared to the sincerity of the German concern for morality. 'May God punish the sinful French' is a slogan for the masses; it is also, perhaps, an indication of the direction the German *Weltanschauung* has taken. It is no longer permissible to allow the nationalities of our continent to squander their precious energies in lustful abandon. It is time for a cleansing.

"But does this mean, I hear you ask, does this mean that a new wave of Puritanism must o'ersweep us, one and all? No, I reply, for extremism does not fit in with our own and exquisitely German idea of *Weltpolitik*.

"We cannot yet look for Germany in those isolated and expensive places in the sun. The specter of doom rises, and falls, and rises again: such is the natural course of events. It must rise once more like the *Unterseeboot*, to an economic and social periscope depth. There must be some effectual Curt Jurgens at the helm, and the tubes must be kept cleared for action. 'Bearing zero five four, two thousand yards . . . Mark!' This must be the watchword. '*Torpedos . . . Los!*' must be the countersign."

"What is she saying? Does she still go on in English?"

"Yes, Nurse. But she becomes less coherent. What is this inflammatory rhetoric? Such pseudo-poetry! Ah, such a strange coma."

"*Herr Doktor*, can nothing be done? She rambles on so; the other patients complain of the constant disturbance."

"*Naja*, then. Give her *ein Glas Schnaps*."

"There is no hiding this shame. It hides *im Bahnhof*, it lurks *im Postamt*, there is no peeling it from your shaking shoulders. '*Ich bekenne mich die Anklage, "nicht schuldig."*' How many of us stop our laughter when we buy soap, when we touch the lampshade? When the SS and the SA march away, whose minds do they take with them, even now? '*Wenn wir fahren gegen England!*'

"Isn't the Jew a human being too? Of course he is; none of us ever doubted it,' wrote Joseph Goebbels. 'All we doubt is that he is a *decent* human being.'

"Ich bekenne mich die Anklage, 'nicht schuldig.'

"But in all, we can say that we fulfilled this heaviest of tasks in love to our people. And we suffered no harm in our essence, in our soul, in our character. . . .' Heinrich Himmler wrote that.

"Paragraph 1: Jews may receive only those first names which are listed in the directives of the Ministry of the Interior concerning the use of first names.

"Paragraph 2: If Jews should bear first names other than those permitted to Jews according to Par. 1, they must, as of January 1, 1939, adopt an additional name. For males, that name shall be Israel, for females Sara.'

"On May 11, another transport of Jews (1,000 pieces) arrived in Minsk from Vienna, and was taken from the station directly to the above-mentioned ditch . . .'

"Ich bekenne mich . . .

"I plead 'not guilty.'"

"Ah, Frau Kämmer, so good of you to come. I must speak to you about your daughter. Gretchen is a tragic case. Her coma is now nearly a year. She takes little food, she is wasting away; she is but a human skeleton. But, you know, she never ceases to talk. Her voice is anguished, Frau Kämmer, so that it pains one to listen. But what she says? Still delirium.

"But now, our country is at war. We march against the czar. Our Wilhelm takes us against the Russians, and today we are at war also with the French. There has been a general call for doctors, and I must now tell you that the sanatorium is closing. Your Gretchen may be taken home; I had been already considering that

recommendation. It may do her more good than this close but impersonal attention . . .”

“Why am I here? I can’t remember my husband here.

“As I recall, we were driving to Mainz. Our little brown VW. We pronounced it *fow-vay* in Germany. Driving along the *Auto-bahn*. I remember this Mercedes. We had the temerity to pass this black Mercedes. In our little VW.

“This feeling, I’m twisting . . .

“Here . . .

“*Ich* . . .”

“How is she today?”

“Better, poor thing. She’s just wasted away from being in that awful hospital. She sounds as if she’s just out of her head, pure and simple.”

“And now, what with the war . . .”

“It is interesting to leaf through the documents that were discovered following the surrender. For instance, this communication: ‘We started with three and a half million Jews here. Of that number, only a few work companies remain. Everybody else has—let us say—emigrated.’

“Where are all those soldiers now? Sousaphone players in the Bratwurst Festival?

“How can I say that I am not guilty?

“I cannot listen anymore. I cannot listen to the charges.

“Please, stop.”

“Mama, does Gretchen know the news?”

“No, *Liebchen*, she cannot understand.”

“Will you tell her about the *Lusitania*?”

“*Nein, sie wurde es nicht verstehen.*”

“We must keep to ourselves. Everyone—the Russians, the French, the English, especially the Americans—they all watch. They hope to catch us, like little boys stealing the pfennigs from Mama’s purse.

"We are here. We know what we have done; it is only left to atone for our deeds, or to justify them.

"We cannot know which course is the more horrible."

"Ernst. My husband's name is Ernst. He was born near Gelnhausen. We met in New York, during the Depression. But I can't remember . . ."

"Have you heard enough? Then consider the *Sonderkommando*.

"Little wooden and concrete block outhouses. Signs indicated that they were baths. How thoughtful of the German High Command. The inmates were gathered together; those who could play musical instruments were commandeered to play cheerful tunes from *The Merry Widow*. Everyone watched as the band played; soon everyone would have their turn for the delousing.

"They got a couple of thousand in one of those buildings. They got their money's worth out of the hydrogen cyanide.

"Twenty minutes later, after the spasms had stopped, they called in the *Sonderkommando*. They were male Jews who were promised immunity from execution for their services. They went into the gas chambers and pulled the tangled corpses apart with hooks. They hosed down the walls, cleaning off the blood and fouler material. They extracted the gold teeth of their kinsmen. A week later, they were gassed, too.

"You've heard it before, don't kid yourself.

"It is said that God appeared to Paul Joseph Goebbels dressed in a leather corset, tightly laced high-heeled hip boots, and brandishing a riding crop. To this day the breezes, according to the neighborhood fools around Bayreuth, to this day you may hear gentle whisperings, wind whistles of the *Horst Wessel*, and you know that it's just a matter of time before *die Fahne* is again *hoch*.

"After reading about Argentine political murders, can you spare some outrage for the merry pranks of thirty years past?

"Picture: It is night. The darkness is made more complete by the storm clouds which obscure the moon and stars. There is nothing to be seen but the light of a small lantern shining through the window of a farmhouse, about a hundred yards away. It is early

December near Metz; it is very cold. There is ice on the Moselle, whose banks curve away about three kilometers beyond the farm. The German patrol halts on the rutted dirt road. Two of the six soldiers are sent up to the farmhouse. They knock loudly on the door. There is a long pause before the door is opened; then the light spills out through the narrow crack. Someone inside the house gasps, someone cries, another curses softly. The Germans force their way into the house. Sometimes in this situation there are shots, sounds of breaking glass, objects falling to the floor. At last one *vert-de-gris* comes to the door. He calls the other four, who still stand in the road, slapping their gloved hands and stamping their jackbooted feet.

"The six Germans are named Gerd, Thomas, Heinrich, Karl, Sigmund, and Gottlob. Their job is to stay in the farmhouse and guard it against the Allies. All over Europe there are similar pockets of Deutschland; this is how the war was fought, from farmhouses. Sometimes they are attacked by Burt Lancaster. Generally Heinrich, stranded hundreds of kilometers from the collaborating *dévoreuses* of Paris, goes mad and shoots a couple of his mates, or dies of lockjaw. In the end the Allies arrive in force, and the Boche are made to abandon the house, throwing their Lugers on a pile and crying '*Kamerad!*'"

"And so, these days, as you take your Polaroid Swinger shots of the *Kölner Dom*, you will meet a man. He is selling green and yellow balloons, ice cream and peanuts, plastic novelties. You speak to him in your halting German, '*Bitte, können Sie mir sagen, wie komme ich zur Bedürfnisanstalt?*' He smiles at you and answers in flawless English. 'The public lavatory that you seek is located there, built into the side of the Victory Monument. My name is Sigmund. You must be Americans. How charming; I was a Stormtrooper, myself.'

"This never happens. If you ask a German student about the *Nazizeit*, he says, 'Terrible. Simply terrible. It is frightening to believe that an entire nation could be so deluded. It was all like a monstrous dream.' A dream.

" 'Yes,' you say, 'but what did *your* father do during the war?'

"His eyes shift nervously, his tongue licks his full, Aryan lips, and he coughs. 'My father? Oh, during the war he was taking care

of some mining interests in South America. We lived in São Paulo then; we never had any actual contact with the Reich.'

"So much for atrocities.

"You must be the conscience for your family: your daughter is busy with ecology, and your husband leads the commuters' fight with the Long Island Railroad. You must keep these memories alive, before you are seduced away by the plight of the American Indian."



"We have shown the way. It is always Germany that develops, *nicht wahr*, it is always Germany that knows its resources, that knows what to do with its people."

"Ach, what is it now, Herr Müller? In what new and resourceful way are we now superior?"

"You have right, Frau Kämmer, in calling us resourceful. For, indeed, we are the practical nation. How did they fight wars? How did the human race battle previously? Why, by loosing various missiles at the enemy, and hoping that the paths of the projectiles and the opposing soldiery might intersect. Ah, look at the probability. Very low, *n'est-ce pas*? What we have done, what the German Command has done, April 22, 1915, at Ypres, is to harness the potential of the very air as a weapon! The atmosphere has become our ally, spreading our new and tiny globules of death. We use gas. The new aircraft dispense thick yellow clouds, and the French are overcome, they are disabled, or they die."

"Perhaps we could drop from those same aircraft a sort of jellied petroleum product. It could be ignited, and those same foes would then have something to contend with, eh?"

"You do not know what you ask, Frau Kämmer. There are still conventions. We do have several sorts of gas, thanks to the Krupps of Essen and to the Interessen Gemeinschaft with their famous German professors. We have such variety; 'poison gas' is then a misnomer. We should refer, rather, to 'chemical warfare.' That is better, it is more *gemütlich*. We have the gas chemicals, and also the liquid chemicals which act in much the same way. Of our

asphyxiating substances we have had success with simple chlorine, phosgene, chloropicrin, and others. We have produced lachrymators, vesicant or blistering compounds, sternutatory or sneezing compounds, and toxic compounds such as prussic acid. We have been disappointed so far with the arsenic compounds. Major V. Lefebure documents all this in his jocularly titled volume *The Riddle of the Rhine*. He discusses the new developments in mustard gas and states that 'these inherent possibilities of organic chemistry, flexibility in research and production, make chemical warfare the most important war problem in the future reconstruction of the world.' "

"I couldn't agree more. Though we win, I would still see those canisters thrown into the sea."

"Yes, and how goes your daughter, Frau Kämmer?"

"My daughter? Gutrune? Why, she begins to go to school soon. It is very kind of you to ask after her."

"I am sorry. I meant to inquire about your other."

"My other? Perhaps you mean Gretchen? Ah, she sleeps. We have little to do with her these days. She needs such little attention. She is so thin, she looks like a skeleton. And her eyes! Sometimes they open, and stare . . . We do not go into her room often these days."

"I don't have any idea how I came here. I mean, I don't even know where I am. No one talks to me. They treat me as if I'm not here at all. I'm paralyzed in this bed; I must have been in an accident, the way they shake their heads when they think I won't notice. Am I disfigured, startlingly mangled now?"

"I don't know how I got here. Christ, I don't even remember who I am! Oh, my God. *Who am I?* What a dumb-ass question."

"Okay, don't panic. I'm Gretchen Weinraub."

"I'm on vacation. I'm in Europe. Our first trip back to Europe! We're in Germany, visiting Munich, just finished in Heidelberg and Stuttgart. Going on to Nuremberg next. Ernst and our grandson, Stevie. Where are they? I haven't seen them at all."

"How long have I been here?"

"This isn't a hospital. I remember a doctor looking at me a few

times, but he seemed old and worried, dressed in a funny-smelling old dark suit. The ceiling above me is pointed, as if I were stuck up under the eaves. The mattress I'm lying on is very soft and comfortable. The bed is piled up with lovely hand-sewn quilts: it must be winter.

"It was July in Munich.

"Where am I? What in hell's happened?

"Where's Ernst?"

"Weh, how she tosses and turns tonight. She is troubled."

"Mama, do you think she has dreams all this time? Her long sleep, is it like we have every night?"

"A full year. I pray the good Lord that it has been peaceful for her."

"Oh, Mama! A full year of nightmare! Oh, how horrible it would be! To be chased, or lost, or falling for a year—"

"*Schweigst du*, little one. God in Heaven watches her."

"Does God understand what she says?"

"Yes, *Liebchen*, God understands what everyone says. Our Gretchen mutters still in English, but she says yet those German words."

"You can understand then, Mama?"

"Yes, but such silly words they are! '*Geheime Staatspolizei* . . .' What good are *secret* police, police that you can't even find when you need them? A 'Gestapo'?"

"Are we winning, Mama?"

"Yes, of course we are. God knows who's been good and who's been bad."

"Has Daddy been good?"

"Yes, dear. He was wounded in the chest just last week. He will win the Iron Cross, Second Class, he thinks. I hope that he does. That will show that landlord of ours in München."

"Does Gretchen know?"

"No, *Liebchen*. Poor, poor Gretchen knows nothing of our great struggle."

"Will you be here when *I* die too, Mama?"

"Hush, now, *Liebchen*. Sit down. Watch the war."

* * *

"I could have taken any of several tacks in doing this. Should I instead have stayed only with the contrite and apologetic? Would it have been better, or even believable, to try to persuade that things weren't really all that bad? Can you believe the canard that seventy-five million Germans were only carrying out their instructions and today can't even recall that they did? No. The question is too big. There are too many angles, and the extenuating circumstances are too difficult to explain.

"The apology must suffice. A necessary prologue, perhaps, for one in my position; but enough. *Also, denn. 'Hier stehe ich.'*

"I borrow those words, of course, from Martin Luther. He knew how it felt to have the responsibility of putting the abstract feelings of a nation, a world, into coherent form. It is for me, having attempted the apology with all the conscience that I can muster, to say, 'Here we are.' I am supposed to point into the shadows, into our nation's superstitious submind, beckoning, saying to my fellows, 'Come out! It is over. *Abierunt ad plures*. They are dead, they are dead.' *They* are the memories, the guilt-demons that take on almost hallucinatory presence.

"And they should be dead. Why are we guilty no longer? Walk among us now. *O felix culpa!* Have the vanquished ever found such prosperity in defeat? To despair of forgiveness from God is the gravest of sins: why then should we bear the enmity of nations beyond the reasonable limit? The Führer was a captain who saw himself sinking and, in his perverse logic, thought it necessary to take his ship with him. Of course, the *Heimatland* suffered, but it was cleansed in its own Iron and Blood.

"No more brownshirts, blackshirts put away, too, with the photos of polished Mussolini, farewell *Ade Polenland, ade weisse Hand; fest ist der Tritt, fest ist der Tritt* up the steps into the attic, packed away in the trunks with the Hitler Youth badges, *die Jugend marschiert*, thirty, count 'em, thirty extermination camps, hundreds of thousands of cheering people.

"Speak of this amazing recovery of the divided German republic. It is remarkable; it would not have been possible, ironically, without Hitler's terrible and unifying nationalistic zeal. The ex-

tremities which are his epitaph are the product of his absolute power. But today, and all that counts *is* today, our country is in a far stronger economic position than before the war. You may go into the *Sowjet* zone, if you wish, and cluck your tongue at the difference.

"The continued animosity of our former enemies grows a bit silly. Certainly we erred; we have learned from our mistakes. Not, I might add, like more than one of our accusers, to whom the term 'genocide' seems, to them, inapplicable because they lack the publicity that attended *our* Treblinkas and Buchenwalds. I fall into the *tu quoque* fallacy: you without sin, you be the first to cast the stone.

"We have a land. It is our *Vaterland*; that term cannot be discredited. If you insist on pulling open your older wounds, we insist on reacting with natural pride in our homes, ourselves, and our accomplishments.

"We still live."

"Gretchen? We once had a daughter named Gretchen, but last spring we lost her."

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry. Did she ever regain consciousness?"

"Oh, no. You misunderstand. We have no idea if she is still alive. You see, as time passed we saw less and less of her. She did not produce in us such a great amount of interest. We dusted her features often, and changed the flowers in the vase monthly, but otherwise we rarely thought of her. Then, one day, she was gone."

"But after so long a confinement to her bed, and in her starved condition, surely she couldn't have gone off by herself?"

"We think so, too. Perhaps we merely mislaid her. I remember one time, when we had taken her outside for the fresher air, we couldn't for the life of us recall where we had put her. We have recently written to the *Gastwirt* at the inn at St. Blasien, to see if we inadvertently left her in our rooms. But, personally, I don't think we even took her along."

"I can't remember who I am.

"Sometimes, like last night, I think I'm still Gretchen Kämmer.

Sometimes I'm Gretchen Weinraub. Right now, I don't have any name at all.

"I can't remember where I'm from, or where I am now.

"I remember getting here, or there, in a brown Volkswagen. It was the car we rented in Hamburg. I don't remember who the others who make up the 'we' are.

"For some reason I feel absolutely no desire to know, I feel no horror at being totally lost. It's rather warm and soft, like anesthesia. The only reasonable thing now, I guess, is to start again somewhere. I don't know which way to head, and I suppose I'll make mistakes I've made before. I forget . . .

"And I cannot yet forgive, but I forget."

R. A. Lafferty

D O R G

The Problem: Straited Ecology (not enough to eat).

Projected Answer: Turnip and Tetrapod.

Projected Method: Find them, find them.

Methodologist: A Crash-Oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology.

Spin-Offs: An Amalgamated Youth, a Trilobal Psychologist, a Mad Cartoonist.

Recycled Method: "On your feet, Dordogne, do it one more time."

"IT BEATS me how you will find the answer to world hunger in a mad cartoonist and a half-mad psychologist," the pleasantly ponderous Annalouise Krug railed angrily. (Annalouise was a member of Amalgamated Youth.) "This is the sort of unimaginative drivel we have always had from the aged," she ran on. (Whenever three or more persons were gathered together anywhere in the world to discuss actions, a member of Amalgamated Youth must be present; this was the law.) "What we need is fresh insights, youthful impetus: not the woeful stutterings of aged minds," she stated.

"You are the oldest person present, Annalouise," Adrian Durchbruch the crash-oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology bounded back at her.

"The oldest only in years, and then only if you unjuggle the record," Annalouise maintained. "I have had my age officially set back eleven years. In Amalgamated Youth we have that privilege. Besides, you have no idea how difficult it is to recruit chronological

youths into Amalgamated Youth. Further besides, Adrian, you are a crook-tailed boor to mention my age, considering all the years I have given to Youth."

"And you are a slashing female shrew, Annalouise, to refer to Dordogne and Riddle as respectively mad and half-mad while they are present," Adrian D. volleyed the words back off Annalouise.

James Riddle had fixed Annalouise with a pleasant scowl when she called him half-mad. J. P. Dordogne had sketched on a square of paper, then balled it up and thrown it to her. She smoothed it out and looked at it.

"They are no less mad for being present," she said with some reason. "Let's start it again, old men. How are you going to solve the problem of world hunger with a mad cartoonist and a half-mad psychologist? Neither one of them knows anything about ecology. Neither one knows anything about anything. And as to food, why I could eat them both up within a week myself and be hungry again."

Annalouise Krug, though she was both the largest and oldest person present, was also the prettiest. And she was not really so old: she was not yet thirty. None of the four persons present was of really advanced years or stiffened mind. This Annalouise was of the swift and powerful loveliness and full figure that is sometimes called Junoesque, but we will not call her so. She was suddenly in the fashion, though. There is something interesting about full-bodied women in times when the edge is on the hunger just a bit. Besides which she held her age better than did most members of Amalgamated Youth.

The mad cartoonist was J. P. (Jasper Pendragon) Dordogne. He used to sign his strips "Dorg," and some of his friends called him Mad Dorg. He was a small, sandy young fellow, all bland and grinning except for his mad black eyes which he said he had inked in himself. While Annalouise was tongue-lashing them, Dordogne had sat silently drawing lampoons of her, balling them up, and throwing them to her, and she caught them and smoothed them out with beautiful anger.

"The dorg has actually been seen, Annalouise," Adrian Durchbruch lobbed the words in as he bounced around. "It has been

seen by at least a dozen persons." Adrian was not referring to the cartoonist "Dorg" Dordogne, but to the fabled animal named dorg that sometimes appeared in Dordogne's comic strip. And now there had been a whole spate of clownish reports that the burlesque animal had actually been seen out in the boondocks, alive and ill.

Adrian bounced around constantly as though he had springs in the balls of his feet. He expedited, he organized, he said things like "Let's have a brain-crash" when he meant "Let's discuss this for a moment." He was the crash-oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology. He had held the job for only a week, and he wouldn't last another week if he didn't come up with something good. There was a rapid turnover of chiefs in the Department of Remedial Ecology. That showed constant effort and reassessment, even if there were no results in the department.

"I don't believe it," Annalouise chimed and resonated. A skinny girl simply will not have that full resonance. "If ever I see it I'll go get my eyes fixed. I will not believe it, not when the witless Dordogne invented it in his comic strip; not when the half-witless Jimmy Riddle declared that it was a creative act and that the animal was bound to appear soon afterward. There cannot be such an animal."

"It's that or the turnips," the psychologist said, "and they've already got whole shoals of psychologists studying the creative act in neo-turnips." James Riddle was the trilobal psychologist. He really had a third lobe or cerebral hemisphere to his brain, this on the actual testimony of proper doctors, but it didn't seem to do much for him. He was boyish and dreamy and horn-rimmed. His theories were astonishing, but he wasn't.

"Since this is our study and our problem, we may as well go and see if we can catch a glimpse of the dorg," Riddle chattered.

"What worries me," Adrian Durchbruch said, "is that there seems to be only one dorg, a male."

"But that part is almost too good to be true," Riddle exulted. "It's in total concord with my theory. You knew it would be that way, didn't you, Dordogne?"

"Yes, but I've been afraid to finish drawing it that way," the mad cartoonist mumbled.

"Where has the dorg been sighted, Adrian?" Riddle asked him.

"Down in the Winding Stair Mountains of—ah—Oklahoma," Durchbruch chirped, and bounced around in eagerness to be at it.

"Then let's fly down there right now," Riddle offered. "I used to own an airplane. I wonder if I still have it."

"Yes, you still have it," Annalouise told him.

"Good, let's go." All of them, Dordogne the mad cartoonist, James Riddle the trilobal psychologist, Adrian Durchbruch the crash-oriented Chief of Remedial Ecology, and Annalouise Krug the Amalgamated Youth went out to Riddle's place and got in the plane.

"Which way is Oklahoma?" Riddle asked when they were airborne. "Listen to the sound of that engine, people, to the sound of any engine anywhere. Do you know that functionally the engine sounds have no purpose? The various engines produce their monotonous noises solely to hypnotize human persons. Then the engines are able to—" But Riddle's warning words were suddenly blocked out by the engine's suddenly increased noise volume. Engines will do that every time the subject is about to be discussed.

The world was in pretty short supply as to food. The miracle of the barley loaves and the fishes had fed the multitudes for a long time. Barley had been developed that would yield five hundred bushels an acre, and billions and billions of fishes had been noodled out of the oceans. The oceans, however, are mostly desert, so have they always been; and the oases and streams and continental shelves of them had been harvested to their limits of both fish and plankton. And on land all the worthy areas were producing to their utmost, and still it was not enough.

The solution: Turnip or Tetrapod. A plant was needed that would grow more lush than barley, more lush than grass, that would be fully edible for humans in both top and bottom of it, that would grow on even the worst land. And such a plant was being searched for carefully. More than that, it was being invented every day, everywhere, anyhow. But the new plants were not really good enough.

And a four-footed animal (they are the best kind) was being

searched out. It would have to be a fine fleshed and multiple-bearing animal, with as many litters as possible a year; one that would grow quickly to great size and succulence; one that could eat and thrive on anything, anything, even— One that could eat—

About that time, the mad cartoonist J. P. Dordogne invented just such an animal in his comic strip. It was a big, comical, rock-eating animal. It struck the popular fancy and humor at once, though it did not at once put anything into the popular stomach. It was a shambling hulk of an animal, good-natured and weird. It ate earth and rocks and anything at all. It didn't even need vegetation, or water. It grew peculiarly fat on such feeding.

And the dorg had a fine slow wit as shown in the comic strip dialogue balloons. The people liked the dorg and especially liked the idea that the animal could grow so large and toothsome on nothing but rocks and earth. The animal was not loved the less because there was something unreal and mad about it, even beyond the unreality of all things in that medium. Something else: the dorg in the comic strip was always feeling bad: there was an air of something momentous about to happen to him.

The dorg filled an inner need, of emotion if not of stomach yet. It became the hopeful totem of the people on the biting edge of hunger. And the dorg was unmistakable; that was what gave the news reports their sharp interest. There was recognition and recollection of the dorg as matching a buried interior image. It could not be mistaken for something else.

The sighters had sighted the dorg, or they had suffered hallucination. But they had not mistaken some other object or creature for the dorg. And Dordogne the cartoonist, a bland little man except for the mad black eyes, was scared stupid by reports that the cartoon animal had actually been seen, alive and ill.

It was then that there appeared, in *Primitive Arts Quarterly*, an odd piece by the trilobal psychologist James Riddle. The piece was titled "Lascaux, Dordogne, and the Naming of the Animals." The essay contained this strange thesis:

"What happened in the cave art days of Lascaux was the 'Naming' of the Animals. The paintings were the namings, or at least they were an aspect of the namings. It must be understood

that this was concurrent with the creative act. The depicted animals were absolutely new then. If the paleozoologists say otherwise, then the paleozoologists are wrong. The men also were absolutely new then.

"Some, perhaps all, of these cave paintings were anticipatory: the paintings appeared a slight time before the animals themselves appeared. My evidence for this is subjective, and yet I am as sure of this as I am of anything in the world. In several cases, the animals, when they appeared, did not quite conform to their depiction. In several other cases, owing I suppose to a geodetic accident, the corresponding animals failed to appear at all.

"It is certain that this art was anticipatory and prophetic, heralding the appearance of new species over the life horizon. It was precursor art, harbinger art. It is certain also that this art contained elements of effective magic; it is most certain that the species were of sudden appearance. The only thing not certain is just to what extent the paintings were creative of the animals. There is still much mystery about the mechanism of the sudden appearance of species. The paleontologists cannot throw any light on this mystery at all, and the biologists cannot. But the artist can throw light on it, and the psychologist can. It is clear that a new species appears, suddenly and completely developed, exactly when it is needed.

"And a new species is needed exactly now.

"It is for this reason that there is peculiar interest in a recent creation of the cartoonist Jasper Pendragon Dordogne. He has depicted a new species of animal. I do not believe that Dordogne realizes what he is doing. He isn't an intelligent man. I do not believe that the Lascaux cave painters realized what they were doing. But the art of J. P. Dordogne, like that of the old cave painters, is anticipatory, it is prophetic, it is precursor art, harbinger art. The new species of animal will appear almost immediately, if it has not already appeared. The exact effect that the cartoonist will have on the appearing species we do not know. The effect that we may be able to have on the cartoonist will not be exact, but it can be decisive.

"Above all, let us see it happen, if this is at all possible. Let us witness the appearance of a new species for once. It should

answer very many questions. It should give the final answer to that dreary and tedious remnant of evolutionists that still lingers in benighted areas. Let our hope and our effort be toward this being a permanent appearance. Very many of them have not been permanent."

Adrian Durchbruch, the newly appointed Chief of Remedial Ecology, had read the James Riddle article in *Primitive Arts Quarterly* on his first day on the job. He immediately requisitioned the mad-eyed cartoonist J. P. Dordogne and the trilobal psychologist for his program. They were both referring to the animal that the world and the project were looking for. However the two men might have their information confused, they did seem to have information of a sort.

When Durchbruch incorporated himself and these other two men into his project, he also had to include a member of Amalgamated Youth to keep it legal. He accepted Annalouise Krug gladly. You should see what most members of Amalgamated Youth are like.

The reports of the actual sightings of the animal had come in immediately. And the four persons flew down to the area immediately.

Riddle landed the plane in tall grass near Talihina, Oklahoma, and the four dorg-seekers got out.

"We will immediately contact the local authorities," Adrian Durchbruch began as he bounded around on his feet on the springy ground, "and we will find whether—"

"Oh, shut up, Adrian," Riddle said pleasantly. "This lady here knows where it can be found. If that were not so, I would have landed in some other place where a lady would know all about it. Time spent checking with authorities is always time lost. Where is the dorg, lady?"

"It went up in the high pasture this morning," said the lady that was there. "It has been feeling so bad that we were worried about it. And *you* are the only one that knows what's the matter with it. You, mad-eyes, I'm talking to you. You know what is bothering it, don't you?"

"Gah, I'm afraid I do," the cartoonist Dordogne grumbled sadly. "I've been afraid to say it or draw it, though. If it is true, then it will push me clear over the ledge, and everyone says I haven't far to go. Don't let it happen! I don't want to be that crazy."

"My husband followed him up there a while ago," the lady said, "and he took his big Jim Bowie knife with him, in case we guessed right about it. They can't hardly do it by themselves, you know. They're not built for it. Oh, here they come now, and the little one is with them."

The man, and the big dorg (moving painfully), and the little dorg were coming down the slope.

"But the big dorg is male!" Annalouise Krug cried out in unbelief.

"Yes, they have such a hard time of it," the lady said. "There isn't any other way to get anything started, though."

The man and the big male dorg and the little female dorg came down to them.

"It wasn't much trouble," the man said. "He went to sleep."

"The Tardemah, the deep sleep," Riddle said reverently. "I should have guessed it."

"Then I cut him open and took her out of his side," the man said. "They will both be all right now."

"By Caesarean section," Annalouise mumbled. "Why didn't we all guess it?" There was a loud snapping noise. "What was that?" Adrian demanded, bouncing around.

"My mind just snapped," Dordogne said woozily. "I won't bother to keep up appearances any longer. Now I will be crazy with a clear conscience."

The little dorg was near grown within one month and was impregnated. In another month she produced a litter of ten. In another five weeks another, and in another five weeks still another. And the young ones produced at two months, and again in five weeks, and again in another five weeks. Quite soon there were a million of them, and then one hundred million, shipped all over the world now. These were big cow-sized animals of excellent meat, and they ate only the rocks and waste hills where nothing had ever grown, turning it into fertile soil incidentally.

Soon there were a billion dorgs in the world ready for butchering, and the numbers of them could be tapered off as soon as it seemed wise, and there was enough meat for everybody in the world.

"I have only one worry," the trilobal psychologist James Riddle said as he met with Adrian Durchbruch and Annalouise Krug in a self-congratulatory session. J. P. Dordogne the mad cartoonist was in a sanitarium now and was really mad. "I keep remembering a part of those cave paintings at Lascaux."

"What were they, James?" Annalouise Krug asked. Annalouise was not so much in the fashion as she had once been. Well-fed nations somehow set their ideals on more svelte types.

"They were the crossed-out animals, the chiseled-over animals, the funny-looking animals. They are funny-looking to us only because we have never seen them in the flesh. They are the animals that did not survive. We don't know why they did not. They were drawn originally with the same boldness as the rest of them."

"We don't know what the odds are," Adrian said worriedly, forgetting to bounce. "We have no way at all to calculate them. It is so hard to take a census of things that aren't. We will keep our fingers crossed and all fetishes working full time. Without primordial fetish there wouldn't have been any animals or people at all."

It went on smoothly for a year and a day after the dorgs had struck their proper world balance. There was plenty of meat for everyone in the world, there were plenty of dorgs, and they had to be segregated to prevent their being too many.

Then the index of dorg fertility fell. The numbers of them were raised up past the safe level again only by unsegregating all flocks. The index fell again and continued to fall. It disappeared.

The last dorgs were born. There was breathless waiting to see if some of them might not be fertile. They weren't. It was all over with, and the world wailing raised higher than it had ever been.

"What we need is fresh insights, youthful impetus, not the woe-

ful stutterings of aged minds," Annalouise Krug was saying. "Aren't there any other animals that can live on rocks?"

"No," Adrian Durchbruch said sadly.

"Where does the species male come from in the first place?" she asked.

"It appears for the first time on a Monday morning in a comic strip or on a cave murus," James Riddle said. "I believe it is something about the syndication that new formats in cartoons always appear on Monday mornings."

"Before that, I mean. Where does the male come from?" Annalouise said.

"I don't know," Riddle groused.

"Well, somebody had better remember something right now," Annalouise stated with a curious menace. "Riddle, what good does an extra lobe do you if you can't remember something special? Come up with something, I say."

"I can't. There is nothing else to come up with," Riddle said. But Annalouise picked the psychologist up and shook him till he near fell apart.

"Now remember something else," she ordered.

"I can't, Annalouise, there is nothing else to remember."

"You have no idea how hard I will shake you if you don't come up with something." She gave him an idea of just how hard she could shake him.

"Now!" she ordered.

"Oh, yes, since my life is on the line, I will remember something else," Riddle moaned, with not much wind left in him. "There are others of those cave paintings that are most curious. Some of them are painted and carved over and over and over again, always in the same region. Most of them are of the common animals of today. Did it come that close, do you think, with even the common ones of them? One at least (and this gives me some hope) was a common animal of today that had been crossed out as having failed. But someone was not content to let it remain crossed out. It was redrawn with great emphasis. And then redrawn and expanded again and again, always in the same region."

"Let's go to Dordogne right now with plenty of drawing materials," Adrian snapped.

"But Dordogne is crazy," Annalouise cried. "Always in *what* same region, Adrian?"

"We're crazy, too, to think of it," Adrian hooted, "but let's go to him right now."

"What region, James?" Annalouise insisted. "Always drawn over and over again in what same region?"

"The belly. Let's go to Dordogne."

They had Dordogne on his feet and drawing dorgs so pregnant that their bellies drug the ground. He was dazed, though, and sniffing.

"When you've drawn one pregnant dorg you've drawn them all," he whimpered.

But they kept him at it. He collapsed, but they jerked him back to the task again. Who knows which may be the quickening stroke? "On your feet, Dordogne," they yelled, "do it one more time!"

Richard E. Peck

GANTLET

JACK BRENS thumbed the ID sensor and waited for the sealed car doors to open. He had stayed too long in his office, hoping to avoid any conversation with the other commuters, and had been forced to trot through the fetid station. The doors split open; he put his head in and sucked gratefully at the cool air inside, then scrubbed his moist palms along his thighs and stepped quickly into the car. Rivulets of sweat ran down the small of his back. He stretched his lips into the parody of a confident smile.

Most of the passengers sat strapped in, a few feigning sleep, others trying to concentrate on the stiff-dried facsheets which rattled in their hands. Lances of light fell diagonally through the gloom; some of the boiler plate welded over the windows had apparently cracked under the twice-daily barrage.

Brens bit the tip of his tongue to remind himself to call Co-op Maintenance when he got home. Today the train was his responsibility—one day out of one hundred; one day out of twenty work weeks. If he didn't correct the flaws he noticed, he might suffer because of them tomorrow, though the responsibility would by then have shifted to someone else. To whom? Karras. Tomorrow Karras had window seat.

Brens nodded to several of the gray-haired passengers who greeted him.

"Hey, Brens. How's it going?"

"Hello, Mr. Brens."

"Go get 'em, Jack."

He strode down the aisle through the aura of acrid fear rising from the ninety-odd men huddled in their seats. A few of the

commuters had already pulled their individual smoking bells down from the overhead rack. Although the rules forbade smoking till the train got underway, Brens understood their feelings too well to make a point of it.

Only Karras sat at the front. The seats beside and behind him were empty.

"Thought you weren't coming and I might have to take her out myself," Karras said. "But my turn tomorrow."

Brens nodded and slipped into the engineer's seat. While he familiarized himself with the instrument console, he felt Karras peering avidly past him at the window. Lights in the station tunnel faded and the darkness outside made the window a temporary mirror. Brens glanced at it once to see the split image of Karras reflected in the inner and outer layers of the bulletproof glass: four bulging eyes, a pair of glistening bald scalps wobbling in and out of focus.

The start buzzer sounded.

He checked the interior mirror. Only two empty seats, at the front of course. He'd heard of no resignations from the Co-op and therefore assumed that the men who should have occupied those seats were ill; it took something serious to make a man miss his scheduled car and incur the fine of a full day's salary.

The train thrummed to life. Lights flared, the fans whined toward full thrust, and the car danced unsteadily forward as it climbed onto its cushion of air. Brens concentrated on keeping his hovering hands near the throttle override.

"You really sweat this thing, don't you?" Karras said. "Relax. You've got nothing to do but enjoy the view, unless you think you're really playing engineer."

Brens tried to ignore him. It was true that the train was almost totally automatic. Yet the man who drew window seat did have certain responsibilities, functions to perform, and no time to waste. No time until the train was safely beyond the third circle—past Cityend, past Opensky, past Workring. And after that, an easy thirty miles home.

Brens pictured the city above them as the train bored its way through the subterranean darkness, pushing it back with a fan of brilliant light. City stretched for thirty blocks from center in this

direction and then met the wall of defenses separating it from Opensky. The whole area of City was unified now, finally—buildings joined and sealed against the filth of the air outside that massive, nearly self-sufficient hive. Escalators up and down, beltways back and forth, interior temperature and pollution kept at an acceptable level—it was all rather pleasant.

It was heaven, compared to Opensky. Surrounding and continually threatening City lay the ring of Opensky and its incredible masses of people. Brens hadn't been there for years, not since driving through on his way to work had become impossibly time-consuming and dangerous. Twenty years ago he had been one of the last lucky ones, picked out by Welfare Control as "salvageable"; these days, no one left Opensky. For that matter, no one with any common sense entered.

He could vaguely recall seeing single-family dwellings there, whether his wife, Hazel, believed that claim or not, and more vividly the single-family room he had shared with his parents and grandfather. He could even remember the first O-peddlers to appear on Sheridan Street. Huge, brawny men with green O-tanks strapped to their backs, they joked with the clamoring children who tugged at their sleeves and tried to beg a lungful of straight O for the high it was rumored to induce. But the peddlers dealt at first only with asthmatics and early-stage emphysemics who gathered on muggy afternoons to suck their metered dollar's worth from the grimy rubber face mask looped over the peddler's arm. All that was before each family had a private bubble hooked directly to the City metering system.

He had no idea what life in Opensky was like now, except what he could gather from the statistics that crossed his desk in Welfare Control. Those figures meant little enough: so many schools to maintain, dole centers to keep stocked and guarded, restraint aides needed for various playgrounds—he merely converted City budget figures to percentages corresponding to the requests of fieldmen in Opensky. And he hadn't spoken to a fieldman in nearly a year. But he assumed it couldn't be pleasant there. Welfare Control had recently disbanded and reassigned to wall duty all Riot Suppression teams; the object now was not to sup-

press, but to contain. What went on in Opensky was the skyers' own business, so long as they didn't try to enter City.

So. Six miles through Opensky to Workring, three miles of Workring itself, where the skyers kept the furnaces bellowing and City industry alive. But that part of the trip wouldn't be too bad. Only responsible skyers were allowed to enter Workring, and most stuck to their jobs for fear of having their thumbprints erased from the sensors at each Opensky exit gate. Such strict control had seemed harsh, at first, but Brens now knew it to be necessary. Rampant sabotage in Workring had made it so. The skyers who chose to work had nearly free access to and from Workring. And those who chose not to work—well, that was their choice. They could occupy themselves somehow. Each year Welfare Control authorized more and more playgrounds in Opensky, and the public schools were open to anyone under fifty with no worse than a moderate arrest record.

Beyond Workring lay the commuter residential area. A few miles of high-rise suburbs, for secretaries and apprentice managerial staff, merging suddenly with the sprawling redevelopment apartment blocks, and then real country. To Brens the commuter line seemed a barometer of social responsibility: the greater one's worth to City, the farther away he could afford to live. Brens and his wife had moved for the last time only a year ago, to the end of the trainpad, thirty miles out. They had a small square of yellowed grass and two dwarf apple trees that would not bear. It was . . .

He shook off his daydreaming and tried to focus on the darkness rushing toward them. As their speed increased, he paradoxically lost the sense of motion conveyed by the lurching start and lumbering underground passage. Greater speed increased the amount of compression below as air entered the train's howling scoops and whooshed through the ducts down the car sides. City-end lay moments ahead.

Brens concentrated on one of the few tasks not yet automated: at Cityend, and on the train's emergence from the tunnel, his real duty would begin. Three times in the past month skyers had sought to breach City defenses through the tunnel itself.

"Hey! You didn't check defense systems," Karras said.

"Thanks," Brens muttered through clenched teeth. "But they're okay." Then, because he knew Karras was right, he flipped the arming switch for the roof-mounted fifties and checked diverted-power availability for the nose lasers. The dials read in the green, as always.

Only Karras, who now sat hunched forward in anticipation, would have noticed the omission. Because Karras was sick. The man actually seemed to look forward to his turn in the window seat, not only for the sights all the other commuters in the Co-op tried to avoid, but also for the possible opportunity of turning loose the train's newly installed firepower.

"One of these days they're going to make a big try. They'd all give an arm to break into City, just to camp in the corridors. Now, if it was me out there, I'd be figuring a way to get out into Suburbs. But them? All they know is destroy. Besides, you think they'll take it lying down that we raised the O-tax? Forget it! They're out there waiting, and we both know it. That's why you ought to check all the gear we've got. Never know when . . ."

"Later, Karras! There it is." Brens felt his chest tighten as the distant circle of light swept toward them—tunnel exit, Cityend. His forearms tensed and he glared at the instruments, waiting for the possibility that he might have to override the controls and slam the train to a stop. But a green light flashed; ahead, the circle of sky brightened as the approaching train tripped the switch that cut off the spray of mist at the tunnel exist. And with that mist fading, the barrier of twenty thousand volts which ordinarily crackled between the exit uprights faded also. For the next few moments, while the train snaked its way into Opensky, City was potentially vulnerable.

Brens stared even harder at the opening, but saw nothing. The car flashed out into gray twilight, and he relaxed. But instinct, or a random impulse, drew his eyes to the train's exterior mirrors. And then he saw them: a shapeless huddle of bodies pouring into the tunnel back toward City. He hit a series of studs on the console and braced himself for the jolt.

There it was.

A murmur swept the crowded car behind him, but he ignored it and stared straight ahead.

"What the hell was it?" Karras asked. "I didn't see a thing."

"Skyers. They were waiting, I guess till the first car passed. They must have figured no one would see them that way."

"I don't mean who. I mean, what did you use? I didn't hear the fifties."

"For a man who's taking the run tomorrow, you don't keep up very well. Nothing fancy, none of the noise and flash some people get their kicks from. I just popped speedbreaks on the last three cars."

"In the tunnel? My God! Must have wiped them all the way out the tunnel walls, like a squeegee. Who figured that one?"

"This morning's Co-op bulletin suggested it, remember?"

Karras sulked. "I've got better things to do than pay attention to every word those guys put out. They must spend all day dictating memos. We got a real bunch of clods running things this quarter."

"Why don't you volunteer?"

"I give them my four days' pay a month. Who needs that mishmash?"

Brens silently agreed. No one enjoyed keeping the Co-op alive. No one really knew how. And that was one of the major problems associated with having amateurs in charge: it's a hell of a way to run a railroad. But the only way, since the line itself had declared bankruptcy, and both city and state governments refused to take over. If it hadn't been for the Co-op, City would have died, a festering ulcer in the midst of the cancer of Opensky.

Opensky whirled past them now. Along the embankment on both sides, legs dangled a decorative fringe. People sat atop the pilings and hurled debris at the speeding stainless steel cars. Their accuracy had always amazed Brens. Even as he willed himself rigid, he flinched at the eggs, rocks, bottles, and assorted garbage that clattered and smeared across the window.

"Look at those sonsabitches throw, would you? You ever try and figure what kind of lead time you need to hit something moving as fast as we are?"

Brens shook his head. "I guess they're used to it."

"Why not? What else they got to do but practice?"

Behind them, gunfire crackled and bullets pattered along the

boiler plate. Many of the commuters ducked at the opening burst.

"Look at them back there." Karras pointed down the aisle. "Scared blue, every one of them. I know this psychologist who's got a way to calm things down, he says. He had this idea to paint bull's-eyes on the sides of the cars, below the window. Did I tell you about it? He figures it'll work two or three ways. One, if the snipers hit the bull's-eyes, there's less chance of somebody getting tagged through a crack in the boiler plate. Two, maybe they'll quit firing at all, when they see we don't give a suck of sky about it. Or three, he says, even if they keep it up, it gives them something to do, sort of channels their aggression. If they take it out on the trains, maybe they'll ease up on City. What do you think?"

"Wouldn't it make more sense to put up shooting galleries in all the playgrounds? Or figure a way to get new cars for the trains? We can't keep patching and jury-rigging these old crates forever. The last thing we need right now is to make us more of a target than we already are."

"Okay. Have it your way. Only, I was thinking . . ."

Brens tuned him out and squinted at the last molten sliver of setting sun. Its rays smeared rainbows through the streaked eggs washing slowly across the window in the slipstream. The mess coagulated and darkened as airblown particles of ash settled in it and crusted over. When he could stand it no longer, Brens flipped on the wipers and watched the clotted slime smear across the glass, as he had known it would. But some of it scrubbed loose to flip back alongside the speeding train.

The people were still out there. If he looked carefully straight ahead, their presence became a mere shadow at the edges of the channel through which he watched the trainpad reeling toward him. Though he doubted any eye would catch his long enough to matter, he avoided the faces. There was always the slight chance that he might recognize one of them. Twenty years wasn't so long a time. Twenty years ago he had watched the trains from an embankment like these.

Now the train swooped upward to ride its cushion of air along the raised pad, level with second-story windows on each side. Blurred faces stared from those windows, here disembodied, there resting on a cupped hand and arm propped on a window ledge.

The exterior mirrors showed him faces ducking away from the gust of wind fanning out behind the train and from the debris lifted whirling in the grimy evening air. He tried to picture the pattern left by the train's passage—dust settling out of the whirlwind like the lines of polarization around a magnet tip. A few of the faces wore respirators or simple, and relatively useless, cotton masks. Many didn't bother to draw back but hung exposed to the breeze that the train was stirring up. And now, as on each of his previous rare turns at the window seat, Brens had the impulse to slow the train, to let the wind die down and diminish behind them, out of what he himself considered misplaced and maudlin sympathy for the skyers, who seemed to enjoy the excitement of the train's glistening passage. It tempered the boredom of their day.

"... right about' here the six-thirty had the explosion. Five months ago. Remember?"

"What?"

"Explosion. Some kids must have got hold of detonator caps and strung them on wires swinging from a tree. When the train hit them, they cracked the window all to hell. Nearly hurt somebody. But the crews came out and burned down all the trees along the right of way. Little bastards won't pull *that* one again."

Brens nodded. There was one of the armored repair vans ahead, on a siding under the protective stone lip of the embankment.

The train rose even higher to cross the river which marked the Opensky-Workring boundary. They were riding securely in the concave shell of the bridge. On the river below, a cat, or dog—it was hard to tell at this distance—picked its cautious way across the crusted algae which nearly covered the stream. The center of the turgid river steamed a molten beige; and upriver a short way, brilliant patches of green marked the mouth of the main Workring spillway.

At the far end of the bridge, a group of children scrambled out of the trough of the trainbed to hang over the side.

"Hey! Hit the lasers. Singe their butts for them." Karras bounced in his seat.

"Shut up for a minute, can't you? They're out of the way."

"Now what's that for? Can't you take a joke? Besides, you

know they're sneaking into Workring to steal something. You saying we ought to let them get away with it?"

"I'm just telling you to shut up. I'm tired, that's all. Leave it at that."

"Sure. Big deal. Tired! But tomorrow the window seat's mine. So don't come sucking around for a look then, understand?"

"It's a promise."

Sulfurous clouds hung in the air, and Brens checked the car's interior pollution level. It was a safe 18, as he might have guessed. But the sight of buildings tarnished green, of bricks flaking and molting on every factory wall, always depressed him. The ride home was worse than the trip into City. Permissive hours ran from five to eight, when pollution controls were lifted. He knew the theory: evening air was more susceptible to condensation because of the temperature drop, and dumping pollutants into the night sky might actually bring on a cleansing rain. He also knew the practical considerations involved: twenty-four-hour control would almost certainly drive industry away. Compromise was essential, if City was to survive.

It would be good to get home.

The train swung into its gently curving descent toward Workring exit, and Brens instinctively clasped the seat arms as the seat pivoted on its gimbals. At the foot of the curve he saw the barricade. Something piled on the pad.

Not for an instant did he doubt what he saw. He lunged at the power override, but stopped himself in time. Dropping to the pad now, in mid-curve, might tip the train or let it slide off the pad onto the potholed and eroded right of way where the uneven terrain offered no stable lift base for getting underway again.

"Ahead of you! On the tracks!" Karras reached for the controls, but Brens caught him with a straight-arm and slammed him to the floor. He concentrated on the roadbed flashing toward them. At the last instant, as the curve modified and tilted toward level, he popped all speedbreaks and snatched the main circuit breaker loose.

From the sides of the cars vertical panels hissed out on their hydraulic pushrods to form baffles against the slipstream, and the train slammed to the pad. Tractor gear whined in protest,

the shriek nearly drowning out the dying whirr of compressor fans, and the train shuddered to a stop.

Inside, lights dimmed and flickered. Voices rose in the darkness amid the noise of men struggling to their feet.

Brens depressed the circuit breaker and hit the emergency call switch overhead. "Hold it!" he shouted. "Quiet down, please! There's something on the pad, and I had to stop. Just keep calm. I've signaled for the work crews, and they'll be here any minute."

Then he ignored the passengers and focused his attention on the window. The barricade lay no more than twenty feet ahead, rusted castings and discarded mold shells heaped on the roadbed. The jumbled pile seemed ablaze in the flickering red light from the emergency beacons rotating atop the train cars. Behind the barricade and along the right of way, faceless huddled forms rose erect in the demonic light and stood motionless, simply staring at the train. The stroboscopic light sweeping over them made each face a swarm of moving, melting shadows. Brens fired a preliminary burst from the fifties atop the first car, then quickly switched them to automatic, but the watching forms stood like statues.

"They must know," Karras said. He stood beside Brens and massaged his bruised shoulder. "Look. None of them moving."

Then one of the watchers broke and charged toward the car, waving a club. He managed two strides before the fifties homed on his movement and opened up. A quick chatter from overhead and the man collapsed. He hurled the club as he dropped and the fifties efficiently followed its arc through the air with homed fire that made it dance in a shower of flashing sparks. It splintered to shreds before it hit the ground.

The other watchers stood motionless.

Brens stared at them a long moment before he could define what puzzled him about their appearance: none of them wore respirators. Were they trying to commit suicide? And why this useless attack? His eyes had grown accustomed to the flickering light and he scanned the mob. Young faces and old, mostly men but a few women scattered among them, all shades of color, united in appearance only by their clothing. Working skyers in leather aprons, thick-soled shoes, probably escapees from a nearby factory. He flinched as one of them nodded slightly—surely they

couldn't see him through the window. The nod grew more violent, and then he realized that the man was coughing. Paroxysms seized the man as he threw his hands to his mouth and bent forward helplessly. It was enough. The fifties chattered once more, and he fell.

"But what do they get out of it?" He turned his bewilderment to Karras.

"Who can tell? They're nuts, all of them. Malcontents, or anarchists. Mainly stupid, I'd say. Like the way they try and break into City. Even if they threw us out, they wouldn't know what to do next. Picture one of them sitting in your office. At your desk."

"I don't mean that. If they stop us from getting through, who takes care of them? I mean, we feed them, run their schools, bury them. I don't understand what they think all this will accomplish."

"Listen! The crew's coming. They'll take care of them."

A siren keened its rise and fall from the dimming twilight ahead, but still the watchers stood frozen. When the siren changed to a blatting klaxon, Brens switched the fifties back on manual to safeguard the approaching repair car. The mob melted away at the same signal. They were there, and then they were gone. They dropped from sight along the pad edge and blended into the shadows.

The work crew's crane hoisted the castings off the pad and dropped them on the right of way. In a few minutes they had finished. Green lights flashed at Brens, and the repair van sped away again.

Passing the Workring exit guards, Brens made a mental note to warn the Co-op. If the skyers were growing bold enough to show open rebellion within the security of Workring, the exit guards had better be augmented. Even Suburbs might not be safe any longer. At thirty miles distance, he wasn't really concerned for his own home, but some of the commuters lived dangerously close to Workring.

He watched in the exterior mirror. The rear car detached itself and swung out onto a siding where it dropped to a halt while the body of the train went on. Every two miles, the scene repeated itself. Cars dropped off singly to await morning reassembly. Brens

had often felt a strange sort of envy for the commuters who lived closer in: they never had the lead window seat on the way out of City. Responsibility for the whole train devolved on them only for short stretches, only on the way in.

But that was fair, he reminded himself. He lived the farthest out. With privilege go obligations. And he was through, for another twenty weeks, his obligations met.

At the station, he telexed his report to the Co-op office and trotted outside to meet Hazel. The other wives had driven away. Only his carryall sat idling at the platform edge. He knew he ought to look forward to relaxing at home, but the trip itself still preyed on his mind unaccountably. He felt irritation at his inability to put the skyers out of his thoughts. His whole day was spent working for their benefit; his evenings ought to be his own.

He looked back toward City, but saw nothing in the smog-covered bowl at the foot of the hills that stretched away to the east. If it rained tonight, it might clear the air.

Hazel smiled and waved.

He grinned in answer. He could predict her reaction when she heard what he'd been through: a touch of wifely fear and concern for him, and that always made her more affectionate. Almost a hero's welcome. After all, he had acquitted himself rather well. A safe arrival, only a few minutes late, no injuries or major problems. And he wouldn't draw window seat for another several months. It was good to be home.

Kate Wilhelm

THE FUSION BOMB

AT DUSK the barrier islands were like a string of jewels gleaming in the placid bay. The sea wasn't reflecting now, the only lights that showed were those of the islands and the shore lights that were from two to four miles westward. The islands looked like an afterthought, as if someone had decided to outline the coast with a faulty pen that skipped as it wrote in sparkles. Here and there dotted lines tethered the jewels, kept them from floating away, and lines joined them one to another in a series, connective tissue too frail to endure the fury of the sea. Then came a break, a dark spot with only a sprinkling of lights at one end, the rest of the island swallowed in blackness of tropical growth.

The few lights at the southern end seemed inconsequential, the twinkling of hovering fireflies, to be swept away with a brush of the hand. No lines joined this dark speck with the other, clearly more civilized, links of the chain that stretched to the north and angled off to the south. No string of incandescence tied it to the mainland. It was as if this dark presence had come from elsewhere to shoulder itself into the chain where it stood unrecognized and unacknowledged by its neighbors.

It was shaped like a primitive arrowhead. If the shaft had been added, the feathers would have touched land hundreds of miles to the south, at St. Augustine, possibly. The island was covered with loblolly pines, live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, cypress and magnolia trees. The thickened end was white sand, stucco houses, and masses of hewn stones, some in orderly piles and rows, others tossed about, buried in sand so that only corners showed, tumbled down the beach, into the water where the sea

and bay joined. Philodendron, gone wild, had claimed many of the blocks, climbing them with stems as thick as wrists, split leaves hiding the worked surface of the granite and sandstone, as if nature were working hard to efface what man had done to her island. Those blocks that had been lost to the sea had long since been naturalized by barnacles, oysters, seaweeds; generations of sergeant majors and wrasses and blue crabs and stonefish had lived among them.

At low tide, as it was now, the water whispered gently to the rocks, secrets of the sea murmured in an unintelligible tongue that evoked memories and suggested understanding. Eliot listened hard, then answered: "So I'll tell the old bastard, take your effing island, and your effing job, and your effing money and stuff it all you know where." The sea mocked him and he took another drink. He sat on one of the stones, his back against another one, and he put a motor on the rocky end of the island and wound it up. It was a rubber-band motor. The arrowhead pointed due north and cut a clean swath, its motion steady and sure, like a giant carrier. And when he had circled the world, when he had docked at all the strange ports and sampled all the strange customs and strange foods, then he didn't know what to do with his mobile island, and he sank it, deep into the Mariannas Trench where it could never be raised again, where it would vanish without a sign that it had existed. He drank again, this time emptying the glass. For a moment he hefted it, then he put it down on the rock next to him.

"Eliot! Where are you?"

He didn't answer, but he could see the white shape moving among the rocks. She knew damn well where he was.

"Pit, old man, I'm through. I quit. I'll leave by the mail boat in the morning, or swim over, or fly on the back of a cormorant."

"Eliot! For God's sake, don't be so childish! Stop playing games. Everyone's waiting for you."

"Ah, Beatrice, the unattainable, forever pure, forever fleeing, and fleet." But I had you once, twice, three times. Hot and sweaty in my arms.

"You're drunk! Why? Why tonight? Everyone's waiting for you."

She was very near now, not so near that he could make out her features, but near enough to know that she wore a white party dress, that she wore pearls at her throat, near enough so that the elusive whisper of the sea now became water swishing among rocks. He stood up. She was carrying her sandals.

"You'll bruise your feet. Stay there, or better, go back and tell them that I do not wish to attend another bloody party, not another one for years and years."

"Eliot, the new girl's here. You'll want to meet her. And . . . it's a surprise, Eliot. Please come now. He'll be so disappointed."

"Why? He already hired her, didn't he? Tomorrow's time enough for me to meet her. And the only surprise around here is that we don't all die of boredom."

He picked up his glass and let a trickle of melted ice wet his lips. He should have brought the pitcher of gin and lemonade. Have to remember, he told himself sternly, no half measures from now on. Been too moderate around here. Moderation's no damn good for island living. He stood up. The sea tilted and the rock tried to slide him off into the water. He could hear vicious laughter, masked as waves rushed around stones. Beatrice caught his hand and led him out of the jumbled rocks.

"Come on, let's take a walk," she said. But the drunkenness was passing, and he shook his head.

"I'm okay," he said. "Sitting too long, that's all. Let's go to the damn party and get it over with."

She half led, half pushed him along the cypress boardwalk toward the main house.

"The new girl. What's she like?"

"I'm not sure. You know she got over on the pretext that I had recommended her. Turns out that we lived in the same town back when we were growing up. So I should know her, except that I'm ten years older than she is. I dated her brother when I was sixteen, but I can't remember much about her. Or her brother either, for that matter. She was Gina's age when I saw her last. She's twenty now, a student, looking for summer work, perfect to spell Marianne while she has her baby, and so on. But you'll see."

Just what we need, he thought. A young single girl to liven things up around here. "Is she pretty?"

"No. Very plain actually. But do you think that will make any difference?" Beatrice sounded amused.

How well we know each other. She can follow my thought processes, come to my conclusions for me, without even thinking about it. A simple temporary dislocation of the ego. The boardwalk led them around the ruins, and they approached the house from the back. Curiously old-fashioned and unglamorous, one floor that rambled, deep porch; there was a lot of ironwork, grilles, rails, scrolls and curlicues that should have been offensive but were pleasing. They skirted a swimming pool that had been converted to a sunken garden and walked along the ornate porch to the front entrance. Wide windows, uncovered, with massive shutters at their sides. View of a room the width of the house, fireplace on one wall, bar and stools, low, gold gleaming cypress furniture, red Spanish tile floors that didn't show the scars of the constant polishing of the sand. Beyond the room there was a terrace, shielded from the sea wind by a louvered wall of glass. Moving figures broken into sections by the partly opened glass slats, the hum of voices, echo of Spanish guitars. All substantial and real, all but the fragmented people.

Eliot took a deep breath and entered the terrace. Beatrice paused a moment to speak to Mr. Bonner, who would go over to her place to babysit. Eliot was aware of their low conversation, as he was aware of the new girl who stood out because she was new and very pale. Not pretty. Homely, actually. He nodded at Mr. Pitcock, whose eyes always seemed to see more than was visible. He was seventy; why weren't his eyes starting to dim? Pitcock knew that he'd been drinking, knew that he'd tried to forget the party, knew that if Beatrice hadn't been sent after him, he would have passed it up. So fire me, he thought at the old man, and knew that the old man was aware of that thought also. They shook hands and Pitcock introduced the new girl.

"Donna, this is the project director, Dr. Kalin. Eliot, Donna Bensinger."

"Hello, Eliot." Too fast. Should have called him Dr. Kalin. He didn't like her pasty skin, or the limpness of her hand when

he touched it, or the pale, myopic eyes, and the thin dun-colored hair that looked as if it needed a shampoo.

"I hope you won't find it too dull here, Miss Bensinger," he said, and looked past her at Ed Delizzio, who was standing at the bar. "Excuse me."

He thought he heard the dry chuckle of Thomas Pitcock as he left them, but he didn't turn back to see. "Christ," he said to Ed. "Just—Christ!"

"Yeah, I know what you mean." Ed poured a martini and put it in Eliot's hand. "Drink. That's all that's left." He refilled his own glass. "After this breaks up we're going to play some poker over at Lee's house. Want to sit in?"

"Sure."

"The buffet is ready in the dining room." Mrs. Bonner's voice was eerie over the intercom.

"Come on, let's eat." Pitcock led them across the patio, into the house, his hand on Donna's arm, talking cheerfully to her. He was tall, straight, bald, brown. Why didn't he stoop and falter?

Mary and Leland Moore beckoned to Eliot. Mary was small and tanned, hair sun-bleached almost white. She always seemed breathless. "Can you come over later? The boys are playing poker."

Eliot accepted again and they went into the dining room with the others. On the table was a glazed cold turkey, hot lobster in sherry sauce, biscuits, salads. There was an assortment of wines. He picked at the food and drank steadily, refusing to pretend an interest in the small talk and forced gaiety about him.

"I have no theory to forward as yet, sir," he said distinctly.

"Damn it, a hypothesis then."

"I don't have that much yet."

"A hunch. A wild guess. Don't couch it in formal terms. You must be thinking something by now. What?"

"Nothing. Can't you get it through your head that I won't be forced into a generalization."

"You're afraid to."

He reached for the champagne and when he raised his gaze from the iced bottle, he caught the bright blue eyes on him. For a second he almost believed they had been speaking, but then he heard Marty's voice, and a giggle from Donna, and he knew

that he had said nothing. The old man continued to watch him as he poured more champagne, spilling some of it, and replaced the bottle. "Fuck off," he said, raising his glass and returning the silent stare. Donna giggled louder and this time the others laughed also, and the old man's gaze shifted as he, too, chuckled at Marty's story.

After they ate, Mrs. Bonner appeared with a birthday cake, and they all sang to Eliot and toasted him with champagne. At eleven thirty Beatrice signaled that they should wrap it up. Eliot stood up and made his way to Pitcock.

"Thanks for the party," he said. He was very unsteady.

"Wait a second, will you. I have something for you, didn't want to bring it out before." The old man said good-bye to his guests and then left Eliot for a moment.

If he brings me a check, I'll rip it to shreds before his eyes. He thought longingly of another drink, but he didn't want to delay to mix it and drink it. The old man returned carrying a bulky package. He watched Eliot's face as he tore off the wrappings.

"I know how much you've admired my Escher works; thought you might like one." It was a large, complicated drawing of builders who were destroying what they built, all in one process. Eliot stared at it: the figures seemed to be moving, toiling up stairs, stairs that flattened out and went down again somehow even as he watched. He blinked and the movement stopped. "Thanks," he said. "Just thanks."

Pitcock nodded. He turned to the window to look out at the beach. "It's a strange night, isn't it? Don't you feel the strangeness? If it were August I'd say a hurricane was on its way, but not so soon. Just strange, I guess."

Eliot waited a moment, wanting to force the talk to the futile project, the open-ended task that Pitcock had hired them to do, but he clamped his lips hard and remained silent.

"You accept the job then?" the old man asked, in the plush office on the thirtieth floor of the glass and plastic building in New York. "Without questioning its merits? Promise to see it through?"

"I'll sign the three-year contract," Eliot said. "Seems fair enough to give it that much of a try."

"Good. And at the end of the three years, we'll talk again, and between now and then, no matter how many doubts you raise, you'll carry on."

Eliot shrugged. I will do my best to uphold the honor of the project. He said, "I don't pretend to think that we'll be able to accomplish anything, except to add to the data, and to bring some order to a field that's in chaos. Maybe that's enough for now. I don't know."

The old man turned toward him, away from the window. "It's working out. I know you don't agree, but I can feel that it's taking shape. And now this feeling of strangeness. That's part of it. Undercurrents. Someone's projecting strong undercurrents, strong enough to affect others. You'll see. You'll see."

The others were loitering near the sunken garden, all except Beatrice, who had gone ahead to relieve Bonner of his baby-sitting chores. Eliot fell into step beside Mary.

Soon she'll say, you've been awfully quiet, something to that effect. And I'll say, thinking. Been here two years and two months, for what? Doing what? Indulging a crazy old man in his obsession.

"Eliot, are you going to stay?"

"What?" He looked at the small woman, but could see only the pale top of her head.

"You've been acting like a man trying to come to a decision. We wondered if you are considering leaving here."

"I've been considering that for two years and two months," he said. "I'm no nearer a decision than I was when I first took it up." He indicated the house behind them. "He's crazy, you know."

"I don't know if he is or not. This whole project seems crazy to me, but then, it always did."

"Is Lee getting restless?"

"Isn't everyone?"

"Yeah, there is that."

The trouble was that there were only ten people on the island and they all spent nine-tenths of their time on it. They were all tired of each other, tired of the island paradise, tired of Mrs.

Bonner's turkeys and champagne parties, tired of the endless statistics and endless data that went nowhere.

We go through the motions of having fun at the parties, and each of us is there in body only, our minds busy with the data, busy trying to find an out without cutting off our connections with the old man. Each one of us afraid the goose will suddenly stop production, wondering if we have enough of the golden eggs to live on the rest of our lives, wondering if any of this is worth it. If anything out there in the real world would be any better, make any more sense. Twenty-five thousand a year, almost all clear, living quarters and most of the food thrown in, no need for cars or servants. Company plane to take us away for vacations, bring us back. Travel expenses, hotel expenses, everything paid for. Looking for ways to spend money. Endless project at twenty-five thousand a year, a raise to thirty, or forty? Keen eyes that see too much, files with too much in them, birthdays, childhood friends, illnesses, mistakes almost forgotten, but in the files. Mary was talking again.

"I almost wish we never had come here, you know? Lee would have been fine. He had a job at Berkeley all lined up. He would like to teach, I think. But probably not now. Not after this kind of freedom and so much money."

"He can always quit," Eliot said more brusquely than was called for. He liked Mary. Mary and Gina were the only ones that he did like. Neither was a threat to him in any way.

"At least we can always say that, can't we?"

They paused at his house and he remembered that he was supposed to bring some mixer. "I'll be over in a few minutes," he said, and left her as Lee and Ed drew near. He put the drawing down, but he didn't want to look at it again yet. Not until he was sober.

He stared at himself in the bathroom mirror and thought, thirty. Good Christ! Back in April Beatrice had become thirty, and had cried. Then, furious with him for taking her, with herself for needing solace, she had run away from him, and since then had been cool and pleasant, and very distant. If he cried now, would she appear from nowhere to put her arm about his shoulders, to pat him awkwardly as she maneuvered him into bed and reassured

him that he still had most of his life ahead? He laughed and turned away, not liking the mirror image. He was deeply suntanned, and his eyes were dark brown, his eyebrows straight and heavy, nearly touching, like a solid, permanent scowl.

"Just one thing more, Mr. Pitcock. Why me? Why did you select me for this project?" The contract was signed, the question made safe by the signatures.

"Because you're avaricious enough to do it. Because you're bright enough to see it through. Because you're cynical enough not to get involved personally no matter what the data start to reveal."

That's me, he thought, searching his kitchen for mixer. Avaricious. Bright. Cynical.

Donna was seated at the round table, across from an empty chair, his chair. He put the mixer down and looked at them. Ed Delizzio, twenty-five, a statistician from Pitcock Enterprises. Dark, Catholic, observed all the holy days, went to mass each Sunday, had a crucifix over his bed, a picture of Mary and Jesus on his wall. Marty Tiomkin, atheist, twenty-four. Slavic type, tall, broad, serious, with a slow grin, a slower laugh, thick long fingers. Probably could swim to England, if the spirit ever moved him. Very powerful. He was the computer expert. He could program it, repair it, make it go when it was sick, talk it into revealing correlations or synchronicities where none seemed possible. He treated it like a wife who might fly to a distant lover at any time unless she received unswerving loyalty and devotion. Marty and Ed had been hired at the same time, almost two years ago. At first they had had separate houses, like the rest of the staff, but after a month they had decided to share one house. Inseparable now, they went off on weekend trips, during which they picked up girls from one of the northern islands, or made a tour of the houses of Charleston. Now and then they brought girls back to the island with them.

Donna was next to Marty, and on the other side of her was Leland Moore. He was tall and intense, probably the most honest one there, tortured by the futility of what he was doing, but also by the memory of a fatherless childhood in a leaky fifteen-foot trailer that his mother kept filled with other people's ironing. He wanted land, a farm or a ranch, with hills on it, and water. Slowly,

month by month, he came nearer that goal, and he wouldn't leave, but he would suffer. Sitting by him was Mary, who worried about her husband too much. Who couldn't understand poverty as a spur because she never had experienced it, and thought only black people and poor Southern dirt farmers ever did. Beatrice wasn't there.

"I can't stay," Eliot said. "Sorry. Too much booze too early tonight, and the champagne didn't help. See you tomorrow."

To sit across from Donna all night, to watch her peer at her cards, and watch those pale fat fingers fumble . . . He waved to them and shook his head at their entreaties to stay at least for a while.

"Will you show me the offices tomorrow, Eliot?" Her voice was like the rest of her, just wrong, too high-pitched, little-girl cute, with the suggestion of a lisp.

He shrugged. "Sure. Eleven?"

He walked up the beach. The tide was coming in fast now, the breakers were white-frosted and insistent. In the woods behind the dunes night life stirred, an owl beat the wind steadily, a deer snorted, the grasses rustled, reviving the legend of the Spaniards who walked by night, bemoaning the abandonment of the fort they had started and left. The air was pungent with the sea smells, and the life and death smells of the miniature jungle. He walked mechanically. Whatever thoughts he had were dreamlike in that he forgot them as quickly as they formed, so that by the time he turned at the end of the island and retraced his steps along the beach, it was as if he had spent the last hour or more sleepwalking. He stopped at the pier and then walked out on it to the end where he was captain of a pirate ship braving the uncharted seas in search of unknown lands to conquer. It was flat and stupid and he let it go.

The pier was solid, a thousand feet out into the ocean; it seemed to move with the motion of the sea and the constant pressure of the wind. Eliot leaned against the end post where a brown pelican roosted every day to watch the sea and the land, alert for subversives, immorality, unseemly behavior, including littering of the beach . . .

Lee Moore's house had a light; the others were all dark. Eliot

wondered if they were still playing poker, if Donna Bensinger had won all their money, if Lee and Ed were singing dirty sea chanteys yet. He flicked his cigarette out into the water. Thirty, he thought, thirty. Forty thousand dollars in the bank, more every day, and no one to tell me to do this or that, to come in or stay out. Freedom and money. The dream of a sixteen-year-old washing dishes after school in a crummy diner. Buy a boat and go around the world after this is over. Or start traveling on tramps and never stop. Or—get a little place somewhere and let the money draw interest, live on the dividends forever. Or . . . He heard voices. Two pale figures running along the sand toward the waves. The tide had turned again. The urgency was gone. Proof, he thought, right here before our eyes day in and day out. Never changing, eternal cycles; he didn't know if he meant the tide or the couple. He looked at the nude figures. It had to be Donna, pale hair, white body. The man could have been any of them, too far up the beach to see him clearly. They ran into the surf and she shrieked, but softly, not for the world to hear. The man caught up with her and they fell together into the shallow water.

Eliot watched the laughing figures, rolling, grappling, and he felt only disgust for the girl, and the man, whoever he happened to be. Too quick. Everything about her was too quick. He started to move from the post, but there were others now coming from the dunes, running together so that it was impossible to say if there were two or three, or even four of them. The light from a crescent moon was too feeble, he couldn't make them out. Now there was a tight knot in his middle, and he felt cold. He looked down at the swells of the sea, black and hard looking here, but alive and moving, always moving. When he looked again at the beach he knew that there were six people, dancing together, running, playing. All naked, all carefree and happy now. They paired off and each couple became one being, and he turned away. Without looking again at the figures, he left the pier and hurried home. He was shivering from the constant wind on the pier.

Strange, fragmented dreams troubled his sleep. The night witch came to him and tormented his flesh while he lay unable to move, unable to respond, or refrain from responding when that pleased her. Then he was crawling up a cliff, barren and rocky, windswept

and cold. He was lost and the wind carried his voice down into crevices when he tried to call for help. His hands hurt, and he knew his toes were bleeding, leaving strange trails, like the spoor of an unidentified animal. He was on a level plain, with a walking stick in his hand, weary and chattering with cold. The wind was relentless, tearing his clothes from him; the rock-strewn field that he traversed was like dry ice. He kept his eyes cast down, so he wouldn't lose the nebulous trail that he had to follow, strange reddish wavery lines, like blood from an unknown animal. He tried to use the walking stick, but each time he struck it on the boulder, he felt it attach itself, knew that it rooted and sprouted instantly, and he had to wrench it loose again.

Eliot sat on his porch drinking black coffee, a newspaper on the table ignored as he stared over the blue-green waters. The sun was hot already, the day calm, the water unruffled. Another perfect day in paradise. He frowned at the sound of light tapping on the screen door. Donna Bensinger opened it, called, "Hello, are you decent? Can I come in?"

"Sure. Around the corner on the porch." He didn't stand up. She had on shorts, too short for her bulging pale legs, and a shirt that didn't conceal her stomach at all. Her hair was pulled back with a yellow ribbon; there were bright red spots on her cheeks, and her nose flamed, as did the tops of her bare feet and forearms. One morning and she was badly burned already. By the end of the day she'd be charred and by the next day, probably in the hospital, or at least on her way home again. He motioned for her to sit down.

"Coffee?"

"Oh, no, thank you. This is all so fantastic, isn't it? I mean, the island, the houses for all of us, people to bring you groceries and anything you need, boats we can use. I never dreamed of a job like this. It's right out of a movie, isn't it?"

He turned from her to resume his contemplation of the quiet ocean. She continued to talk. He finished his coffee and stood up. "Let's go. I have a date at twelve. I can show you the offices and explain briefly what you're to do in half an hour or so."

Eliot was six feet tall, his stride was long and quick, and he made no pretense of slowing it for the girl. She trotted at his

side. "Oh, I know that people have planted all this stuff, that it didn't just happen like this, I mean the orchids in the trees, and the jasmines and hibiscus and everything, but doesn't it look just like one of those dream islands where the heroine wears a grass skirt and sings and the hero dives for pearls, and there's a volcano that erupts in the end and they all get away in those funny boats with the things sticking out of the sides of them? Who started to build something here?"

"Spaniards. They brought in the rocks to build a fort, then abandoned it."

"Spaniards! Pirates!" She stopped abruptly, then had to run to catch up. "I can see the ships with all those sails, and slaves hauling the blocks all roped together, a Spaniard in black with a long whip . . ."

The pink stucco building that they were approaching was lavishly landscaped with tropical and semitropical plants imported from around the world: travelers' palms, fifteen-foot-high yucca plants, Philippine mahogany trees, a grouping of live oaks hung with gray-green Spanish moss that turned the light silver. A small lake before the building mirrored the trees, swans gliding through the water hardly distorted the images.

"The office building used to be a guest house," Eliot said. "It has its own kitchen, a hurricane-proof basement. Come on." There was another of the wide porches; then they were inside, in the cooled air of the lobby. This had been converted into a lounge, with a coffee maker, tables and chairs, a color television, a fireplace. Eliot showed her through the building quickly. Her office was small but well furnished, and she nodded approval. The old dining room had been equipped with a computer, several desks and chairs, a typewriter desk, drawing table lighted by a pair of fluorescent lamps. Next door was the file room, cabinet after cabinet, with library tables in the center of the room, all covered with folders and loose papers. "Marianne usually kept it up to date, but these last weeks she really wasn't well enough."

She sounded put-upon. "I have to file all that stuff?"

"Beatrice will come over a couple of hours every day to show you the system, help you get caught up. She's Pitcock's private secretary, but she knows this work too."

He showed her the rest of the first floor, then they went downstairs to the recreation room, where he sat down and lighted a cigarette. "Any questions?"

"But you haven't told me anything about what I have to do, except the filing. And what you're doing here, all of you, I mean."

"Okay. I didn't know how much Pitcock told you. You'll handle correspondence, type up reports, keep the files up to date. We are studying the effects of cycles. First we establish the fact of cycles, correlate synchronous cycles, check them back as far as you can find records for, and predict their future appearance. We collect data from all over the world, Marty feeds it into his computer and the monster spits out answers. The snowshoe hare and the lynx have the same cycle. There are business cycles of highs and lows that persist in spite of wars, technological discoveries, anything that happens. Weather cycles, excitability cycles in man. War and peace cycles. There are cycles of marriages in St. Louis, and cycles of migrations of squirrels in Tennessee." He stopped and stubbed out his cigarette hard, mashing it to shreds.

After the silence had lengthened long enough for him to light a new cigarette and for her to start fidgeting, she said, "But—why? I mean, who cares, and why?"

Eliot laughed and stubbed out the new cigarette. "That's the best damn question anyone's asked around here for over two years."

At noon he picked up Gina to take her to Charleston. Beatrice was dressed, as if she too would go, if he only asked again. He didn't look directly at her, nor did he ask. The day was not a success, although usually he enjoyed taking the child to town. He kept wondering what Beatrice was doing, what the others were doing, if they were all together. He returned to the island with Gina at six thirty. Pitcock and Bonner were talking on the dock when he brought the small boat in.

Pitcock reached for Gina's hand. "Have a good time, honey?"

"Eliot bought me a see-through raft. And a book about sea shells. And we went on rides at a carnival."

Eliot handed the parcels to Bonner, checked the boat again, then climbed out. The motor launch was gone. Pitcock stood up,

still holding Gina's hand. "Come over to dinner later, Eliot? The others have gone out fishing. I'll see Gina home."

"Beatrice?"

"She's here. She'll be over later too."

"Okay. See you around eight?"

Donna was there. Eliot paused in the doorway when he saw her, shrugged, and entered. She smiled at him, dimpling both cheeks. Beatrice nodded, murmured thanks for Gina's gifts, then turned away. Pitcock handed him a martini, and Eliot sat down with it and studied an Escher drawing over the mantel. It reminded him of his dream, following his own trail that he was making so that he wouldn't get lost when he came along. He shook his head and tried to pick up the gist of the story Pitcock was telling. Donna was hanging on every word. She was no more burned than she had been that morning, must have spent the day inside somewhere. He wondered with whom, then concentrated on Pitcock.

"Selling you down the river was no idle threat, not just a little piece of slang that got started; what it was was a death sentence. It meant actually selling a slave to work in the bottom lands on the coast—downriver. Swamps, disease, floods, alligators, snakes. Sure death real quick. And the sands kept piling up on the islands, the rocks got buried deeper and deeper. In eighteen forty my great-granddaddy bought three of these islands, ten dollars an island, or some such amount. He was ashamed to put down the real figure he paid for them, just said they were cheap. Along about nineteen twenty-eight, twenty-nine, a hurricane came and stripped a lot of the sand away again, and by the time I got around to coming out to see the damage, hell, I found a pile of rocks and stones, the foundation of a fort, all that stuff. Decided to keep the island. But I sold off the other two. One island's enough for a man."

"Fifteen fifty," Donna said, her eyes wide. "Wow! I wonder what happened to them, the Spaniards."

Pitcock shrugged and glanced at the glasses the others were holding. He poured more martini into Eliot's, was waved away by Beatrice. Donna hadn't touched hers. "Malaria. Possibly a hur-

ricane. They went ahead with St. Augustine, but they never came back up here."

"Well, I think they were crazy. It's the grooviest place I've ever seen. Last night the wind in the palm trees and the sound of the ocean, and the way the air smells here. I mean, I slept like a baby. I've never slept like that before in my life. And awake at dawn! I couldn't stand not going out right away! I just had to go out and jump into the water and swim."

Eliot laughed harshly and choked. "Nothing," he said when he finally could speak again. "Nothing. Just thinking how we all felt at first, then how the days began to melt into each other, and the weekends tended to blur and run together, and how you're always tearing off another page of the calendar, another month gone to hell."

Beatrice swept him with a sharp look, and he returned her gaze coldly. She was always so cool, so self-possessed, she didn't like scenes or emotional outbursts, and his voice had been thick with emotion. "Just don't go childish on me, okay? If you have something to say, say it, but don't pout or sulk or scream obscenities." And he said, "You can sweat and moan and cry, just like any other woman." "But not with you, not again. I don't like performing, even for an audience of only one."

"Dinner's ready." The goddam intercom.

"But the work's coming along," Pitcock said to Donna. Pitcock was laughing at him, Eliot knew, not on his face where it would show, or in his voice where it could be heard, but somewhere inside him there was laughter.

Pitcock told Donna about the hotel suite he maintained in the Windward Hotel, and the car there available at all times. "Bonner will run you over to the mainland, or the other islands any time you want to go, pick you up again later, or you can just check in and spend the night. Nice shops, a movie or two. Don't want you getting lonesome, you know."

Donna's eyes grew larger and she ate without glancing at her food.

And later: "Supposing that you were an intelligent flea on a dog. Life's been pretty good, plenty to eat, no real drastic changes in your life, or that of your parents or grandparents. You can look

forward to generations of the same existence for your children and theirs. But supposing that, because you are intelligent, you want to know more about this thing that is home to you, and when you start digging you find that it isn't the universe after all. What you thought was the whole world turns out to be a tiny bit of it, with masters ordering it, forces working on it that you never dreamed of. Things you thought were causes turn out to be effects, things that you thought were making you act in one way or another turn out not to be causing any such thing, they just happen to correspond to your actions. Take weather, for instance. Sunspots affect weather. Weather affects people, the way they feel, moody or elated. Right? Maybe. What if weather, sunspots and moods are all the effects of something else that we haven't even begun to suspect yet? You see, they are synchronous, but not causal. What else has that same periodicity of eleven point three years? Some business cycles." Pitcock was warming up now. Eliot had forgotten how long it had been since there had been someone new to explain things to. He scowled at his wine glass and wished the old fool would finish. "A businessman was shown a chart of the ups and downs of his business, and he nodded and said, yep, and he could explain each and every one of them. A strike, a lost shipment of parts, an unexpected government contract. Another man might compare the ups and downs to the excitability curve and claim that that explained it. Someone else might point to a weather chart and say that was the cause. Or the sunspot charts. Or God knows what else. But what if all those things are unrelated to each other, just happen to occur at the same time, all of them caused by something apart from any of them, something that happens that has all those effects? That's what we're after. Keep taking another step backward so you can get far enough away to see the whole pattern."

Or until you step off the end of the gangplank, Eliot added silently.

Donna was staring at Pitcock. "That's . . . that's kind of spooky, isn't it? Are you serious?"

"Let me tell you about one more cycle," Pitcock said, smiling benignly. "Ed will give you a chart tomorrow, your own personal information chart. Every day at the same time you will be required

to *X* in a square that will roughly indicate your mental state for the day. Feeling very optimistic, happy. Moody, apprehensive. Actively worried. At the end of the month Ed will go over it with you and draw you a curve that will show you your high point and your low. It'll take about fifty days to finish it, probably. Most people seem to have a cycle of fifty to fifty-five days from one high to the next. Now, I'll warn you, nothing you do or don't do will change that chart. You're like a clock ticking away, when it's time to chime, there it is."

Donna made dimples, shaking her head. "I don't believe it. I mean, if I flunk a test, I feel low. Or if a boyfriend shows up with someone else. You know. And I feel good when I look nice, and someone pays attention to me."

"Furthermore," Pitcock said, ignoring her, "statistics show that although the low points occupy only ten percent of the subject's life, during these periods more than forty percent of his accidents occur. This is the time that suicides jump, or take an overdose. It's the time that wives leave husbands, and vice versa. During the high points, roughly twelve percent of the time, twenty percent of the accidents take place, suggesting that there might be overoptimism. The other forty percent of all the accidents are spaced out in the rest of the time, sixty-eight percent of your life. It's the high and the low periods that you have to watch for."

"But why?" Donna said, looking from him to Beatrice to Eliot.

"That's one of the things we want to find out with this research," Pitcock said. He glanced at his watch. "May I suggest coffee on the terrace? It's always pleasant out there this time of the evening."

"Do you mind if I beg off?" Beatrice asked, rising. "I still have some packing to do. I want to get an early start with Gina in the morning." She added to Donna, "She's going to spend a couple of weeks with her grandparents in the mountains."

Donna nodded. "Could I come with you, help you pack or something?"

There was a quick exchange of glances between Beatrice and Pitcock; then she smiled and said of course. Eliot stood up also, but Pitcock said, "You won't rush off, too, will you? Something I wanted to bring up, if you aren't in a hurry."

Progress report? A dressing down? A boost in morale? Eliot shrugged and they watched the girls vanish among the magnolia trees. "Drambuie and coffee on the terrace. Right?" Pitcock moved ahead of him and sat down facing the sea. The breeze was warm and gentle, clouds drifted by the moon; a shift, and the moon was gliding among castles.

"What would you do if you left here tomorrow?" Pitcock asked after several minutes.

"I don't know. Hadn't thought about it. Not much, at least not very soon."

"Nothing so fascinating to you that you'd dash right off instantly to do it?"

"'Fraid not."

"Listen." Pitcock leaned forward slightly. A loon cried out three times, then stopped abruptly, and once more there was only the sound of the waves and the wind in the palm trees.

Pitcock's voice was lower. "I have a suggestion then, Eliot. Not an order, merely a suggestion. How about starting a book on the data we've collected here?"

"Me? Write a book? About what?"

He listened to Pitcock's low voice, and his own articulated thoughts, and those stirrings that never found words, and later he couldn't separate them. "If you knew you had to have surgery, would you permit it when your cycle is at its low point? You know you wouldn't. How about starting a business? You know the figures for failures and successes, the peaks and troughs. You'd be crazy to pick one of the low spots. An eagle doesn't have to understand updrafts and currents and jet streams in order to soar and ride the winds. . . ."

Something for everyone. Cycles on every side, ready to be used, causes unknown, but obviously there. Circadian cycles, menstrual cycles, creativity cycles, excitability cycles. War cycles, peace cycles. Constructive and destructive cycles. Determinism as conceived of in the past, so simplistic, like comparing checkers to chess. A reordering of life-styles, acceptance of the inevitable, using the inevitable instead of always bucking it, trying to circumvent it.

He walked on the beach and seemed to feel the earth stirring beneath his feet. Bits of the earth flowing down the river, into

the bay, material to be used by the sea as it constructed the islands grain by grain, shaping them patiently, lovingly as the very face of the earth was changed, subsiding here, growing there, swelling and ebbing. Eternal cycles of life and death.

He stumbled over the stones of the ruins and climbed the rough steps of the incompleated tower, a sand-filled stone cylinder. There was lightning out over the ocean, a distant storm too far away to hear the thunder. He watched the flashing light move northward. I don't want to do your goddamned book, Pitcock. Hire yourself a nice obedient ghost writer and do it yourself. Where does it lead? What does it imply? Something I don't want to examine. Flea on the dog, ready to be scratched off, sprayed off, get swept off in the torrent of the river when the dog swims.

"Something happened last night. I don't know what it was, but it has everyone on the island uptight today. Do you know?"

"No." I don't know. I won't know. I dreamed a crazy dream. Or else they had a bacchanal, and I don't know which, and won't know.

"I thought I had time, five years, even more. But now . . . Don't tell me you won't do it, Eliot. Don't say anything about it for a while. Let it lie there. You'll come back to it now and again. See what happens if you don't worry it."

But I won't. I don't want to do it. I want to finish my three years and get the hell out. Chess and checkers. Not with humans, Pit. Not a game, even on a macrocosmic scale. Not fleas on a dog. Free agents, within the limits set down by our capabilities and the government.

He slept and dreamed, and rejected the dream on awakening. Although unremembered, it left an uneasy feeling in his stomach, and he felt as though he hadn't slept at all. Later he found himself at the ruins and he stood gazing at a mammoth oak tree. The Spaniards had built around it. They had laid a terrazzo floor between the tower and the fort, connected by a walkway that was to have been covered. The pillars were there. And they had built around the oak tree. Crazy pagans, he muttered. Hypocrites with your beads and crucifixes and inquisitions. He walked on the top layer of the stones that made up the fort. They hadn't closed the square. One-tenth of it done, then abandoned.

That week Marty fell in love with Donna. Marty had been friendly to Eliot in the past, but now avoided him, refused to look directly at him, and managed to be gone with Donna every day when Mrs. Bonner announced lunch from the basement intercom at the office building.

Eliot kept to himself all week. He worked alone in his office, had a solitary dinner, then prowled about the island until early morning when fatigue drove him to bed and fitful sleep beset by dreams that vanished when he tried to examine them. He knew that the others were together much of the time. Sometimes late at night when the wind eased he could hear their voices, laughing, but he didn't see them again. He caught himself watching one or the other of them for an overt sign of conspiracy.

Friday afternoon Marty and Donna went to the northern islands for the weekend. Beatrice was gone, to the mountains to visit Gina. Ed Delizzio and Eliot were invited to Lee's house for dinner on Friday night, and there was no graceful, or even possible, way for Eliot to refuse without hurting Mary's feelings.

"It's been a funny week, hasn't it," Mary said. "Eliot" She looked toward her husband, set her mouth, and continued quickly, "Last week, the night that *she* came, did you have a peculiar dream?"

Lee put his knife down too hard, and she said, "I have to find out. Has Marty spoken to you all week?" She had turned back to Eliot almost instantly.

"No. Why? What about a dream?"

"All right. We all dreamed of . . . an orgy. Either we dreamed it, or it happened. Lee and I talked about it right away, of course. We thought it was our dream, strange, but ours. Then something Marty said made me realize that he had dreamed it, too. Only he had the players mixed up. And Beatrice . . . Well, you can ask her what she dreamed sometime. So I asked Ed, and he said almost the same thing. You?"

Eliot nodded. "Yeah. Except I wasn't asleep. I saw it, down on the beach. I hadn't gone home yet."

No one moved or spoke. Mary paled, then she flushed crimson, and finally broke the silence with a sound that was meant to be a laugh but sounded more like a sob. She picked up her wine glass

and choked on a swallow. Without looking at Eliot she said, "Well, if you saw what Lee and I dreamed, you must have had quite a show."

"It wasn't on the beach," Ed Delizzio said hoarsely. "It was back by the ruins, between the fort and the tower. We had a fire, and a ceremony. Rites of some kind." He stared ahead as if seeing it again. "I searched for ashes, for a scorched place. I got down on my knees the next morning and searched for a sign. . . . Nothing."

Eliot looked at him curiously, wondering how he had missed noting the haggard appearance of the younger man. Ed's eyes appeared sunken, haunted, as if there were only darkness before him that he was trying to pierce.

"It's her fault," Mary said softly. "I don't know how or why, what she has done, anything. But I know she's to blame. Night after night I wake up listening and I don't know what for."

"Hey, knock off talk like that," Lee said, and while his voice was light, his hand that closed over hers on the table made her wince.

Mary looked at Lee and there was certainty on her face. Eliot stood up. "Is there coffee, Mary? I have an appointment with Pitcock later on. Can't dawdle here all night."

Lee looked relieved as Mary's face relaxed and she smiled a genuine smile and stood up. "Sorry, Eliot. Pie? Cherry pie and coffee coming up."

They all helped her clear the table and ate pie and drank coffee. Mary refilled the cups, then asked, "Are you quitting, Eliot? Is that why you have to see Mr. Pitcock?"

"Mary!" Lee looked at Eliot and shrugged eloquently. Eliot laughed.

"No, dear heart, I'm not quitting. In fact I might write a book for the old goat."

Mary looked disappointed. "She thinks that if you'd just quit then the whole thing will fold and I won't have to actually do anything," Lee said.

"You really want to go, don't you?" Eliot asked her.

"I was willing to stay, wasn't I, Lee? I never mentioned leaving,

did I? But now, after this week, I'm afraid and I don't know why. I don't like that."

"Mary, relax. We were all together at dinner. Maybe the lobster was a little off. Or the wrong kind of mushroom in something or other. I mean, I was a lot more worried when I thought it was just me than I am now knowing that everyone experienced something like that."

She studied his face for a long time, then nodded. "You could be right, Eliot. I guess it must have been something like that."

Lee sighed, and even Ed seemed relieved. Soon after that Eliot left them and walked over to Pitcock's house.

"I decided to do the book," he said without preamble.

Pitcock was on the terrace alone. There was a touch of daylight remaining, enough to make the water look like flowing silver. "Would you mind telling me why you decided to do it?" Pitcock said after a moment.

"Mainly because I feel like there's something trying its damndest to keep me from doing it." Eliot was surprised at his own words. He hadn't meant to say that, hadn't thought it consciously.

"I should warn you, Eliot, that it could be dangerous. Especially if you really feel that way."

"Dangerous how? Psychologically?"

"Sometimes I forget how bright you are. Sit down, Eliot. Sit down. Have you had dinner?"

Eliot refused another dinner and left the old man on his terrace. They would talk the next day. All my life, he thought, always drifting, everything too easy, too meaningless to become involved with any of it. Like a cork on the stream, this way and that, touching reality now and then, then bobbing away again. Never mattered if I got waterlogged and sank, or if I kept on floating along. Just didn't matter. Then that crazy old man pulled me into his madness, and now I don't feel like I'm floating with the current at all. I'm bucking it and I don't know why, or where I'm going, what I'll find when I get there. And I don't want to get out. I won't get out, and it, that mysterious it that I feel now, it will get in my way, and maybe even try to hurt me . . . He laughed suddenly, but his laughter was not harsh, or cynical, but light with amusement and wonder.

Sunday afternoon. "Some things I should tell you, Eliot. There's a trust already set up, to continue this research. It's your baby."

"When did you do that?"

"Almost as soon as you came here I started making the arrangements. It doesn't have to be here, you understand. You can move the operations if you want to."

"And if I decide to quit, then what?"

"I would ask that you personally supervise finding the right man to carry on. I won't issue directives, anything like that, if that's what you mean. At your own discretion."

Eliot stared at him coldly. "No ties, of any sort. What I want goes. If I change the direction, whatever."

"Whatever."

They stopped to listen. Loud voices from the next house, Ed's house that he shared with Marty. Pitcock was staring toward the sound intently, not surprised, not startled.

Eliot left him and trotted along the boardwalk to Ed's house. Marty was backing Ed up against the screened porch. There was a cut on Ed's cheek. Marty's fists were hanging at his sides and at that moment neither was speaking. Off to one side Donna was pressed against the door of the house, holding her hands over her mouth hard.

"Knock it off, you two. What in Christ's name is going on?"

Neither of them paid any attention to Eliot. From nowhere a knife had appeared in Ed's hand. "Okay, Marty, baby. Come on in and get it. Come on, baby. Come on." Ed's voice was low.

Marty hesitated, his eyes on the knife. Before he could move again Eliot jumped him, knocking him to the ground. He brought his knee up sharply under Marty's chin, snapping his head back, then hit him hard just under the ribs. Marty gagged, doubled up gasping.

"Ed! Oh, Ed, he might have killed you! I thought he was going to kill you!" Donna ran to Ed and held him, sobbing.

Eliot watched, mystified. He helped Marty up, keeping a firm grasp on his arm. Marty had no fight left in him. He looked at Ed and Donna and from them to Eliot, his face twisted with contempt and hatred. Furiously he jerked loose from Eliot and turned

away to go around the house, not speaking. A second later the front door slammed.

"Ed, come over to my house. You're hurt! You're bleeding. He was going to kill you!" Donna was tugging at Ed's arm.

"Is anyone going to fill me in? What was that all about?"

Donna looked blank. "I don't know. He went out of his mind. He started to scream and yell at me and I made him bring me back. Then he went at Ed. Over nothing. Nothing at all."

Ed shrugged. The knife was gone. Eliot wondered if he had even seen a knife. "Damned if I know," Ed said. He was breathing fast now, as if fighting off shock or fear. "He came at me calling me names like I haven't heard since I left the Bronx." Donna started to sob again and he put his arm about her shoulders. "It wasn't your fault," he said. "Hey. Don't do that. It wasn't your fault." He led her toward her house.

"So," Eliot told Pitcock later, "I tried to get something out of Marty. He was packing. He cursed me out and finished throwing his stuff into his suitcases, then left. Period."

Beatrice had returned, was waiting with Pitcock. Neither seemed at all surprised. "It was bound to happen," she said. "They were deadly rivals. That togetherness was too openly self-protective. Donna should have been twins." She shivered. "I didn't know Ed carried a knife out here. He's an expert, you know. It's in his file."

Eliot walked home with her later; at her door he said, "Something else, Beatrice. Something happened here last week, something inexplicable that has affected us all. A mass hallucination, a mass dream. That's all it was, a psychic event of some sort, not explained yet, but not real."

They had been standing close together; she drew away. "Are you certain, Eliot? Absolutely certain? Anything strong enough to touch every one of us, change us somehow, must have some reality of its own." Then she went inside.

They reorganized and rescheduled work on Monday. Without Marty at the computer there was much that would have to be postponed until they got a replacement. Donna and Ed smiled softly at each other and wandered off down the beach when it was lunchtime. Eliot watched and tried to see her as Marty must have

seen here, as Ed obviously saw her. All he saw was the bulgy figure, sagging breasts in too-tight dresses, or halters. The thick legs and arms. Indentable flesh, skin that didn't tan but looked mottled, with red highlights. Thursday night he had dinner with Beatrice on her porch. She lived next to Mary and Lee Moore. They had no lights on yet when they heard Mary calling to Beatrice in a muffled but urgent voice.

"Damn," Beatrice said. She left Eliot. After a moment he followed her.

". . . your friend. Just do something. I won't have her crying on Lee's shoulder. Take her home, or something." Mary's voice was too controlled, too tight.

"For heaven's sake, Mary. Tell her to clear out. It's your house. Where's Ed?"

"He went for a walk, *she* said. I don't know. All I know is that she's in there crying on Lee's shoulder and they won't even hear me."

She broke then, suddenly and completely. Eliot couldn't see them, they were hidden by a fence of yellow oleanders, but he could hear her weeping and Beatrice's voice trying to soothe her. He circled them and approached the house.

Donna was in Lee's arms. He was holding her tightly, smoothing her dull hair. His eyes were closed. Their voices were too low to hear any of the words.

"Lee!" They didn't move apart. Lee opened his eyes and stared at Eliot blankly. "Lee! Snap out of it!"

"They used her," Lee said dully. "They both used her to get even with each other for some childish thing. They didn't care what happened to her at all."

Eliot took a step toward them, stopped again. "Lee, Mary's hurt. She needs you now. She's hurt, Lee."

Lee's face changed; slowly the life returned, then suddenly he looked like a man waking up. He dropped his arms from Donna and stepped around her without seeing her at all. "Mary? What's wrong with Mary?"

"She's out there. Beatrice found her. She needs you right now. By the oleanders."

Lee ran out of the house. Donna stared after him, her face

tear-streaked and ugly. She turned to Eliot. "I was frightened. Ed had a knife, he began to talk crazy, saying if I would repent now and die before I sinned again, my soul would be saved. I was so frightened. He wants to kill me."

Eliot saw her hopelessness and despair, the overwhelming fear that had driven her to Lee for help. She was so agonizingly young and inexperienced, so susceptible. Her large eyes awash with tears that made eddies and shadows and revealed depths that he hadn't suspected before, her body hidden now by adolescent fat that would dissolve and reveal a woman with a firm slim figure, protected until she was ready to find union with . . . He blinked and laughed raucously. "God, you're good, doll!" He laughed again and now the tears were gone and her eyes were flat and hard, like a reflecting metal polished to a high sheen. Wordlessly she left the house.

He found Mary and Lee. Beatrice was nearby, her back to them. "All of you, come on in. I want to say something." Inside again he didn't know what he could say. Nothing that would make any sense.

"Mary, you have to forget this." Mary looked at the wall, her face composed and set. "I mean it, Mary, or else she will have won. You're giving her exactly what she came here for. She doesn't want Lee any more than she wanted Marty or Ed. She wants to drive wedges. To come between people. We all watched it happen. This is the very same thing. You're intelligent enough to see this, Mary. You too, Lee."

Lee had been watching him stonily. Now he said, "Hasn't it occurred to you that you're butting in on something you don't know a damn thing about? That girl was frightened. Mary acted like a bitch. Period."

Eliot sighed. "Oh, Christ."

"I'm leaving," Mary said furiously. "I won't stand by and see you make a fool of yourself. And when she throws you over, you'll know where to look for me."

"And you," Eliot said. "Right on cue. That's the scenario, all right. For God's sake, you two idiots, open your eyes and see what you're doing and why!" He jammed his hands into his pockets. They continued to avoid looking at one another. Finally Eliot

shrugged. "Okay. If you really can't see it, then leave, Mary. It's the only thing to do. I'll take you over tonight."

"What are you talking about?" Lee demanded coldly.

"I mean that if you two are so caught up in this that you believe it's real, she has to go away, or one of you will kill the other one. Either snap out of it and convince me that you're aware of what's happened, or I'll take Mary to Charleston. I won't leave you together."

A new intentness came into Lee's face. Ignoring Mary, he took a step toward Eliot. "All this crazy talk. You're the one who started all this." His eyes narrowed and his hands clenched. "That night, down on the beach, I saw her with you. I let her convince me that it was a dream, but I saw you. I know what I saw. And I'm going to kill you, Kalin. I'm going to choke your lies right back down in your throat."

Suddenly the screen door was flung open and Ed Delizzio stepped into the room. Mary screamed. Ed had the same knife that he had threatened Marty with. This time he was holding it to throw. His quick look swept the room, stopped at Lee, and in the same instant that his arm rose, Mary moved toward Lee, her hands out. She pushed him hard; the knife flashed; she screamed again, this time in fear and pain. She staggered against Lee and fell. For a second Lee swayed, gray-faced; then he dropped to his knees at her side.

"It's nothing," she said shakily. "It touched my arm, that's all. Lee . . . Darling, please, don't. Please, Lee." He was rocking back and forth, holding her, weeping. When she tried to get up, he gathered her into his arms and lifted her and carried her into the bedroom. Beatrice followed them.

Eliot picked up the knife, closed it, and put it in his pocket.

"I guess we should call the police," Ed said emotionlessly.

"We'll call nobody," Eliot said. He studied Ed, who continued to stand in the doorway. Even his lips seemed bloodless. "Are you all right?"

"Yes. Spent. Used up. Everything's gone. I'm okay now. It's over." He looked like a shock victim: ashen-faced, blank, rigid.

They waited in silence until Beatrice returned. She was pale

and avoided Ed's glance. "They're in there crying like babies. She's all right. Hardly even scratched. Mostly scared."

"Let's go," Eliot said. He motioned for Ed to leave with them. "We could use a drink."

Beatrice hesitated. "Can we leave them? You said . . ."

"Everything changes from moment to moment, honey. Everything's the same and everything keeps changing. They'll be all right now. Ed's going to keel over and I'm damned if I want to carry him across the island. Give us a drink, Beatrice. We all deserve it."

Beatrice kept close to him as they walked around the oleanders. "No lights," she said on her porch, then added quickly, "It makes us so visible." She left them. There was the sound of the refrigerator door, ice in glasses, liquor being poured. Then she was back and handed them both glasses, very strong bourbon and water. She pulled a chair closer to Eliot's. "How can she do this to us?"

"She's a witch," Ed said.

"No. She's not a witch. And she hasn't done a damn thing to any of us. Whatever we're doing, we're doing to ourselves." Eliot finished his drink and went inside to refill his glass. When he returned, Beatrice was alone.

"You upset him more than anything up to now. Eliot, is he likely to do anything like that again?"

"I don't think so. He sinned. Now he'll repent, in the good traditional way. Prayers, good deeds, confession. Whatever he does to atone."

"Is it all over now? Who else is there to go berserk? Are you safe?"

"Nobody is safe from himself. Nobody that I know, anyway. Maybe Pitcock. I'm gambling on Pitcock, but I don't know." He drank deeply. The alcohol was numbing him now and he felt grateful.

The wind blew harder and the palm trees came to life. On the porch the silence deepened. Beatrice took Eliot's glass from his hand and went inside with it, bringing it back in a few moments without speaking. He put it down this time. There had been a need before, but the urgency was gone.

"I don't understand what's happening," Beatrice said quietly, "but whatever it is, it's changed you."

"Nobody understands, least of all me. I'm just groping for the right thing to do from one moment to the next, no plans, no over-all theory to account for anything."

"It won't go on like this, will it? We couldn't stand this kind of turmoil day after day."

"No. It's building up to something. Can't you feel that? Each step is farther, each thrust more nearly mortal." Lassitude was creeping through his bones. Abruptly he stood up. "I have to go or I'll fall asleep here."

"Eliot . . . Do you have to go?"

"I think so. Are you afraid?"

"No. It isn't that. Yes, go now. I'll see you in the morning."

"No work tomorrow. I'm going by the office and post a sign, a declared holiday." He held her hand for a minute. Soon, he thought, soon. Then he left her and walked through the darkness of the shadows cast by the oak trees and the pines, around the ruins that rose abruptly, smelling the night-blooming cereus, and the sea, and the constant odor of decay that was present wherever there were tropical plants. The scents mingled, the drive toward life stronger than death, blossoms in decay, greenery erupting from the black. He didn't turn on a light when he got to the building, but walked through the dark lobby that echoed hollowly.

He sat at his desk for several minutes before he flicked the light switch. Then he typed the notice quickly and found scotch tape to attach it to the door. His head was starting to throb and his weariness returned, making his legs ache and his back hurt. Outside the building, he hesitated at the lake. It was spring-fed, cool, clean water, without a ripple on its surface. The moon rode there as sedately as if painted. A whippoorwill cried poignantly.

Very slowly Eliot began to take off his clothes. He walked out into the water, and when it was up to his thighs, he dove straight out into it, down, down. The moon shattered and fled, the resting swans screamed alarm, and half a dozen ducks took flight. Eliot let out his air slowly, measuring it, and when it was gone he began to rise again, but suddenly he doubled in pain. He sank, struggling to loosen the knot in his stomach. The water was luminous now,

pale green and silver, and where the bottom had been there was nothing. He sank lower, drifting downward like a snowflake. The broken moon was falling with him, flecks of silver, a streak of a heavier piece flashing by; the minuscule particles of it that touched him adhered, turning him into a radiant being, floating downward in the bottomless pool. From somewhere a thought came to him, unwanted and obtrusive: The lake is only eight feet deep in the very center. He tried to push the thought away, but his body had heard, and the struggle began again, and now he tumbled and one leg stretched out until his toes felt the sandy bottom and pushed hard. He exploded in pain, as the moon had exploded. The water rushed in to fill his emptiness and he gasped and choked and coughed and the fire in his lungs was all there was.

He lay on the sand, raw and sore from retching, and he knew he couldn't move. His legs wouldn't hold him yet. Another spasm shook him and he heaved again.

He had little memory of getting to his house and into bed. He dreamed that the Spaniards dragged themselves up from the shadows where they lived and toiled to complete the fort throughout the night. They were crude shadow figures themselves, silent, carrying impossibly heavy burdens on their backs, climbing the crude steps to lay the blocks, and the fort took shape and rose higher and higher. He woke to find it nearly noon.

There was a note on his table to see Pitcock as soon as convenient. He showered and made coffee, and after he had eaten he walked over to the main house. Pitcock was in his office.

"Ed came by to say he was leaving," Pitcock said. "He wouldn't tell me what happened. Will you?"

"Sure." His account was very brief, and when he got to his adventure in the lake, he summed it up in one sentence. "I went for a swim in the lake and nearly drowned."

"Part of the same thing?"

"I believe so."

"Yes. Well, we agreed that it would get dangerous."

"Yes."

"Have you seen Donna this morning?" Pitcock toyed with a pencil and when it fell, he jerked. He looked at his hands with curiosity. Before Eliot could answer his question, he said, "Maybe

we should disband the project now. God knows we have to start over with a new staff."

"I haven't seen Donna. Do you really want to quit?"

"I feel like a man swimming the channel. I'm three-quarters of the way there, but I want to turn around and go back. I feel like either way I'll lose something. I don't think I can make it all the way, Eliot."

"That's because we don't know exactly what's in the water for the last quarter of the trip. We keep finding out there are things that we weren't ready for. Ed's knife. I put it in my pocket, but it's not there now. Swimming in a lake that suddenly became bottomless. You can walk across that lake in the dry season. What's ahead? That's the question, isn't it?"

"Is it? I keep wondering, and if we found out that the earth is an illusion dreamed by a god, what harm have we done? Why are we being stopped? Who's meddling?"

Eliot stared at him, then shook his head. "I think you should go away for the weekend. Get away from here for a few days, see how you feel about it Monday. If you want to break it all up then, well, we can talk about it."

"You can't leave now, can you? You'll see it through, no matter what happens?"

"I can't leave now."

Pitcock looked shriveled and old, and for several minutes his bright blue eyes seemed clouded. Surprisingly, he laughed then. "You asked once why I picked you. Because I could see myself in you. The self that I could have been forty years ago. But instead I took the other path, extended an empire. Pitcock Enterprises. I thought there was time for it all, and I was wrong. I thought it was a kind of knowledge, that if I bypassed it, I could have it just the same if I forced someone else to seek it and let me see the results. Nontransferable. Not knowledge, then. Not in the accepted sense. I pushed you and prodded you and goaded you into going somewhere and I can't follow you. Leave me alone, Eliot. I have some work to do now."

Eliot stood up and started to leave, but stopped at the door. "Pit, I don't *know* anything. If I did, I would make you see it. But there's nothing."

Pitcock didn't look at him. He had picked up the pencil again and held it poised over a notebook as if impatient to resume an interrupted task. Eliot went out.

"Eliot, are you all right?" Beatrice was waiting for him. She held out his watch. "I found it by the lake."

Eliot took her in his arms and held her quietly for a long time. "I'm all right."

"The lake shore is a mess, as if you were fighting there. I went to your house and saw that you'd had breakfast. I knew it was all right, but still . . ."

They walked in the shade, toward the far end of the island. The trees, the dunes to the seaward side, all masked the sound of the ocean, and there were only bird songs and an occasional rustling in the undergrowth. There was a cool, mossy glen, where the air was tinted blue by a profusion of wild morning glories that never closed in the shadows. Very deliberately and gently Eliot made love to Beatrice in the glen.

She lay on her back with her eyes closed, a small smile on her face. "I feel like a woods nymph, doing what I have to do, without a thought in the world. My brain's on vacation."

He ran his finger over her cheek. She was humming. With a chill Eliot realized that she was humming "Ten Little Indians."

That afternoon Eliot made some preliminary notes:

Any eschatological system, whether religious, mathematical, physical, or simply theoretical for purposes of analogies is counter to the world as it exists. Experimental bias, observer effect, by whatever name science would call it, the addition of life in a universe reverses the entropic nature of matter. Eschatology can validly be applied only to inert matter; the final dispersion of the atoms in a uniform, energyless universe is a reformulation of what others have called the death wish. Since man rose from the same inert matter, this pull or drive or simple tendency exerts its purpose in every cell of his being. But with the random chemical reaction that brought life to the lifeless, another, stronger drive was created. The double helix is the perfect symbol for this new,

not to be denied drive that manifests in rebirth, renewal, in an ever widening spiral of growth and change . . .

"Eliot!" Lee's voice jolted him awake. "Pitcock's missing. We can't find him anywhere."

"Where have you looked?" Eliot hurried out to join Lee. "Where's Bonner?"

"He went to check out the office building. We went through the house, then the ruins. He likes to prowl among them. I looked in on Beatrice. I thought he might be with you."

"Okay. Check out the other houses. I'll take the beach, work back through the stones toward his house."

Two hours until it would be dark, two hours, plenty of time to find him. Not in the woods, but among the dead rocks. A quarter of a mile of jumbled rocks, fan-shaped, narrowed at the ruins, spreading out at the water's edge, piled higher there with deeper cracks between them. Eliot zigzagged from the edge of the water to the ruins, back to the water. He called, and the whispering sea mocked him. From a distance he could hear Lee's voice calling. A catbird practiced Lee's shout, then gave it up and trilled sweetly. Eliot stopped abruptly. He strained to hear, then began working his way more slowly toward a high place where six of the massive stones had been piled up. "I'm coming, Pit." He couldn't be certain now if he had heard the old man or not. He searched frantically but carefully among the bases. Here the water lapped at the rocks with every third or fourth wave. The tide was turning.

"Eliot."

This time he knew he had heard. He found the old man lying in an unnatural position, his shoulders and his hips not in line. Pitcock was very pale, but conscious. His voice was a faint whisper.

"Can't move, Eliot. Back's hurt."

"Okay. Take it easy, Pit. We'll get you out of here." Eliot clambered back up the rocks and yelled for Lee. An answer came back faintly, and he waited until Lee was closer. "Bring a stretcher, a door, something to carry him on." Lee appeared at the head of the rocks and waved. "Tell Bonner to get the launch ready. Mrs. Bonner to call the hospital." Lee waved again and ran toward Pitcock's house. Eliot returned to the old man.

There was nothing he could do now. He found his handkerchief and wiped Pitcock's face gently. He was perspiring hard.

"Heard someone crying. Couldn't find her. Slipped . . ."

"Don't talk now, Pit. Save it. Your pulse is good. It's not serious, I'm sure. Rest."

"Eliot, don't send me over tonight. Isn't fair, not now. Get me back to the house. Help me up." His face was gray, cold and moist. His eyes were glazed.

Damn Lee! Where was Bonner? "Take it easy, Pit. Soon now. Just take it easy." He yanked his shirt off and covered the old man with it. He mopped his face again.

"I didn't do it, Eliot. I didn't want to fall." He looked past Eliot and groaned. His eyes closed. Beads of sweat came together and a trickle ran across one eye, another down his temple. Eliot wiped his face again and the man shuddered. "She's up there," he mumbled. "Watching us."

Eliot looked over his shoulder, across the tumbled rocks. She was standing on the wall of the fort, not moving, a dark shape against the paling sky. "Don't worry about her, Pit," he said. "I'll take care of her." He caught a motion and turned to see Lee and Bonner picking their way among the blocks with a door. Beatrice darted before them, burdened with blankets and a beach mat.

"How bad?"

"I don't know. Shock." He glanced quickly toward the fort. She was gone.

"For God's sake, be careful!" he said moments later as they started to move Pitcock to the door, padded now with the beach mat. They covered him and fastened him down securely with the blankets, and then Lee and Eliot carried him to the motor launch. Mrs. Bonner met them at the dock.

"There'll be an ambulance waiting." She looked at Pitcock and turned white. "My God! Oh, my God!"

"Go with them," Eliot said to her. "You, too," he told Beatrice. "Get out of here."

"No. I couldn't help him."

They got him on board and Lee worked with the mooring line. Eliot turned again to Beatrice. "Please go on. Stay with him. He might want you."

"Don't send me away, Eliot. Please don't send me away."

He nodded and the three of them stood on the dock and watched until the launch started to pick up speed in the smooth water of the bay. As the roar diminished, the silence of the island settled preternaturally. "Where's Mary?"

"In our house."

"Let's get her. We have to stay together tonight." They started across the island. Under the trees the light was a somber yellow, the air hot and still, thick and oppressive. Through the branches overhead the sky was dirty yellow, the color of Donna's hair. No bird stirred, no tree frogs sang, the palm fronds stood stiff and unmoving. Eliot set a fast pace and they hurried a bit more. When they came to the ruins, twilight had descended, and rounding the aborted building they involuntarily stopped. Before them was a concrete ocean, gray on gray, the sea and horizon an encapsulating solid that was closing the distance to them rapidly.

"Get Mary, fast. We'll go to the office building." Eliot's hand closed hard on Beatrice's arm. She was gazing about in wonder. She reached out to touch the granite block, then her hand swept through the air, her fingers spread apart, as if trying to feel for something not there. "It's an illusion, a trick of the light. A storm's coming fast."

She looked at him, touched his cheek as she had touched the rock. "But I can't tell the difference. This afternoon, I dreamed, I thought, or hallucinated, something. Everything was like a flat illustration from a book. I . . ." She shook herself and laughed self-consciously. "I found your watch. Here." She pulled it from her pocket and handed it to him. Eliot stared at it for a long time. Then Lee and Mary were with them and they turned to go to the office building.

Halfway there, the wind came. It came with a shriek that was too high-pitched, and it carried sand and dust that brought night. The island shook, and the trees ground their branches together. Eliot grasped Beatrice's hand and pulled her, blinded by flying matter and the driving wind that was tearing up rotted and rotting leaves and twigs and stripping leaves from the oaks and needles from the pines. It was a hot wind. When the noises ebbed they could hear the sea pounding. A tree shuddered and crashed down

across the walk and they stopped, panting, then ran on, clambering over the trunk. Now they could see the office building and the lake dimly. The lake looked like a saucer of water rocking back and forth. There was no sign of the waterfowl. They began to run across the parklike setting and the water rocked higher on the far side of the lake.

"For the love of God, hurry!" Eliot cried, and nearly yanked Beatrice off her feet. The water was swinging back now, and at the same time the wind increased, pushing the water up and out of its banks. Lee and Mary had reached the building, but Beatrice stumbled. Eliot knocked her to the ground and wrapped his arms around her, and the water hit them.

They rolled with the wall of water, tumbled over and over, grinding against the walk, against the sand and bushes. Beatrice went limp and Eliot held her head tight against him and let himself roll. He closed his hand over her mouth and nose so she wouldn't breathe in the roiling water and dirt. When he knew he could hold his breath no longer, that Beatrice would die if she didn't get air, the water abruptly fell. Everything stopped, even the wind paused. There were hands on him, Lee, trying to help him up. Eliot resisted feebly, the hands persisted, and the weight that was Beatrice was removed.

"Can you get up, Eliot? Can you move? I'll carry her inside and come back for you." Again the peace returned, but after an infinitely long time, he opened his eyes and knew that he had to get up, had to get inside the shelter of the building. The wind was starting to build again and he struggled to his knees, then pulled himself upright and, staggering uncertainly, stumbled to the entrance as Lee was coming out for him.

He was hardly aware of being led inside, of anything that happened for the next few minutes. Beatrice smiled wanly at him, then lay back on the couch where Lee had put her. Outside, the storm built to a new intensity.

"How long has it been?" Mary asked much later. There was no light in the building, the electricity had long since failed. They could hear the howling wind, now and again punctuated by explosive noises as if a wrecking crew were hard at work destroying the island and everything on it.

Eliot looked at his watch; it had stopped. He shrugged. Something crashed into the building and the whole structure shuddered.

"What is it?" Lee asked later. "A tornado would have gone long ago. There wasn't any report of a hurricane. What is it?"

Eliot stood up. The building shuddered again with a new blast of wind. "I have to go find her," he said.

"No!" Beatrice, pale and torn and cut and filthy, and very beautiful. He touched her cheek lightly. She backed away from him and sat down. Very frightened. Tears standing in her eyes. No one else said anything.

No matter which way he went the wind was in his face. The rain drove against him horizontally, blinding him, and he was buffeted with debris of the storm. There were trees downed everywhere, and he stumbled and fell over them and crawled and dragged himself to his feet again and again. He lost his sandals and knew that his feet were bleeding. His bare chest was hatchmarked by cuts and scrapes. Then he felt the smooth terrazzo underfoot and he knew that soon he would find her. He fell again, hard against a roughly worked block that was cold and wet. The pounding rain dissolved him; he flowed through the rock where there was silence and peace and no more pain. He rested. Very slowly, after a long time, he found himself withdrawing from the nothingness of rest; the rock was cutting into his chest, and where it had scraped his cheek raw there was pain. He pulled away. Lightning burned the air, sizzling so close that he was blinded. The thunder that was almost simultaneous with it deepened and he vibrated with the roar. Blinded and deafened, he pushed himself away from the rock, reeled backward and clung to the great oak tree until his vision cleared again. Then he lurched away from the place, toward the water's edge and the jumbled rocks there. Behind him lightning flashed again, the tree exploded, showering a geyser of splinters over him. He didn't look back. The tree crashed to the ground, one of the branch ends brushing him as it fell.

The thunder of the sea contested the thunder of the air, overcame it as he drew nearer until there was only the roar of the ocean. The waves were mountainous, crashing over the highest of the rocks now, grinding rocks against rocks, smashing all to a

powdery sand that it would fling away to rest in a watery grave. Eliot saw her then.

I've come for you.

You can't touch me.

Yes. I can. I know you.

She laughed and was gone. He waited, bracing himself against the wind, and lightning illuminated her again, closer.

Don't run anymore. I'll still be here no matter how far you run. Always closer.

A wave broke over his feet, and again she laughed and the moment was over. He didn't move.

Eliot, go back to them. Or they'll all die. And death is real, Eliot. No matter what else isn't, death is real.

He had only to reach out to touch her now. Her flesh was as alive as his own, the arm that he caught twisted and pulled reassuringly.

You'll kill them all, Eliot. Beatrice. Lee. Mary. They'll die. Look at the water. It's going to cover the island.

Another wave broke, higher on his leg this time. The water was rushing among the blocks, reaching out for the fort now.

She struggled to free herself, she clawed his face and bit and tried to bring her knee up. Eliot twisted her around and they slipped and fell together, his grasp on her arm broken. He brought his hands up her body and fastened them on her throat, and the waves were over his head as he choked her and beat her head against the rocks and knew that he was drowning, being swept out to sea by the furious undertow, but still he held her. Her struggles became feebler.

God! Help me!

He can't! He brings destruction and plagues and wars and death. No help.

She was hardly moving, and they were both swept up together and dashed against the piled-up blocks. Eliot blacked out, but his hands didn't let go, and when the pain released him, he knew that he still held her although he could no longer feel her.

God, please! Please.

He brings the floods and the winds and devastates the land and kills mankind. He is death and I'm sending you back to him.

You're crazy. You can't kill. They'll punish you. They'll hang you. Put you in an institution for the rest of your life.

And the spark of life that is stronger than all the powers of death commands the waters to be stilled, and they are quiet.

There was only silence now.

"Help me pull him out of there." Lee's voice. "Can you unlock his hands?"

"Is he dead? For God's sake, Lee, is he dead?"

"No. Beatrice, get out of the way. He's . . ."

Eliot opened his eyes to a tranquil night. He was between two stone blocks, waves breaking over his legs. His hands and arms ached and he looked at them; his fingers were locked together. There was no sign of her. Beatrice reached down to touch him and he felt his muscles relax, and took her hand.

"It's over then?"

"Yes. How? What happened?" Beatrice shook her head violently. "Never mind. Not now. Let's get you inside. You're hurt."

They walked around the toppled oak tree, but in the wet black ground there were sprouts already, palely green, tenacious. There would be a grove there one day.

"The oak tree is the only casualty." Lee said in wonder. "You'd think with all that wind, the thunder and lightning, the whole island would be gone. One tree."

Eliot felt Beatrice's hand tighten in his, but he didn't say anything. She knows. A temporary displacement of the ego and she comes up with what I'm thinking, just like that. He didn't find it at all curious that no one asked what had happened to Donna. They were on the spiral, safely now, and they would continue to search for patterns that would prove to be elusive, but maybe, now, not too elusive after all.

INDEX TO VOLUMES 1-10

Index, Volumes 1-10

[All references are to volumes.]

Authors

Aldiss, Brian W., *Full Sun*, 2

Anderson, Poul, *The Disinherited*, 1

Belcher, C. Davis, *The Price*, 5

Blish, James, *How Beautiful With Banners*, 1

Bryant, Edward, *Jody After the War*, 10

Buck, Doris Pitkin, *Why They Mobbed the White House*, 3

Carr, Carol, *Inside*, 8

Look, You Think You've Got Troubles, 5

Charnock, Graham, *The Chinese Boxes*, 8

Cox, Jean, *Fame*, 6

Dann, Jack M., *Whirl Cage*, 10

Davidson, Avram, *Goslin Day*, 6

Rite of Spring, 8

The Roads, the Roads, the Beautiful Roads, 5

Disch, Thomas M., *The Asian Shore*, 6

5 Eggs, 1

The Pressure of Time, 7

Dorman, Sonya, *The Living End*, 7

Splice of Life, 1

Dozois, Gardner R., *A Dream at Noonday*, 7

Horse of Air, 8

A Kingdom by the Sea, 10

- Where No Sun Shines*, 6
- Effinger, Geo. Alec, *Live, from Berchtesgaden*, 10
- Ellison, Harlan, *One Life, Furnished in Early Poverty*, 8
 Shattered Like a Glass Goblin, 4
- Emshwiller, Carol, *Al*, 10
 Animal, 4
 Debut, 6
 Woman Waiting, 7
- Farmer, Philip José, *Don't Wash the Carats*, 3
- Harness, Charles L., *Probable Cause*, 4
- Hill, Richard, *To Sport with Amaryllis*, 7
- Hoffman, Lee, and Robert E. Toomey, Jr., *Lost in the Marigolds*, 9
- Hufford, Liz, *Tablets of Stone*, 8
- Jakes, John, *Here Is Thy Sting*, 3
- Jones, Langdon, *The Time Machine*, 5
- Kidd, Virginia, *Kangaroo Court*, 1
- Lafferty, R. A., *All Pieces of a River Shore*, 8
 Configuration of the North Shore, 5
 Continued on Next Rock, 7
 Dorg, 10
 Entire and Perfect Chrysolite, 6
 The Hole on the Corner, 2
 Interurban Queen, 8
 Old Foot Forgot, 7
 One at a Time, 4
 When All the Lands Pour Out Again, 9
- Latham, Philip, *The Dimple in Draco*, 2
 The Rose Bowl-Pluto Hypothesis, 5
- Laumer, Keith, *In the Queue*, 7
- Le Guin, Ursula K., *The End*, 6
 Winter's King, 5
- Macfarlane, W., *The Last Leaf*, 9
- Margroff, Robert E., and Andrew J. Offutt, *The Book*, 8
- McKenna, Richard, *Bramble Bush*, 3
 Fiddler's Green, 2
 The Secret Place, 1
- Neville, Kris, *Dominant Species*, 9
- Offutt, Andrew J., and Robert E. Margroff, *The Book*, 8

- Panshin, Alexei, *Now I'm Watching Roger*, 10
- Peck, Richard E., *Gantlet*, 10
- Reed, Kit, *Across the Bar*, 9
 The Food Farm, 2
 Winston, 5
- Rice, Allison, *The Loolies Are Here*, 1
- Roberts, Keith, *The Deep*s, 1
- Russ, Joanna, *The Adventuress*, 2
 The Barbarian, 3
 Gleepsite, 9
 I Gave Her Sack and Sherry, 2
 The Second Inquisition, 6
- Sallis, James, *Binaries*, 9
 The Creation of Bennie Good, 6
 A Few Last Words, 4
 The History Makers, 5
 Jim and Mary G, 7
 Letter to a Young Poet, 3
 Only the Words Are Different, 9
- Saxton, Josephine, *Heads Africa Tails America*, 9
- Scott, Robin, *Maybe Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de Lamarck, Was a Little Bit Right*, 6
- Silverberg, Robert, *Passengers*, 4
- Spinrad, Norman, *The Big Flash*, 5
- Stover, Leon E., *What We Have Here Is Too Much Communication*, 9
- Teichner, Albert, *Christlings*, 10
- Thomas, Ted, *The Doctor*, 2
 The Weather on the Sun, 8
- Thorp, Roderick, *Sunburst*, 6
- Thurston, Robert, *Stop Me Before I Tell More*, 9
- Toomey, Robert E., Jr., and Lee Hoffman, *Lost in the Marigolds*, 9
- Transue, Jacob, *This Corruptible*, 4
- Vinge, Vernor, *Grimm's Story*, 4
 The Science Fair, 9
- Wharton, Thom Lee, *The Bystander*, 8
- Wilhelm, Kate, *April Fool's Day Forever*, 7
 Baby, You Were Great, 2

- The Chosen*, 6
- A Cold Dark Night with Snow*, 6
- The Encounter*, 8
- The Fusion Bomb*, 10
- The Infinity Box*, 9
- The Planners*, 3
- Somerset Dreams*, 5
- Staras Flonderans*, 1
- Windsong*, 4
- Wilson, Richard, *Mother to the World*, 3
- Winn, Pip, *Right Off the Map*, 8
- Wolfe, Gene, *The Changeling*, 3
 - Eyebem*, 7
 - The Fifth Head of Cerberus*, 10
 - How the Whip Came Back*, 6
 - The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories*, 7
 - A Method Bit in "B,"* 8
 - Paul's Treehouse*, 5
 - Remembrance to Come*, 6
 - Sonya, Crane Wessleman, and Kittee*, 8
 - The Toy Theater*, 9
 - Trip, Trap*, 2
- Young, Robert F., *Starscape with Frieze of Dreams*, 8

Titles

- Across the Bar*, Kit Reed, 9
- Adventuress, The*, Joanna Russ, 2
- Al*, Carol Emshwiller, 10
- All Pieces of a River Shore*, R. A. Lafferty, 8
- Animal*, Carol Emshwiller, 4
- April Fool's Day Forever*, Kate Wilhelm, 7
- Asian Shore, The*, Thomas M. Disch, 6
- Baby, You Were Great*, Kate Wilhelm, 2
- Barbarian, The*, Joanna Russ, 3
- Big Flash, The*, Norman Spinrad, 5
- Binaries*, James Sallis, 9
- Book, The*, Robert E. Margroff and Andrew J. Offutt, 8

- Bramble Bush*, Richard McKenna, 3
Bystander, The, Thom Lee Wharton, 8
Changeling, The, Gene Wolfe, 3
Chinese Boxes, The, Graham Charnock, 8
Chosen, The, Kate Wilhelm, 6
Christlings, Albert Teichner, 10
Cold Dark Night with Snow, A, Kate Wilhelm, 6
Configuration of the North Shore, R. A. Lafferty, 5
Continued on Next Rock, R. A. Lafferty, 7
Creation of Bennie Good, The, James Sallis, 6
Debut, Carol Emshwiller, 6
Deepes, The, Keith Roberts, 1
Dimple in Draco, The, Philip Latham, 2
Disinherited, The, Poul Anderson, 1
Doctor, The, Ted Thomas, 2
Dominant Species, Kris Neville, 9
Don't Wash the Carats, Philip José Farmer, 3
Dorg, R. A. Lafferty, 10
Dream at Noonday, A, Gardner R. Dozois, 7
Encounter, The, Kate Wilhelm, 8
End, The, Ursula K. Le Guin, 6
Entire and Perfect Chrysolite, R. A. Lafferty, 6
Eyebem, Gene Wolfe, 7
Fame, Jean Cox, 6
Few Last Words, A, James Sallis, 4
Fiddler's Green, Richard McKenna, 2
Fifth Head of Cerberus, The, Gene Wolfe, 10
5 Eggs, Thomas M. Disch, 1
Food Farm, The, Kit Reed, 2
Full Sun, Brian W. Aldiss, 2
Fusion Bomb, The, Kate Wilhelm, 10
Gantlet, Richard E. Peck, 10
Gleepsite, Joanna Russ, 9
Goslin Day, Avram Davidson, 6
Grimm's Story, Vernor Vinge, 4
Heads Africa Tails America, Josephine Saxton, 9
Here Is Thy Sting, John Jakes, 3
History Makers, The, James Sallis, 5

- Hole on the Corner, The*, R. A. Lafferty, 2
Horse of Air, Gardner R. Dozois, 8
How Beautiful with Banners, James Blish, 1
How the Whip Came Back, Gene Wolfe, 6
I Gave Her Sack and Sherry, Joanna Russ, 2
In the Queue, Keith Laumer, 7
Infinity Box, The, Kate Wilhelm, 9
Inside, Carol Carr, 8
Interurban Queen, R. A. Lafferty, 8
Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories, The, Gene Wolfe, 7
Jim and Mary G, James Sallis, 7
Jody After the War, Edward Bryant, 10
Kangaroo Court, Virginia Kidd, 1
Kingdom by the Sea, A, Gardner R. Dozois, 10
Last Leaf, The, W. Macfarlane, 9
Letter to a Young Poet, James Sallis, 3
Live, from Berchtesgaden, Geo. Alec Effinger, 10
Living End, The, Sonya Dorman, 7
Look, You Think You've Got Troubles, Carol Carr, 5
Loolies Are Here, The, Allison Rice, 1
Lost in the Marigolds, Lee Hoffman and Robert E. Toomey, Jr., 9
Maybe Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, Chevalier de Lamarck, Was a Little Bit Right, Robin Scott, 6
Method Bit in "B," A, Gene Wolfe, 8
Mother to the World, Richard Wilson, 3
Now I'm Watching Roger, Alexei Panshin, 10
Old Foot Forgot, R. A. Lafferty, 7
One at a Time, R. A. Lafferty, 4
One Life, Furnished in Early Poverty, Harlan Ellison, 8
Only the Words Are Different, James Sallis, 9
Passengers, Robert Silverberg, 4
Paul's Treehouse, Gene Wolfe, 5
Planners, The, Kate Wilhelm, 3
Pressure of Time, The, Thomas M. Disch, 7
Price, The, C. Davis Belcher, 5
Probable Cause, Charles L. Harness, 4
Remembrance to Come, Gene Wolfe, 6
Right Off the Map, Pip Winn, 8

- Rite of Spring*, Avram Davidson, 8
Roads, the Roads, the Beautiful Roads, The, Avram Davidson, 5
Rose Bowl-Pluto Hypothesis, The, Philip Latham, 5
Science Fair, The, Vernor Vinge, 9
Second Inquisition, The, Joanna Russ, 6
Secret Place, The, Richard McKenna, 1
Shattered Like a Glass Goblin, Harlan Ellison, 4
Somerset Dreams, Kate Wilhelm, 5
Sonya, Crane Wessleman, and Kittee, Gene Wolfe, 8
Splice of Life, Sonya Dorman, 1
Staras Flonderans, Kate Wilhelm, 1
Starscape with Frieze of Dreams, Robert F. Young, 8
Stop Me Before I Tell More, Robert Thurston, 9
Sunburst, Roderick Thorp, 6
Tablets of Stone, Liz Hufford, 8
This Corruptible, Jacob Transue, 4
Time Machine, The, Langdon Jones, 5
To Sport with Amaryllis, Richard Hill, 7
Toy Theater, The, Gene Wolfe, 9
Trip, Trap, Gene Wolfe, 2
Weather on the Sun, The, Ted Thomas, 8
What We Have Here Is Too Much Communication, Leon E. Stover, 9
When All the Lands Pour Out Again, R. A. Lafferty, 9
Where No Sun Shines, Gardner R. Dozois, 6
Whirl Cage, Jack M. Dann, 10
Why They Mobbed the White House, Doris Pitkin Buck, 3
Windsong, Kate Wilhelm, 4
Winston, Kit Reed, 5
Winter's King, Ursula K. Le Guin, 5
Woman Waiting, Carol Emshwiller, 7

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