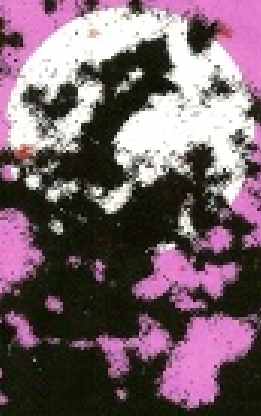
Orbit 14

Edited by Damon Knight



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The best **ALL NEW** SF stories

ORBIT 14

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Edited by Damon Knight

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They Say

The lead story [in *Astounding Stories,* December 1933] was Nat Schachner's "Ancestral Voices," in which a time traveler, having returned to the past, happens to kill a ferocious Hun who, unknown to the traveler, is one of his own ancestors. This brings about the immediate nonexistence of the time traveler as well as that of many thousands of people throughout history. Above all, the Hun's death causes the disappearance in 1933 of Hitler and numerous Nazis, along with an equally large number of Jews! Thus Schachner denounced the myth of the superiority of the "Aryan race" along with that of the "chosen people." Jews or Nazis, all men are of the same race. This very courageous story, written at a time when Hitlerism had many supporters in the United States, caused a shock among the readers. Certain admirers of the Third Reich went so far as to threaten the editors with reprisals; adult science fiction was born.

—Jacques Sadoul, in *Hier, l'An 2000* (Denoël, Paris, 1973)

"I owe what I am entirely to paperbacks. I am a PX and bus station author; and I'm lucky because people think of my books as science fiction, and they always print a lot of copies of science fiction."

—Kurt Vonnegut, at the Bookworkers' seminar on "Open Publishing," New York, April 9, 1973 (reported in *Publishers Weekly*)

HEINLEIN (Robert A.)

Here is the typical product of America, as seen by those who are repelled by America but who like the Americans. As an individual, he so perfectly represents that country, crammed with blinding faults and made up of often delightful people, that he seems a parody of it: the best conscience in the world, more extraverted than flesh and blood can be, a juvenile mentality furnished with an extravagant power (his talent), a purely visceral racism without any rational foundation, all this in the service of science fiction—it's too much.

—Pierre Versins, *Encyclopédie de l'Utopie et de la Science Fiction* (L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne, 1972)

We who hobnob with hobbits and tell tall tales about little green men are quite used to being dismissed as mere entertainers, or sternly disapproved of as escapists. But I think that perhaps the categories are changing, like the times. Sophisticated readers are accepting the fact that an improbable and unmanageable world is going to produce an improbable and hypothetical art. At this point, realism is perhaps the least adequate means of understanding or portraying the incredible realities of our existence. A scientist who creates a monster in his laboratory; a librarian in the library of Babel; a wizard unable to cast a spell; a space ship having trouble in getting to Alpha Centauri: all these may be precise and profound metaphors of the human condition. The fantasist, whether he uses the ancient archetypes of myth and legend or the younger ones of science and technology, may be talking as seriously as any sociologist—and a good deal more directly—about human life as it is lived, and as it might be lived, and as it ought to be lived. For, after all, as great scientists have said and as all children know, it is above all by the imagination that we achieve perception, and compassion, and hope.

—Ursula K. Le Guin, accepting the National Book Award for Children's Literature, New York, April 10, 1973

TIN SOLDIER

In Hans Christian Andersen's immortal story, a tin soldier fell in love with a ballerina and passed through the fire for her. Their fate was cruel; but now, centuries later and light-years away, another tin soldier and his ballerina might have a second chance.

Joan D. Vinge

The ship drifted down the ragged light-robe of the Pleiades, dropped like a perfect pearl into the midnight water of the bay. And re-emerged, to bob gently in a chain of gleaming pearls stretched across the harbor toward the port. The port's unsleeping Eye blinked once, the ship replied. New Piraeus, pooled among the hills, sent tributaries of light streaming down to the bay to welcome all comers, full of sound and brilliance and rash promise. The crew grinned, expectant, faces peering through the transparent hull; someone giggled nervously.

The sign at the heavy door flashed a red one-legged toy; TIN SOLDIER flashed blue below it. EAT. DRINK. COME BACK AGAIN. In green. And they always did, because they knew they could.

"Soldier, another round, please!" came over canned music.

The owner of the Tin Soldier, also known as Tin Soldier, glanced

up from his polishing to nod and smile, reached down to set bottles out on the bar. He mixed the drinks himself. His face was ordinary, with eyes that were dark and patient, and his hair was coppery barbed wire bound with a knotted cloth. Under the curling copper, under the skin, the back of his skull was a plastic plate. The quick fingers of the hand on the goose-necked bottle were plastic, the smooth arm was prosthetic. Sometimes he imagined he heard clicking as it moved. More than half his body was artificial. He looked to be about twenty-five; he had looked the same fifty years ago.

He set the glasses on the tray and pushed, watching as it drifted across the room, and returned to his polishing. The agate surface of the bar showed cloudy permutations of color, grain-streak and whorl and chalcedony depths of mist. He had discovered it in the desert to the east—a shattered imitation tree, like a fellow traveler trapped in stasis through time. They shared the private joke with their clientele.

"—come see our living legend!"

He looked up, saw her coming in with the crew of the *Who Got Her–709,* realized he didn't know her. She hung back as they crowded around, her short ashen hair like beaten metal in the blue-glass lantern light. *New,* he thought. Maybe eighteen, with eyes of quicksilver very wide open. He smiled at her as he welcomed them, and the other women pulled her up to the agate bar. "Come on, little sister," he heard Harkané say, "you're one of us too." She smiled back at him.

"I don't know you . . . but your name should be Diana, like the silver Lady of the Moon." His voice caught him by surprise.

Quicksilver shifted. "It's not."

Very new. And realizing what he'd almost done again, suddenly wanted it more than anything. Filled with bitter joy he said, "What is your name?"

Her face flickered, but then she met his eyes and said, smiling, "My name is Brandy."

"Brandy . . ."

A knowing voice said, "Send us the usual, Soldier. Later, yes—?"

He nodded vaguely, groping for bottles under the counter ledge. Wood screeked over stone as she pulled a stool near and slipped onto it, watching him pour. "You're very neat." She picked nuts from a bowl.

"*Long* practice."

She smiled, missing the joke.

He said, "Brandy's a nice name. And I think somewhere I've heard it—"

"The whole thing is Branduin. My mother said it was very old."

He was staring at her. He wondered if she could see one side of his face blushing. "What will you drink?"

"Oh . . . do you have any—brandy? It's a wine, I think; nobody's ever had any. But because it's my name, I always ask."

He frowned. "I don't . . . hell, I do! Stay there."

He returned with the impossible bottle, carefully wiped away its gray coat of years and laid it gleaming on the bar. Glintings of maroon speared their eyes. "All these years, it must have been waiting. That's where I heard it . . . genuine vintage brandy, from Home."

"From Terra—really? Oh, thank you!" She touched the bottle, touched his hand. "I'm going to be lucky."

Curving glasses blossomed with wine; he placed one in her palm. *"Ad astra."* She lifted the glass.

"Ad astra; to the stars." He raised his own, adding silently, *Tonight . . .*

They were alone. Her breath came hard as they climbed up the newly cobbled streets to his home, up from the lower city where the fluorescent lamps were snuffing out one by one.

He stopped against a low stone wall. "Do you want to catch your breath?" Behind him in the empty lot a weedy garden patch wavered with the popping street lamp.

"Thank you." She leaned downhill against him, against the wall. "I got lazy on my training ride. There's not much to do on a ship; you're supposed to exercise, but—" Her shoulder twitched under the quilted blue-silver. He absorbed her warmth.

Her hand pressed his lightly on the wall. "What's your name? You haven't told me, you know."

"Everyone calls me Soldier."

"But that's not your name." Her eyes searched his own, smiling.

He ducked his head, his hand caught and tightened around hers. "Oh . . . no, it's not. It's Maris." He looked up. "That's an old name, too. It *means* 'soldier,' consecrated to the god of war. I never liked it much."

"From 'Mars'? Sol's fourth planet, the god of war." She bent back her head and peered up into the darkness. Fog hid the stars.

"Yes."

"Were you a soldier?"

"Yes. Everyone was a soldier—every man—where I came from. War was a way of life."

"An attempt to reconcile the blow to the masculine ego?"

He looked at her.

She frowned in concentration. " 'After it was determined that men were physically unsuited to spacing, and women came to a new position of dominance as they monopolized this critical area, the Terran cultural foundation underwent severe strain. As a result, many new and not always satisfactory cultural systems are evolving in the galaxy. . . . One of these is what might be termed a backlash of exaggerated *machismo*—' "

" '—and the rebirth of the warrior/chattel tradition.' "

"You've read that book too." She looked crestfallen.

"I read a lot. *New Ways for Old,* by Ebert Ntaka?"

"Sorry . . . I guess I got carried away. But, I just read it—"

"No." He grinned. "And I agree with old Ntaka, too. Glatte—what a sour name—was an unhealthy planet. But that's why I'm here, not there."

"Ow—!" She jerked loose from his hand. "Ohh, oh . . . God, you're strong!" She put her fingers in her mouth.

He fell over apologies; but she shook her head, and shook her hand. "No, it's all right . . . really, it just surprised me. Bad memories?"

He nodded, mouth tight.

She touched his shoulder, raised her fingers to his lips. "Kiss it, and make it well?" Gently he caught her hand, kissed it; she pressed against him. "It's very late. We should finish climbing the hill . . . ?"

"No." Hating himself, he set her back against the wall.

"No? But I thought—"

"I know you did. Your first space, I asked your name, you wanted me to; tradition says you lay the guy. But I'm a cyborg, Brandy. . . . It's always good for a laugh on the poor greenie, they've pulled it a hundred times."

"A cyborg?" The flickering gray eyes raked his body.

"It doesn't show with my clothes on."

"Oh . . . " Pale lashes were beating very hard across the eyes now. She took a breath, held it. "Do—you always let it get this far? I mean—"

"No. Hell, I don't know why I . . . I owe you another apology. Usually I never ask the name. If I slip, I tell them right away; nobody's ever held to it. I don't count." He smiled weakly.

"Well, why? You mean you can't—"

"I'm not all plastic." He frowned, numb fingers rapping stone. "God, I'm not. Sometimes I wish I was, but I'm not."

"No one? They never want to?"

"Branduin"—he faced the questioning eyes—"you'd better go back down. Get some sleep. Tomorrow laugh it off, and pick up some flashy Tail in the bar and have a good time. Come see me again in twenty-five years, when you're back from space, and tell me what you saw." Hesitating, he brushed her cheek with his true hand; instinctively she bent her head to the caress. "Good-bye." He started up the hill.

"Maris—"

He stopped, trembling.

"Thank you for the brandy . . ." She came up beside him and caught his belt. "You'll probably have to tow me up the hill."

He pulled her to him and began to kiss her, hands touching her body incredulously.

"It's getting—very, very late. Let's hurry."

Maris woke, confused, to the sound of banging shutters. Raising his head he was struck by the colors of dawn, and the shadow of Brandy standing bright-edged at the window. He left the rumpled bed and crossed cold tiles to join her. "What are you doing?" He yawned.

"I wanted to watch the sun rise, I haven't seen anything but night for months. Look, the fog's lifting already: the sun burns it up, it's on fire, over the mountains—"

He smoothed her hair, pale gold under a corona of light. "And embers in the canyon."

She looked down across ends of gray mist slowly reddening; then back. "Good morning." She began to laugh. "I'm glad you don't have any neighbors down there!" They were both naked.

He grinned, "That's what I like about the place," and put his arms around her. She moved close in the circle of coolness and warmth.

They watched the sunrise from the bed.

In the evening she came into the bar with the crew of the *Kiss And Tell–736*. They waved to him, nodded to her and drifted into blue shadows; she perched smiling before him. It struck him suddenly that nine hours was a long time.

"That's the crew of my training ship. They want some white wine, please, any kind, in a bottle."

He reached under the bar. "And one brandy, on the house?" He sent the tray off.

"Hi, Maris . . ."

"Hi, Brandy."

"To misty mornings." They drank together.

"By the way"—she glanced at him slyly—"I passed it around that people have been missing something. You."

"Thank you," meaning it. "But I doubt if it'll change any minds."

"Why not?"

"You read Ntaka—xenophobia; to most people in most cultures cyborgs are unnatural, the next thing up from a corpse. You'd have to be a necrophile—"

She frowned.

"—or extraordinary. You're the first extraordinary person I've met in a hundred years."

The smile formed, faded. "Maris—you're not exactly twenty-five, are you? How old are you?"

"More like a hundred and fifteen." He waited for the reaction.

She stared. "But, you look like twenty-five? You're real, don't you age?"

"I age. About five years for every hundred." He shrugged. "The prosthetics slow the body's aging. Perhaps it's because only half my body needs constant regeneration; or it may be an effect of the anti-rejection treatment. Nobody really understands it. It just happens sometimes."

"Oh." She looked embarrassed. "That's what you meant by 'come back and see me' . . . and they meant—Will you really live a thousand years?"

"Probably not. Something vital will break down in another three or four centuries, I guess. Even plastic doesn't last forever."

"Oh . . ."

"Live longer and enjoy it less. Except for today. What did you do today? Get any sleep?"

"No—" She shook away disconcertion. "A bunch of us went out and gorged. We stay on wake-ups when we're in port, so we don't miss a minute; you don't need to sleep. Really they're for emergencies, but everybody does it."

Quick laughter almost escaped him; he hoped she'd missed it. Serious, he said, "You want to be careful with those things. They can get to you."

"Oh, they're all right." She twiddled her glass, annoyed and suddenly awkward again, confronted by the Old Man.

Hell, it can't matter—He glanced toward the door.

"Brandy! There you are." And the crew came in. "Soldier, you

must come sit with us later; but right now we're going to steal Brandy away from you."

He looked up with Brandy to the brown face, brown eyes, and salt-white hair of Harkané, Best Friend of the Mactav on the *Who Got Her–709*. Time had woven deep nets of understanding around her eyes; she was one of his oldest customers. Even the shape of her words sounded strange to him now: "Ah, Soldier, you make me feel young, always . . . Come, little sister, and join your family; share her, Soldier."

Brandy gulped brandy; her boots clattered as she dropped off the stool. "Thank you for the drink," and for half a second the smile was real. "Guess I'll be seeing you—Soldier." And she was leaving, ungracefully, gratefully.

Soldier polished the agate bar, ignoring the disappointed face it showed him. And later watched her leave, with a smug, blank-eyed Tail in velvet knee pants.

Beyond the doorway yellow-green twilight seeped into the bay, the early crowds began to come together with the night. "H'lo, Maris . . . ?" Silver dulled to lead met him in a face gone hollow; thin hands trembled, clenched, trembled in the air.

"Brandy—"

"What've you got for an upset stomach?" She was expecting laughter.

"Got the shakes, huh?" He didn't laugh.

She nodded. "You were right about the pills, Maris. They make me sick. I got tired, I kept taking them . . ." Her hands rattled on the counter.

"And that was pretty dumb, wasn't it?" He poured her a glass of water, watched her trying to drink, pushed a button under the counter. "Listen, I just called you a ride—when it comes, I want you to go to my place and go to bed."

"But—"

"I won't be home for hours. Catch some sleep and then you'll be

all right, right? This is my door lock." He printed large numbers on a napkin. "Don't lose this."

She nodded, drank, stuffed the napkin up her sleeve. Drank some more, spilling it. "My mouth is numb." An abrupt chirp of laughter escaped; she put up a shaky hand. "I—won't lose it."

Deep gold leaped beyond the doorway, sunlight on metal. "Your ride's here."

"Thank you, Maris." The smile was crooked but very fond. She tacked toward the doorway.

She was still there when he came home, snoring gently in the bedroom in a knot of unmade blankets. He went silently out of the room, afraid to touch her, and sank into a leather-slung chair. Filled with rare and uneasy peace he dozed, while the starlit mist of the Pleiades' nebulosity passed across the darkened sky toward morning.

"Maris, why didn't you wake me up? You didn't have to sleep in a *chair* all night." Brandy stood before him wrestling with a towel, eyes puffy with sleep and hair flopping in sodden plumb-bobs from the shower. Her feet made small puddles on the braided rug.

"I didn't mind. I don't need much sleep."

"That's what I told *you*."

"But I meant it. I never sleep more than three hours. You needed the rest, anyway."

"I know . . . damn—" She gave up and wrapped the towel around her head. "You're a fine guy, Maris."

"You're not so bad yourself."

She blushed. "Glad you approve. Ugh, your rug—I got it all wet." She disappeared into the bedroom.

Maris stretched unwillingly, stared up into ceiling beams bronzed with early sunlight. He sighed faintly. "You want some breakfast?"

"Sure, I'm starving! Oh, wait—" A wet head reappeared. "Let me make you breakfast? Wait for me."

He sat watching as the apparition in silver-blue flightsuit ransacked his cupboards. "You're kind of low on raw materials."

"I know." He brushed crumbs off the table. "I eat instant breakfasts and frozen dinners; I hate to cook."

She made a face.

"Yeah, it gets pretty old after half a century . . . they've only had them on Oro for half a century. They don't get any better, either."

She stuck something into the oven. "I'm sorry I was so stupid about it."

"About what?"

"About . . . a hundred years. I guess it scared me. I acted like a bitch."

"No, you didn't."

"Yes, I did! I know I did." She frowned.

"Okay, you did . . . I forgive you. When do we eat?"

They ate, sitting side by side.

"Cooking seems like an odd spacer's hobby." Maris scraped his plate appreciatively. "When can you cook on a ship?"

"Never. It's all prepared and processed. So we can't overeat. That's why we love to eat and drink when we're in port. But I can't cook now either—no place. So it's not really a hobby, I guess, any more. I learned how from my father, he loved to cook . . ." She inhaled, eyes closed.

"Is your mother dead?"

"No—" She looked startled. "She just doesn't like to cook."

"She wouldn't have liked Glatte, either." He scratched his crooked nose.

"Calicho—that's my home, it's seven light years up the cube from this corner of the Quadrangle—it's . . . a pretty nice place. I guess Ntaka would call it 'healthy,' even . . . there's lots of room, like space; that helps. Cold and not very rich, but they get along. My mother and father always shared their work . . . they have a farm." She broke off more bread.

"What did they think about your becoming a spacer?"

"They never tried to stop me; but I don't think they wanted me to. I guess when you're so tied to the land it's hard to imagine

wanting to be so free. . . . It made them sad to lose me—it made me sad to lose them; but, I had to go. . . ."

Her mouth began to quiver suddenly. "You know, I'll never get to see them again, I'll never have time, our trips take so long, they'll grow old and die. . . ." Tears dripped onto her plate. "And I miss my h-home—" Words dissolved into sobs, she clung to him in terror.

He rubbed her back helplessly, wordlessly, left unequipped to deal with loneliness by a hundred years alone.

"M-Maris, can I come and see you always, will you always, always be here when I need you, and be my friend?"

"Always . . ." He rocked her gently. "Come when you want, stay as long as you want, cook dinner if you want, I'll always be here. . . ."

★

. . . Until the night, twenty-five years later, when they were suddenly clustered around him at the bar, hugging, badgering, laughing, the crew of the *Who Got Her–709.*

"Hi, Soldier!"

"Soldier, have we—"

"Look at this, Soldier—"

"What happened to—"

"Brandy?" he said stupidly. "Where's Brandy?"

"Honestly, Soldier, you really never *do* forget a face, do you?"

"Ah-ha, I bet it's not her *face* he remembers!"

"She was right with us." Harkané peered easily over the heads around her. "Maybe she stopped off somewhere."

"Maybe she's caught a Tail al*ready?"* Nilgiri was impressed.

"She could if anybody could, the little rascal." Wynmet rolled her eyes.

"Oh, just send us the usual, Soldier. She'll be along eventually. Come sit with us when she does." Harkané waved a rainbow-tipped hand. "Come, sisters, gossip is not tasteful before we've had a drink."

"That little rascal."

Soldier began to pour drinks with singleminded precision, until he noticed that he had the wrong bottle. Cursing, he drank them himself, one by one.

"Hi, Maris."

He pushed the tray away.

"*Hi,* Maris." Fingers appeared in front of his face; he started. "Hey."

"Brandy!"

Patrons along the bar turned to stare, turned away again.

"Brandy—"

"Well, sure; weren't you expecting me? Everybody else is already here."

"I know. I thought—I mean, they said . . . maybe you were out with somebody already," trying to keep it light, "and—"

"Well, really, Maris, what do you take me for?" She was insulted. "I just wanted to wait till everybody else got settled, so I could have you to myself. Did you think I'd forget you? Unkind." She hefted a bright mottled sack onto the bar. "Look, I brought you a present!" Pulling it open, she dumped heaping confusion onto the counter. "Books, tapes, buttons, all kinds of things to look at. You said you'd read out the library five times; so I collected everywhere, some of them should be new . . . Don't you like them?"

"I . . ." he coughed, "I'm crazy about them! I'm—overwhelmed. Nobody ever brought me anything before. Thank you. Thanks very much. And welcome back to New Piraeus!"

"Glad to be back!" She stretched across the bar, hugged him, kissed his nose. She wore a new belt of metal inlaid with stones. "You're just like I remembered."

"You're more beautiful."

"Flatterer." She beamed. Ashen hair fell to her breasts; angles had deepened on her face. The quicksilver eyes took all things in now without amazement. "I'm twenty-one today, you know."

"No kidding? That calls for a celebration. Will you have brandy?"

"Do you still have some?" The eyes widened slightly. "Oh, yes! We should make it a tradition, as long as it lasts."

He smiled contentedly. They drank to birthdays, and to stars.

"Not very crowded tonight, is it?" Brandy glanced into the room, tying small knots in her hair. "Not like last time."

"It comes and it goes. I've always got some fisherfolk, they're heavy on tradition. . . . I gave up keeping track of ship schedules."

"We don't even believe our own; they never quite fit. We're a month late here."

"I know—happened to notice it. . . ." He closed a bent cover, laid the book flat. "So anyway, how did you like your first Quadrangle?"

"Beautiful—oh, Maris, if I start I'll never finish, the City in the Clouds on Patris, the Freeport on Sanalareta . . . and the Pleiades . . . and the depths of night, ice and fire." Her eyes burned through him toward infinity. "You can't imagine—"

"So they tell me."

She searched his face for bitterness, found none. He shook his head. "I'm a man and a cyborg; that's two League rules against me that I can't change—so why resent it? I enjoy the stories." His mouth twitched up.

"Do you like poetry?"

"Sometimes."

"Then—may I show you mine? I'm writing a cycle of poems about space, maybe someday I'll have a book. I haven't shown them to anybody else, but if you'd like—"

"I'd like it."

"I'll find them, then. Guess I should be joining the party, really, they'll think I'm antisocial"—she winced—"and they'll talk about me! It's like a small town, we're as bad as lubbers."

He laughed. "Don't—you'll disillusion me. See you later. Uh . . . listen, do you want arrangements like before? For sleeping."

"Use your place? Could I? I don't want to put you out."

"Hell, no. You're welcome to it."

"I'll cook for you—"

"I bought some eggs."

"It's a deal! Enjoy your books." She wove a path between the tables, nodding to sailor and spacer; he watched her laughing face merge and blur, caught occasional flashes of silver. Stuffing books into the sack, he set it against his shin behind the bar. And some time later, watched her go out with a Tail.

The morning of the thirteenth day he woke to find Brandy sleeping soundly in the pile of hairy cushions by the door. Curious, he glanced out into a water-gray field of fog. It was the first time she had come home before dawn. *Home?* Carefully he lifted her from the pillows; she sighed, arms found him, in her sleep she began to kiss his neck. He carried her to the bed and put her down softly, bent to . . . *No.* He turned away, left the room. He had slept with her only once. Twenty-five or three years ago, without words, she had told him they would not be lovers again. She kept the customs; a spacer never had the same man more than once.

In the kitchen he heated a frozen dinner, and ate alone.

"What's that?" Brandy appeared beside him, mummified in a blanket. She dropped down on the cushions where he sat barefoot, drinking wine and ignoring the TD.

"Three-dimensional propaganda: the Oro Morning Mine Report. You're up pretty early—it's hardly noon."

"I'm not sleepy." She took a sip of his wine.

"Got in pretty early, too. Anything wrong?"

"No . . . just—nothing happening, you know. Ran out of parties, everybody's pooped but me." She cocked her head. "What is this, anyway . . . an inquisition? 'Home awfully *early,* aren't you—?' " She glared at him and burst into laughter.

"You're crazy." He grinned.

"Whatever happened to your couch?" She prodded cushions.

"It fell apart. It's been twenty-five years, you know."

"Oh. That's too bad . . . Maris, may I read you my poems?" Suddenly serious, she produced a small, battered notebook from the folds of her blanket.

"Sure." He leaned back, watching subtle transformations occur in her face. And felt them begin to occur in himself, growing pride and a tender possessiveness.

> . . . Until, lost in darkness, we
> dance the silken star-song.

It was the final poem. "That's 'Genesis.' It's about the beginning of a flight . . . and a life." Her eyes found the world again, found dark eyes quietly regarding her.

" 'Attired with stars we shall forever sit, triumphing over Death, and Chance, and thee, O Time.' " He glanced away, pulling the tassel of a cushion. "No . . . Milton, not Maris—I could never do that." He looked back, in wonder. "They're beautiful, you are beautiful. Make a book. Gifts are meant for giving, and you are gifted."

Pleasure glowed in her cheeks. "You really think someone would want to read them?"

"Yes." He nodded, searching for the words to tell her. "Nobody's ever made me—see that way . . . as though I . . . go with you. Others would go, if they could. Home to the sky."

She turned with him to the window; they were silent. After a time she moved closer, smiling. "Do you know what I'd like to do?"

"What?" He let out a long breath.

"See your home." She set her notebook aside. "Let's go for a walk in New Piraeus. I've never really seen it by day—the real part of it. I want to see its beauty up close, before it's all gone. Can we go?"

He hesitated. "You sure you want to—?"

"Sure. Come on, lazy." She gestured him up.

And he wondered again why she had come home early.

So on the last afternoon he took her out through the stone-paved winding streets, where small whitewashed houses pressed for footholds. They climbed narrow steps, panting, tasted the sea wind, bought fruit from a leathery smiling woman with a basket.

"Mmm—" Brandy licked juice from the crimson pith. "Who was that woman? She called you 'Sojer,' but I couldn't understand

the rest . . . I couldn't even understand you! Is the dialect that slurred?"

He wiped his chin. "It's getting worse all the time, with all the newcomers. But you get used to everything in the lower city. . . . An old acquaintance, I met her during the epidemic, she was sick."

"Epidemic? What epidemic?"

"Oro Mines was importing workers—they started before your last visit, because of the bigger raw material demands. One of the new workers had some disease we didn't; it killed about a third of New Piraeus."

"Oh, my God—"

"That was about fifteen years ago . . . Oro's labs synthesized a vaccine, eventually, and they repopulated the city. But they still don't know what the disease was."

"It's like a trap, to live on a single world."

"Most of us have to . . . it has its compensations."

She finished her fruit, and changed the subject. "You helped take care of them, during the epidemic?"

He nodded. "I seemed to be immune, so—"

She patted his arm. "You are very good."

He laughed; glanced away. "Very plastic would be more like it."

"Don't you ever get sick?"

"Almost never. I can't even get very drunk. Someday I'll probably wake up entirely plastic."

"You'd still be very good." They began to walk again. "What did she say?"

"She said, 'Ah, Soldier, you've got a lady friend.' She seemed pleased."

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'That's right.' " Smiling, he didn't put his arm around her; his fingers kneaded emptiness.

"Well, I'm glad she was pleased . . . I don't think most people have been."

"Don't look at them. Look out there." He showed her the sea,

muted greens and blues below the ivory jumble of the flat-roofed town. To the north and south mountains like rumpled cloth reached down to the shore.

"Oh, the sea—I've always loved the sea; at home we were surrounded by it, on an island. Space is like the sea, boundless, constant, constantly changing . . ."

"—spacer!" Two giggling girls made a wide circle past them in the street, dark skirts brushing their calves.

Brandy blushed, frowned, sought the sea again. "I—think I'm getting tired. I guess I've seen enough."

"Not much on up there but the new, anyway." He took her hand and they started back down. "It's just that we're a rarity up this far." A heavy man in a heavy caftan pushed past them; in his cold eyes Maris saw an alien wanton and her overaged Tail.

"They either leer, or they censure." He felt her nails mark his flesh. "What's their problem?"

"Jealousy . . . mortality. You threaten them, you spacers. Don't you ever think about it? Free and beautiful immortals—"

"They know we aren't immortal; we hardly live longer than anybody else."

"They also know you come here from a voyage of twenty-five years looking hardly older than when you left. Maybe they don't recognize you, but they *know*. And they're twenty-five years older. . . . Why do you think they go around in sacks?"

"To look ugly. They must be dreadfully repressed." She tossed her head sullenly.

"They are; but that's not why. It's because they want to hide the changes. And in their way to mimic you, who always look the same. They've done it since I can remember; you're all they have to envy."

She sighed. "I've heard on Elder they paint patterns on their skin, to hide the change. Ntaka called them 'youth-fixing,' didn't he?" Anger faded, her eyes grew cool like the sea, gray-green. "Yes, I think about it . . . especially when we're laughing at the lubbers,

and their narrow lives. And all the poor panting awestruck Tails, sometimes they think they're using us, but we're always using them. . . . Sometimes I think we're very cruel."

"Very like a god—Silver Lady of the Moon."

"You haven't called me that since—that night . . . all night." Her hand tightened painfully; he said nothing. "I guess they envy a cyborg for the same things. . . ."

"At least it's easier to rationalize—and harder to imitate." He shrugged. "We leave each other alone, for the most part."

"And so we must wait for each other, we immortals. It's still a beautiful town; I don't care what they think."

He sat, fingers catching in the twisted metal of his thick bracelet, listening to her voice weave patterns through the hiss of running water. Washing away the dirty looks—Absently he reread the third paragraph on the page for the eighth time; and the singing stopped.

"Maris, do you have any—"

He looked up at her thin, shining body, naked in the doorway. "Brandy, God damn it! You're not between planets—you want to show it all to the whole damn street?"

"But I always—" Made awkward by sudden awareness, she fled.

He sat and stared at the sun-hazed windows, entirely aware that there was no one to see in. Slowly the fire died, his breathing eased.

She returned shyly, closing herself into quilted blue-silver, and sank onto the edge of a chair. "I just never think about it." Her voice was very small.

"It's all right." Ashamed, he looked past her. "Sorry I yelled at you . . . What did you want to ask me?"

"It doesn't matter." She pulled violently at her snarled hair. "Ow! Damn it!" Feeling him look at her, she forced a smile. "Uh, you know, I'm glad we picked up Mima on Treone; I'm not the little sister anymore. I was really getting pretty tired of being the greenie for so long. She's—"

"Brandy—"

"Hm?"

"Why don't they allow cyborgs on crews?"

Surprise caught her. "It's a regulation."

He shook his head. "Don't tell me 'It's a regulation,' tell me why."

"Well . . ." She smoothed wet hair-strands with her fingers. ". . . They tried it, and it didn't work out. Like with men—they couldn't endure space, they broke down, their hormonal balance was wrong. With cyborgs, stresses between the real and the artificial in the body were too severe, they broke down too. . . . At the beginning they tried cyborganics, as a way to let men keep space, like they tried altering the hormone balance. Neither worked. Physically or psychologically, there was too much strain. So finally they just made it a regulation, no men on space crews."

"But that was over a thousand years ago—cyborganics has improved. I'm healthier and live longer than any normal person. And stronger—" He leaned forward, tight with agitation.

"And slower. We don't need strength, we have artificial means. And anyway, a man would still have to face more stress, it would be dangerous."

"Are there any female cyborgs on crews?"

"No."

"Have they ever even tried it again?"

"No—"

"You see? The League has a lock on space, they keep it with archaic laws. They don't want anyone else out there!" Sudden resentment shook his voice.

"Maybe . . . we don't." Her fingers closed, opened, closed over the soft heavy arms of the chair; her eyes were the color of twisting smoke. "Do you really blame us? Spacing is our life, it's our strength. We have to close the others out, everything changes and changes around us, there's no continuity—we only have each other. That's why we have our regulations, that's why we dress alike, look alike, act alike; there's nothing else we *can* do, and stay sane. We have to live apart, always." She pulled her hair forward, tying nervous knots. "And—that's why we never take the same lover

twice, too. We have needs we have to satisfy; but we can't afford to . . . form relationships, get involved, tied. It's a danger, it's an instability. . . . You do understand that, don't you, Maris; that it's why I don't—" She broke off, eyes burning him with sorrow and, below it, fear.

He managed a smile. "Have you heard me complain?"

"Weren't you just . . . ?" She lifted her head.

Slowly he nodded, felt pain start. "I suppose I was." *But I don't change.* He shut his eyes suddenly, before she read them. *But that's not the point, is it?*

"Maris, do you want me to stop staying here?"

"No— No . . . I understand, it's all right. I like the company." He stretched, shook his head. "Only, wear a towel, all right? I'm only human."

"I promise . . . that I will keep my eyes open, in the future."

He considered the future that would begin with dawn when her ship went up, and said nothing.

★

He stumbled cursing from the bedroom to the door, to find her waiting there, radiant and wholly unexpected. "Surprise!" She laughed and hugged him, dislodging his half-tied robe.

"My God—hey!" He dragged her inside and slammed the door. "You want to get me arrested for indecent exposure?" He turned his back, making adjustments, while she stood and giggled behind him.

He faced her again, fogged with sleep, struggling to believe. "You're early—almost two weeks?"

"I know. I couldn't wait till tonight to surprise you. And I did, didn't I?" She rolled her eyes. "I heard you coming to the door!"

She sat curled on his aging striped couch, squinting out the window as he fastened his sandals. "You used to have so much room. Houses haven't filled up your canyon, have they?" Her voice grew wistful.

"Not yet. If they ever do, I won't stay to see it . . . How was your trip this time?"

"Beautiful, again . . . I can't imagine it ever being anything else. You could see it all a hundred times over, and never see it all—

> Through your crystal eye,
> Mactav, I watch the midnight's
> star turn inside out. . . .

Oh, guess what! My poems—I finished the cycle during the voyage . . . and it's going to be published, on Treone. They said very nice things about it."

He nodded smugly. "They have good taste. They must have changed, too."

" 'A renaissance in progress'—meaning they've put on some *ver*-ry artsy airs, last decade; their Tails are really something else. . . ." Remembering, she shook her head. "It was one of them that told me about the publisher."

"You showed him your poems?" Trying not to—

"Good grief, no; he was telling me about *his*. So I thought, What have I got to lose?"

"When do I get a copy?"

"I don't know." Disappointment pulled at her mouth. "Maybe I'll never even get one; after twenty-five years they'll be out of print. 'Art is long, and Time is fleeting' . . . Longfellow had it backwards. But I made you some copies of the poems. And brought you some more books, too. There's one you should read, it replaced Ntaka years ago on the Inside. I thought it was inferior; but who are we . . . What are you laughing about?"

"What happened to that freckle-faced kid in pigtails?"

"What?" Her nose wrinkled.

"How old are you now?"

"Twenty-four. Oh—" She looked pleased.

"Madame Poet, do you want to go to dinner with me?"

"Oh, *food,* oh yes!" She bounced, caught him grinning, froze. "I would love to. Can we go to Good Eats?"

"It closed right after you left."

"Oh . . . the music was wild. Well, how about that seafood place, with the fish name—?"

He shook his head. "The owner died. It's been twenty-five years."

"Damn, we can never keep anything." She sighed. "Why don't I just make us a dinner—*I'm* still here. And I'd like that."

That night, and every other night, he stood at the bar and watched her go out, with a Tail or a laughing knot of partyers. Once she waved to him; the stem of a shatterproof glass snapped in his hand; he kicked it under the counter, confused and angry.

But three nights in the two weeks she came home early. This time, pointedly, he asked her no questions. Gratefully, she told him no lies, sleeping on his couch and sharing the afternoon . . .

They returned to the flyer, moving in step along the cool jade sand of the beach. Maris looked toward the sea's edge, where frothy fingers reached, withdrew, and reached again. "You leave tomorrow, huh?"

Brandy nodded. "Uh-huh."

He sighed.

"Maris, if—"

"What?"

"Oh—nothing." She brushed sand from her boot.

He watched the sea reach, and withdraw, and reach—

"Have you ever wanted to see a ship? Inside, I mean." She pulled open the flyer door, her body strangely intent.

He followed her. "Yes."

"Would you like to see mine—the *Who Got Her?"*

"I thought that was illegal?"

" 'No waking man shall set foot on a ship of the spaceways.' It is a League regulation . . . but it's based on a superstition that's at least a thousand years old—'Men on ships is bad luck.' Which

is silly here. Your presence on board in port isn't going to bring us disaster."

He looked incredulous.

"I'd like you to see our life, Maris, like I see yours. There's nothing wrong with that. And besides"—she shrugged—"no one will know; because nobody's there right now."

He faced a wicked grin, and did his best to match it. "I will if you will."

They got in, the flyer drifted silently up from the cove. New Piraeus rose to meet them beyond the ridge; the late sun struck gold from hidden windows.

"I wish it wouldn't change—oh . . . there's another new one. It's a skyscraper!"

He glanced across the bay. "Just finished; maybe New Piraeus is growing up—thanks to Oro Mines. It hardly changed over a century; after all those years, it's a little scary."

"Even after three . . . or twenty-five?" She pointed. "Right down there, Maris—there's our airlock."

The flyer settled on the water below the looming, semitransparent hull of the *WGH–709*.

Maris gazed up and back. "It's a lot bigger than I ever realized."

"It masses twenty thousand tons, empty." Brandy caught hold of the hanging ladder. "I guess we'll have to go up this . . . okay?" She looked over at him.

"Sure. Slow, maybe, but sure."

They slipped in through the lock, moved soft-footed down hallways past dim cavernous storerooms.

"Is the whole ship transparent?" He touched a wall, plastic met plastic. "How do you get any privacy?"

"Why are you whispering?"

"I'm no— *I'm not.* Why are you?"

"Shhh! Because it's so *quiet."* She stopped, pride beginning to show on her face. "The whole ship can be almost transparent, like now; but usually it's not. All the walls and the hull are polarized;

you can opaque them. These are just holds, anyway, they're most of the ship. The passenger stasis cubicles are up there. Here's the lift, we'll go up to the control room."

"Brandy!" A girl in red with a clipboard turned on them, outraged, as they stepped from the lift. "Brandy, what the hell do you mean by— Oh. Is that you, Soldier? God, I thought she'd brought a man on board."

Maris flinched. "Hi, Nilgiri."

Brandy was very pale beside him. "We just came out to—uh, look in on Mactav, she's been kind of moody lately, you know. I thought we could read to her. . . . What are *you* doing here?" And a whispered, "Bitch."

"Just that—checking up on Mactav. Harkané sent me out." Nilgiri glanced at the panels behind her, back at Maris, suddenly awkward. "Uh—look, since I'm already here don't worry about it, okay? I'll go down and play some music for her. Why don't you—uh, show Soldier around the ship, or something . . ." Her round face was reddening like an apple. "Bye?" She slipped past them and into the lift, and disappeared.

"*Damn,* sometimes she's such an ass."

"She didn't mean it."

"Oh, I should have—"

"—done just what you did; she *was* sorry. And at least we're not trespassing."

"God, Maris, how do you stand it? They must do it to you all the time. Don't you resent it?"

"Hell, yes, I resent it. Who wouldn't? I just got tired of getting mad. . . . And besides—" he glanced at the closed doors—"besides, nobody needs a mean bartender. Come on, show me around the ship."

Her knotted fingers uncurled, took his hand. "This way, please; straight ahead of you is our control room." She pulled him forward beneath the daybright dome. He saw a hand-printed sign above the center panel, NO-MAN'S LAND. "From here we program our computer; this area here is for the AAFAL drive, first devised by Ursula, an early spacer who—"

"What's awful about it?"

"What?"

"Every spacer I know calls the ship's drive 'awful'?"

"Oh— Not 'awful,' AAFAL: Almost As Fast As Light. Which it is. That's what we call it; there's a technical name too."

"Um." He looked vaguely disappointed. "Guess I'm used to—" Curiosity changed his face, as he watched her smiling with delight. "I—suppose it's different from antigravity?" Seventy years before she was born, he had taught himself the principles of starship technology.

"Very." She giggled suddenly. "The 'awfuls' and the 'aghs,' *hmm* . . . We do use an AG unit to leave and enter solar systems; it operates like the ones in flyers, it throws us away from the planet, and finally the entire system, until we reach AAFAL ignition speeds. With the AG you can only get fractions of the speed of light, but it's enough to concentrate interstellar gases and dust. Our force nets feed them through the drive unit, where they're converted to energy, which increases our speed, which makes the unit more efficient . . . until we're moving almost as fast as light.

"We use the AG to protect us from acceleration forces, and after deceleration to guide us into port. The start and finish can take up most of our trip time; the farther out in space you are, the less AG feedback you get from the system's mass, and the less your velocity changes. It's a beautiful time, though—you can see the AG forces through the polarized hull, wrapping you in shifting rainbow . . .

"And you are isolate"—she leaned against a silent panel and punched buttons; the room began to grow dark—"in absolute night . . . and stars." And stars appeared, in the darkness of a planetarium show; fire-gnats lighting her face and shoulders and his own. "How do you like our stars?"

"Are we in here?"

Four streaks of blue joined lights in the air. "Here . . . in space by this corner of the Quadrangle. This is our navigation chart for the Quadrangle run; see the bowed leg and brightness, that's the

Pleiades. Patris . . . Sanalareta . . . Treone . . . back to Oro. The other lines zigzag too, but it doesn't show. Now come with me . . . With a flare of energy, we open our AAFAL nets in space—"

He followed her voice into the night, where flickering tracery seined motes of interstellar gas; and impossible nothingness burned with infinite energy, potential transformed and transforming. With the wisdom of a thousand years a ship of the League fell through limitless seas, navigating the shifting currents of the void, beating into the sterile winds of space. Stars glittered like snow on the curving hull, spitting icy daggers of light that moved imperceptibly into spectral blues before him, reddened as he looked behind: imperceptibly time expanded, velocity increased and with it power. He saw the haze of silver on his right rise into their path, a wall of liquid shadow . . . the Pleiades, an endless bank of burning fog, kindled from within by shrouded islands of fire. Tendrils of shimmering mists curved outward across hundreds of billions of kilometers, the nets found bountiful harvest, drew close, hurled the ship into the edge of cloud.

Nebulosity wrapped him in clinging haloes of colored light, ringed him in brilliance, as the nets fell inward toward the ship, burgeoning with energy, shielding its fragile nucleus from the soundless fury of its passage. Acceleration increased by hundredfolds, around him the Doppler shifts deepened toward cerulean and crimson; slowly the clinging brightness wove into parabolas of shining smoke, whipping past until the entire flaming mass of cloud and stars seemed to sweep ahead, shriveling toward blue-whiteness, trailing embers.

And suddenly the ship burst once more into a void, a universe warped into a rubber bowl of brilliance stretching past him, drawing away and away before him toward a gleaming point in darkness. The shrunken nets seined near-vacuum and were filled; their speed approached $0.999c$ . . . held constant, as the conversion of matter to energy ceased within the ship . . . and in time, with a flicker of silver force, began once more to fall away. Slowly time

unbowed, the universe cast off its alienness. One star grew steadily before them: the sun of Patris.

A sun rose in ruddy splendor above the City in the Clouds on Patris, nine months and seven light-years from Oro. . . . And again, Patris fell away; and the brash gleaming Freeport of Sanalareta; they crept toward Treone through gasless waste, groping for current and mote across the barren ship-wakes of half a millennium. . . . And again—

Maris found himself among fire-gnat stars, on a ship in the bay of New Piraeus. And realized she had stopped speaking. His hand rubbed the copper snarl of his hair, his eyes bright as a child's. "You didn't tell me you were a witch in your spare time."

He heard her smile, "Thank you. Mactav makes the real magic, though; her special effects are fantastic. She can show you the whole inhabited section of the galaxy, with all the trade polyhedra, like a dew-flecked cobweb hanging in the air." Daylight returned to the panel. "Mactav—that's her bank, there—handles most of the navigation, life support, all that, too. Sometimes it seems like we're almost along for the ride! But of course we're along for Mactav."

"Who or what is Mactav?" Maris peered into a darkened screen, saw something amber glimmer in its depths, drew back.

"You've never met her, neither have we—but you were staring her right in the eye." Brandy stood beside him. "She must be listening to Giri down below. . . . Okay, okay!—a Mactavia unit is the brain, the nervous system of a ship, she monitors its vital signs, calculates, adjusts. We only have to ask—sometimes we don't even have to do that. The memory is a real spacer woman's, fed into the circuits . . . someone who died irrevocably, or had reached retirement, but wanted to stay on. A human system is wiser, more versatile—and lots cheaper—than anything all-machine that's ever been done."

"Then your Mactav is a kind of cyborg."

She smiled. "Well, I guess so; in a way—"

"But the Spacing League's regulations still won't allow cyborgs in crews."

She looked annoyed.

He shrugged. "Sorry. Dumb thing to say . . . What's that red down there?"

"Oh, that's our 'stomach': the AAFAL unit, where"—she grinned—"we digest stardust into energy. It's the only thing that's never transparent, the red is the shield."

"How does it work?"

"I don't really know. I can make it go, but I don't understand why—I'm only a five-and-a-half technician now. If I was a six I could tell you." She glanced at him sidelong. "Aha! I finally impressed you!"

He laughed. "Not so dumb as you look." He had qualified as a six half a century before, out of boredom.

"You'd better be kidding!"

"I am." He followed her back across the palely opalescing floor, looking down, and down. "Like walking on water . . . why transparent?"

She smiled through him at the sky. "Because it's so beautiful outside."

They dropped down through floors, to come out in a new hall. Music came faintly to him.

"This is where my cabin—"

Abruptly the music became an impossible agony of sound torn with screaming.

"God!" And Brandy was gone from beside him, down the hallway and through a flickering wall.

He found her inside the door, rigid with awe. Across the room the wall vomited blinding waves of color, above a screeching growth of crystal organ pipes. Nilgiri crouched on the floor, hands pressed against her stomach, shrieking hysterically. "Stop it, Mactav! Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!"

He touched Brandy's shoulder, she looked up and caught his arm; together they pulled Nilgiri, wailing, back from bedlam to the door.

"Nilgiri! Nilgiri, what happened!" Brandy screamed against her ear.

"Mactav, Mactav!"

"Why?"

"She put a . . . charge through it, she's crazy-mad . . . sh-she thinks . . . Oh, *stop* it, Mactav!" Nilgiri clung, sobbing.

Maris started into the room, hands over his ears. "How do you turn it off!"

"Maris, wait!"

"How, Brandy?"

"It's electrified, don't touch it!"

"How?"

"On the left, on the left, three switches—Maris, *don't*— Stop it, Mactav, stop—"

He heard her screaming as he lowered his left hand, hesitated, battered with glaring sound; sparks crackled as he flicked switches on the organ panel, once, twice, again.

"—it-it-it-it!" Her voice echoed through silent halls. Nilgiri slid down the doorjamb and sat sobbing on the floor.

"Maris, are you all right?"

He heard her dimly through cotton. Dazed with relief, he backed away from the gleaming console, nodding, and started across the room.

"Man," the soft hollow voice echoed echoed echoed. "What are you doing in here?"

"Mactav?" Brandy was gazing uneasily to his left.

He turned; across the room was another artificial eye, burning amber.

"Branduin, you brought him onto the ship; how could you do this thing, it is forbidden!"

"Oh, God." Nilgiri began to wail again in horror. Brandy knelt and caught Nilgiri's blistered hands; he saw anger harden over her face. "Mactav, how could you!"

"Brandy." He shook his head; took a breath, frightened. "Mactav—I'm not a man. You're mistaken."

"Maris, no . . ."

He frowned. "I'm one hundred and forty-one years old . . . half my body is synthetic. I'm hardly human, any more than you are. Scan and see." He held up his hands.

"The part of you that matters is still a man."

A smile caught at his mouth. "Thanks."

"Men are evil, men destroyed . . ."

"Her, Maris," Brandy whispered. "They destroyed her."

The smile wavered. "Something more we have in common." His false arm pressed his side.

The golden eye regarded him. "Cyborg."

He sighed, went to the door. Brandy stood to meet him, Nilgiri huddled silently at her feet, staring up.

"Nilgiri." The voice was full of pain; they looked back. "How can I forgive myself for what I've done? I will never, never do such a thing again . . . never. Please, go to the infirmary; let me help you?"

Slowly, with Brandy's help, Nilgiri got to her feet. "All right. It's all right, Mactav. I'll go on down now."

"Giri, do you want us—?"

Nilgiri shook her head, hands curled in front of her. "No, Brandy, it's okay. She's all right now. Me too—I think." Her smile quivered. "Ouch . . ." She started down the corridor toward the lift.

"Branduin, Maris, I apologize also to you. I'm—not usually like this, you know. . . ." Amber faded from her eye.

"Is she gone?"

Brandy nodded.

"That's the first bigoted computer I ever met."

And she remembered: "Your *hand?*"

Smiling, he held it out to her. "No harm; see? It's a nonconductor."

She shivered. Hands cradled the hand that ached to feel. "Mactav really isn't like that, you know. But something's been wrong

lately, she gets into moods; we'll have to have her looked at when we get to Sanalareta."

"Isn't it dangerous?"

"I don't think so—not really. It's just that she has special problems; she's in there because she didn't have any choice, a strife-based culture killed her ship. She was very young, but that was all that was left of her."

"A high technology." A grimace; memory moved in his eyes.

"They were terribly apologetic, they did their best."

"What happened to them?"

"We cut contact . . . that's regulation number one. We have to protect ourselves."

He nodded, looking away. "Will they ever go back?"

"I don't know. Maybe, someday." She leaned against the doorway. "But that's why Mactav hates men; men, and war—and combined with the old taboo . . . I guess her memory suppressors weren't enough."

Nilgiri reappeared beside them. "All better." Her hands were bright pink. "Ready for anything!"

"How's Mactav acting?"

"Super-solicitous. She's still pretty upset about it, I guess."

Light flickered at the curving junctures of the walls, ceiling, floor. Maris glanced up. "Hell, it's getting dark outside. I expect I'd better be leaving; nearly time to open up. One last night on the town?" Nilgiri grinned and nodded; he saw Brandy hesitate.

"Maybe I'd better stay with Mactav tonight, if she's still upset. She's got to be ready to go up tomorrow." Almost-guilt firmed resolution on her face.

"Well . . . I could stay, if you think—" Nilgiri looked unhappy.

"No. It's my fault she's like this; I'll do it. Besides, I've been out having a fantastic day, I'd be too tired to do it right tonight. You go on in. Thank you, Maris! I wish it wasn't over so soon." She turned back to him, beginning to put her hair into braids; quicksilver shone.

"The pleasure was all mine." The tight sense of loss dissolved in warmth. "I can't remember a better one either . . . or more exciting—" He grimaced.

She smiled and took his hands; Nilgiri glanced back and forth between them. "I'll see you to the lock."

Nilgiri climbed down through the glow to the waiting flyer. Maris braced back from the top rung to watch Brandy's face, bearing a strange expression, look down through whipping strands of loose hair. "Good-bye, Maris."

"Good-bye, Brandy."

"It was a short two weeks, you know?"

"I know."

"I like New Piraeus better than anywhere; I don't know why."

"I hope it won't be too different when you get back."

"Me too. . . . See you in three years?"

"Twenty-five."

"Oh, yeah. Time passes so quickly when you're having fun—" Almost true, almost not. A smile flowered.

"Write while you're away. Poems, that is." He began to climb down, slowly.

"I will . . . Hey, my stuff is at—"

"I'll send it back with Nilgiri." He settled behind the controls, the flyer grew bright and began to rise. He waved; so did Nilgiri. He watched her wave back, watched her in his mirror until she became the vast and gleaming pearl that was the *Who Got Her–709*. And felt the gap that widened between their lives, more than distance, more than time.

★

"Well, now that you've seen it, what do you think?"

Late afternoon, first day, fourth visit, seventy-fifth year . . . mentally he tallied. Brandy stood looking into the kitchen. "It's—different."

"I know. It's still too new; I miss the old wood beams. They

were rotting, but I miss them. Sometimes I wake up in the morning and don't know where I am. But I was losing my canyon."

She looked back at him, surprising him with her misery. "Oh . . . At least they won't reach you for a long time, out here."

"We can't walk home anymore, though."

"No." She turned away again. "All—all your furniture is built in?"

"*Um.* It's supposed to last as long as the house."

"What if you get tired of it?"

He laughed. "As long as it holds me up, I don't care what it looks like. One thing I like, though—" He pressed a plate on the wall, looking up. "The roof is polarized. Like your ship. At night you can watch the stars."

"Oh!" She looked up and back, he watched her mind pierce the high cloud-fog, pierce the day, to find stars. "How wonderful! I've never seen it anywhere else."

It had been his idea, thinking of her. He smiled.

"They must really be growing out here, to be doing things like this now." She tried the cushions of a molded chair. "Hmm . . ."

"They're up to two and a half already, they actually do a few things besides mining now. The Inside is catching up, if they can bring us this without a loss. I may even live to see the day when we'll be importing raw materials, instead of filling everyone else's mined-out guts. If there's anything left of Oro by then . . ."

"Would you stay to see that?"

"I don't know." He looked at her. "It depends. Anyway, tell me about this trip?" He stretched out on the chain-hung wall seat. "You know everything that's new with me already: one house." And waited for far glory to rise up in her eyes.

They flickered down, stayed the color of fog. "Well—some good news, and some bad news, I guess."

"Like how?" Feeling suddenly cold.

"Good news—" her smile warmed him—"I'll be staying nearly a month this time. We'll have more time to—do things, if you want to."

"How did you manage that?" He sat up.

"That's more good news. I have a chance to crew on a different ship, to get out of the Quadrangle and see things I've only dreamed of, new worlds—"

"And the bad news is how long you'll be gone."

"Yes."

"How many years?"

"It's an extended voyage, following up trade contacts; if we're lucky, we might be back in the stellar neighborhood in thirty-five years . . . thirty-five years tau—more than two hundred, here. If we're not so lucky, maybe we won't be back this way at all."

"I see." He stared unblinking at the floor, hands knotted between his knees. "It's—an incredible opportunity, all right . . . especially for your poetry. I envy you. But I'll miss you."

"I know." He saw her teeth catch her lip. "But we can spend time together, we'll have a lot of time before I go. And—well, I've brought you something, to remember me." She crossed the room to him.

It was a star, suspended burning coldly in scrolled silver by an artist who knew fire. Inside she showed him her face, laughing, full of joy.

"I found it on Treone . . . they really are in renaissance. And I liked that holo, I thought you might—"

Leaning across silver he found the silver of her hair, kissed her once on the mouth, felt her quiver as he pulled away. He lifted the woven chain, fixed it at his throat. "I have something for you, too."

He got up, returned with a slim book the color of red wine, put it in her hands.

"My poems!"

He nodded, his fingers feeling the star at his throat. "I managed to get hold of two copies—it wasn't easy. Because they're too well known now; the spacers carry them, they show them but they won't give them up. You must be known on more worlds than you could ever see."

"Oh, I hadn't even heard . . ." She laughed suddenly. "My

fame preceded me. But next trip—" She looked away. "No. I won't be going that way anymore."

"But you'll be seeing new things, to make into new poems." He stood, trying to loosen the tightness in his voice.

"Yes . . . Oh, yes, I know . . ."

"A month is a long time."

A sudden sputter of noise made them look up. Fat dapples of rain were beginning to slide, smearing dust over the flat roof.

"Rain! not fog; the season's started." They stood and watched the sky fade overhead, darken, crack and shudder with electric light. The rain fell harder, the ceiling rippled and blurred; he led her to the window. Out across the smooth folded land a liquid curtain billowed, slaking the dust-dry throat of the canyons, renewing the earth and the spiny tight-leafed scrub. "I always wonder if it's ever going to happen. It always does." He looked at her, expecting quicksilver, and found slow tears. She wept silently, watching the rain.

For the next two weeks they shared the rain, and the chill bright air that followed. In the evenings she went out, while he stood behind the bar, because it was the last time she would have leave with the crew of the *Who Got Her*. But every morning he found her sleeping, and every afternoon she spent with him. Together they traced the serpentine alleyways of the shabby, metamorphosing lower city, or roamed the docks with the windburned fisherfolk. He took her to meet Makerrah, whom he had seen as a boy mending nets by hand, as a fishnet-clad Tail courting spacers at the Tin Soldier, as a sailor and fisherman, for almost forty years. Makerrah, now growing heavy and slow as his wood-hulled boat, showed it with pride to the sailor from the sky; they discussed nets, eating fish.

"This world is getting old. . . ." Brandy had come with him to the bar as the evening started.

Maris smiled. "But the night is young." And felt pleasure stir with envy.

"True true—" Pale hair cascaded as her head bobbed. "But, you know, when . . . if I was gone another twenty-five years, I probably wouldn't recognize this *street*. The Tin Soldier really is the only thing that doesn't change." She sat at the agate counter, face propped in her hands, musing.

He stirred drinks. "It's good to have something constant in your life."

"I know. We appreciate that too, more than anybody." She glanced away, into the dark-raftered room. "They really always do come back here first, and spend more time in here . . . and knowing that they *can* means so much: that you'll be here, young and real and remembering them." A sudden hunger blurred her sight.

"It goes both ways." He looked up.

"I know that, too. . . . You know, I always meant to ask: why did you call it the 'Tin Soldier'? I mean, I think I see . . . but why 'tin'?"

"Sort of a private joke, I guess. It was in a book of folk tales I read, *Andersen's Fairy Tales*"—he looked embarrassed—"I'd *read* everything else. It was a story about a toy shop, about a tin soldier with one leg, who was left on the shelf for years. . . . He fell in love with a toy ballerina who only loved dancing, never him. In the end, she fell into the fire, and he went after her—she burned to dust, heartless; he melted into a heart-shaped lump. . . ." He laughed carefully, seeing her face. "A footnote said sometimes the story had a happy ending; I like to believe that."

She nodded, hopeful. "Me too— Where did your stone bar come from? It's beautiful; like the edge of the Pleiades, depths of mist."

"Why all the questions?"

"I'm appreciating. I've loved it all for years, and never said anything. Sometimes you love things without knowing it, you take them for granted. It's wrong to let that happen . . . so I wanted you to know." She smoothed the polished stone with her hand.

He joined her tracing opalescences. "It's petrified wood—some kind of plant life that was preserved in stone, minerals replaced its structure. I found it in the desert."

"Desert?"

"East of the mountains. I found a whole canyon full of them. It's an incredible place, the desert."

"I've never seen one. Only heard about them, barren and deadly; it frightened me."

"While you cross the most terrible desert of them all?—between the stars."

"But it's not barren."

"Neither is this one. It's winter here now, I can take you to see the trees, if you'd like it." He grinned. "If you dare."

Her eyebrows rose. "I dare! We could go tomorrow, I'll make us a lunch."

"We'd have to leave early, though. If you were wanting to do the town again tonight . . ."

"Oh, that's all right; I'll take a pill."

"Hey—"

She winced. "Oh, well . . . I found a kind I could take. I used them all the time at the other ports, like the rest."

"Then why—"

"Because I liked staying with you. I deceived you, now you know, true confessions. Are you mad?"

His face filled with astonished pleasure. "Hardly . . . I have to admit, I used to wonder what—"

"*Sol*-dier!" He looked away, someone gestured at him across the room. "More wine, please!" He raised a hand.

"Brandy, come on, there's a party—"

She waved. "Tomorrow morning, early?" Her eyes kept his face.

"Uh-huh. See you—"

"—later." She slipped down and was gone.

The flyer rose silently, pointing into the early sun. Brandy sat beside him, squinting down and back through the glare as New Piraeus grew narrow beside the glass-green bay. "Look, how it falls behind the hills, until all you can see are the land and the sea, and no sign of change. It's like that when the ship goes up, but it hap-

pens so fast you don't have time to savor it." She turned back to him, bright-eyed. "We go from world to world but we never see them; we're always looking up. It's good to look down, today."

They drifted higher, rising with the climbing hills, until the rumpled olive-red suede of the seacoast grew jagged, blotched green-black and gray and blinding white.

"Is that really snow?" She pulled at his arm, pointing.

He nodded. "We manage a little."

"I've only seen snow once since I left Calicho, once it was winter on Treone. We wrapped up in furs and capes even though we didn't have to, and threw snowballs with the Tails. . . . But it was cold most of the year on our island, on Calicho—we were pretty far north, we grew special kinds of crops . . . and us kids had hairy hornbeasts to plod around on. . . ." Lost in memories, she rested against his shoulder; while he tried to remember a freehold on Glatte, and snowy walls became jumbled whiteness climbing a hill by the sea.

They had crossed the divide; the protruding batholith of the peaks degenerated into parched, crumbling slopes of gigantic rubble. Ahead of them the scarred yellow desolation stretched away like an infinite canvas, into mauve haze. "How far does it go?"

"It goes on forever. . . . Maybe not this desert, but this merges into others that merge into others—the whole planet is a desert, hot or cold. It's been desiccating for eons; the sun's been rising off the main sequence. The sea by New Piraeus is the only large body of free water left now, and that's dropped half an inch since I've been here. The coast is the only habitable area, and there aren't many towns there even now."

"Then Oro will never be able to change too much."

"Only enough to hurt. See the dust? Open-pit mining, for seventy kilometers north. And that's a little one."

He took them south, sliding over the eroded face of the land to twist through canyons of folded stone, sediments contorted by the palsied hands of tectonic force; or flashing across pitted flatlands lipping on pocket seas of ridged and shadowed blow-sand.

They settled at last under a steep out-curving wall of frescoed rock layered in red and green. The wide, rough bed of the sandy wash was pale in the chill glare of noon, scrunching underfoot as they began to walk. Pulling on his leather jacket, Maris showed her the kaleidoscope of ages left tumbled in stones over the hills they climbed, shouting against the lusty wind of the ridges. She cupped them in marveling hands, hair streaming like silken banners past her face; obligingly he put her chosen few into his pockets. "Aren't you cold?" He caught her hand.

"No, my suit takes care of me. How did you ever learn to know all these, Maris?"

Shaking his head, he began to lead her back down. "There's more here than I'll ever know. I just got a mining tape on geology at the library. But it made it mean more to come out here . . . where you can see eons of the planet laid open, one cycle settling on another. To know the time it took, the life history of an entire world: it helps my perspective, it makes me feel—young."

"We think we know worlds, but we don't, we only see people: change and pettiness. We forget the greater constancy, tied to the universe. It would humble our perspective, too—" Pebbles boiled and clattered; her hand held his strongly as his foot slipped. He looked back, chagrined, and she laughed. "You don't really have to lead me here, Maris. I was a mountain goat on Calicho, and I haven't forgotten it all."

Indignant, he dropped her hand. "You lead."

Still laughing, she led him to the bottom of the hill.

And he took her to see the trees. Working their way over rocks up the windless branch wash, they rounded a bend and found them, tumbled in static glory. He heard her indrawn breath. "Oh, Maris—" Radiant with color and light she walked among them, while he wondered again at the passionless artistry of the earth. Amethyst and agate, crystal and mimicked wood-grain, hexagonal trunks split open to bare subtleties of mergence and secret nebulosities. She knelt among the broken bits of limb, choosing colors to hold up to the sun.

He sat on a trunk, picking agate pebbles. "They're sort of special friends of mine; we go down in time together, in strangely familiar bodies. . . ." He studied them with fond pride. "But they go with more grace."

She put her colored chunks on the ground. "No . . . I don't think so. They had no choice."

He looked down, tossing pebbles.

"Let's have our picnic here."

They cleared a space and spread a blanket, and picnicked with the trees. The sun warmed them in the windless hollow, and he made a pillow of his jacket; satiated, they lay back head by head, watching the cloudless green-blue sky.

"You pack a good lunch."

"Thank you. It was the least I could do"—her hand brushed his arm; quietly his fingers tightened on themselves—"to share your secrets; to learn that the desert isn't barren, that it's immense, timeless, full of—mysteries. But no life?"

"No—not anymore. There's no water, nothing can live. The only things left are in or by the sea, or they're things we've brought. Across our own lifeless desert-sea."

" 'Though inland far we be, our souls have sight of that immortal sea which brought us hither.' " Her hand stretched above him, to catch the sky.

"Wordsworth. That's the only thing by him I ever liked much."

They lay together in the warm silence. A piece of agate came loose, dropped to the ground with a clink; they started.

"Maris—"

"Hmm?"

"Do you realize we've known each other for three-quarters of a century?"

"Yes. . . ."

"I've almost caught up with you, I think. I'm twenty-seven. Soon I'm going to start passing you. But at least—now you'll never have to see it show." Her fingers touched the rusty curls of his hair.

"It would never show. You couldn't help but be beautiful."

"Maris . . . sweet Maris."

He felt her hand clench in the soft weave of his shirt, move in caresses down his body. Angrily he pulled away, sat up, half his face flushed. "Damn—!"

Stricken, she caught at his sleeve. "No, no—" Her eyes found his face, gray filled with grief. "No . . . Maris . . . I—want you." She unsealed her suit, drew blue-silver from her shoulders, knelt before him. "I want you."

Her hair fell to her waist, the color of warm honey. She reached out and lifted his hand with tenderness; slowly he leaned forward, to bare her breasts and her beating heart, felt the softness set fire to his nerves. Pulling her close, he found her lips, kissed them long and longingly; held her against his own heart beating, lost in her silken hair. "Oh, God, Brandy . . ."

"I love you, Maris . . . I think I've always loved you." She clung to him, cold and shivering in the sunlit air. "And it's wrong to leave you and never let you know."

And he realized that fear made her tremble, fear bound to her love in ways he could not fully understand. Blind to the future, he drew her down beside him and stopped her trembling with his joy.

In the evening she sat across from him at the bar, blue-haloed with light, sipping brandy. Their faces were bright with wine and melancholy bliss.

"I finally got some more brandy, Brandy . . . a couple of years ago. So we wouldn't run out. If we don't get to it, you can take it with you." He set the dusty red-splintered bottle carefully on the bar.

"You could save it, in case I do come back, as old as your grandmaw, and in need of some warmth. . . ." Slowly she rotated her glass, watching red leap up the sides. "Do you suppose by then my poems will have reached Home? And maybe somewhere Inside, Ntaka will be reading *me*."

"The Outside will be the Inside by then. . . . Besides, Ntaka's probably already dead. Been dead for years."

"Oh. I guess." She pouted, her eyes growing dim and moist. "Damn, I wish . . . I wish."

"Branduin, you haven't joined us yet tonight. It is our last together." Harkané appeared beside her, lean dark face smiling in a cloud-mass of blued white hair. She sat down with her drink.

"I'll come soon." Clouded eyes glanced up, away.

"Ah, the sadness of parting keeps you apart? I know." Harkané nodded. "We've been together so long; it's hard, to lose another family." She regarded Maris. "And a good bartender must share everyone's sorrows, yes, Soldier—? But bury his own. Oh—they would like some more drinks—"

Sensing dismissal, he moved aside; with long-practiced skill he became blind and deaf, pouring wine.

"Brandy, you are so unhappy—don't you want to go on this other voyage?"

"Yes, I do—! But . . ."

"But you don't. It is always so when there is choice. Sometimes we make the right choice, and though we're afraid we go on with it anyway. And sometimes we make the wrong choice, and go on with it anyway because we're afraid not to. Have you changed your mind?"

"But I can't change—"

"Why not? We will leave them a message. They will go on and pick up their second compatible."

"Is it really that easy?"

"No . . . not quite. But we can do it, if you want to stay."

Silence stretched; Maris sent a tray away, began to wipe glasses, fumbled.

"But I *should.*"

"Brandy. If you go only out of obligation, I will tell you something. I want to retire. I was going to resign this trip, at Sanalareta; but if I do that, Mactav will need a new Best Friend. She's getting old and cantankerous, just like me; these past few years her behavior has begun to show the strain she is under. She must have someone who can feel her needs. I was going to ask you, I think you un-

derstand her best; but I thought you wanted this other thing more. If not, I ask you now to become the new Best Friend of the *Who Got Her.*"

"But Harkané, you're not old—"

"I am eighty-six. I'm too old for the sporting life anymore! I will become a Mactav; I've been lucky, I have an opportunity."

"Then . . . yes—I do want to stay! I accept the position."

In spite of himself Maris looked up, saw her face shining with joy and release. "Brandy—?"

"Maris, I'm not going!"

"I know!" He laughed, joined them.

"Soldier." He looked up, dark met dark, Harkané's eyes that saw more than surfaces. "This will be the last time that I see you; I am retiring, you know. You have been very good to me all these years, helping me be young; you are very kind to us all. . . . Now, to say good-bye, I do something in return." She took his hand, placed it firmly over Brandy's, shining with rings on the counter. "I give her back to you. Brandy—join us soon, we'll celebrate." She rose mildly and moved away into the crowded room.

Their hands twisted, clasped tight on the counter.

Brandy closed her eyes. "God, I'm so glad!"

"So am I."

"Only the poems . . ."

"Remember once you told me, 'you can see it all a hundred times, and never see it all'?"

A quicksilver smile. "And it's true. . . . Oh, Maris, now this is my last night! And I have to spend it with them, to celebrate."

"I know. There's—no way I can have you forever, I suppose. But it's all right." He grinned. "Everything's all right. What's twenty-five years, compared to two hundred?"

"It'll seem like three."

"It'll seem like twenty-five. But I can stand it—"

★

He stood it, for twenty-four more years, looking up from the bar with sudden eagerness every time new voices and the sound of laughter spilled into the dim blue room.

"Soldier! Soldier, you're still—"

"We missed you like—"

"—two whole weeks of—"

"—want to buy a whole *sack* for my own—"

The crew of the *DOM-428* pressed around him, their fingers proving he was real; their lips brushed a cheek that couldn't feel and one that could, long loose hair rippling over the agate bar. He hugged four at a time. "Aralea! Vlasa! Elsah, what the hell have you done to your hair now—and Ling-shan! My God, you're pretty, like always. Cathe—" The memory bank never forgot a shining fresh-scrubbed face, even after thirty-seven years. Their eyes were very bright as he welcomed them, and their hands left loving prints along the agate bar.

"—still have your stone bar; I'm so glad, don't ever sell it—"

"And what's new with *you?*" Elsah gasped, and ecstatic laughter burst over him.

He shook his head, hands up, laughing too. "—go prematurely *deaf?* First round on the house; only one at a time, huh?"

Elsah brushed strands of green-tinged waist-length hair back from her very green eyes. "Sorry, Soldier. We've just said it *all* to each other, over and over. And gee, we haven't seen you for four years!" Her belt tossed blue-green sparks against her green quilted flight-suit.

"Four years? Seems more like thirty-seven." And they laughed again, appreciating, because it was true. "Welcome back to the Tin Soldier. What's your pleasure?"

"Why you of course, me darlin'," said black-haired Brigit, and she winked.

His smile barely caught on a sharp edge; he winked back. "Just the drinks are on the house, lass." The smile widened and came unstuck.

More giggles.

"Ach, a pity!" Brigit pouted. She wore a filigree necklace, like the galaxy strung over her dark-suited breast. "Well, then, I guess a little olive beer, for old time's sake."

"Make it two."

"Anybody want a pitcher?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Come sit with us in a while, Soldier. Have we got things to tell you!"

He jammed the clumsy pitcher under the spigot and pulled down as they drifted away, watching the amber splatter up its frosty sides.

"Alta, hi! Good timing! How are things on the *Extra Sexy Old-115?*"

"Oh, good enough; how's Chrysalis—has it changed much?"

The froth spilled out over his hand; he let the lever jerk up, licked his fingers and wiped them on his apron.

"It's gone wild this time, you should see what they're wearing for clothes. My God, you would not believe—"

He hoisted the slimy pitcher onto the bar and set octagonal mugs on a tray.

"Aralea, did you hear what happened to the—"

He lifted the pitcher again, up to the tray's edge.

"*—Who Got Her-709?*"

The pitcher teetered.

"Their Mactav had a nervous breakdown on landing at Sanalareta. Branduin died, the poet, the one who wrote—"

Splinters and froth exploded on the agate bar and slobbered over the edge, *tinkle, crash.*

Stunned blank faces turned to see Soldier, hands moving ineffectually in a puddle of red-flecked foam. He began to brush it off onto the floor, looking like a stricken adolescent. "Sorry . . . sorry about that."

"Ach, Soldier, you really blew it!"

"Got a mop? Here, we'll help you clean it up . . . hey, you're bleeding—?" Brigit and Ling-shan were piling chunks of pitcher onto the bar.

Soldier shook his head, fumbling a towel around the one wrist that bled. "No . . . no, thanks, leave it, huh? I'll get you another pitcher . . . it doesn't matter. Go on!" They looked at him. "I'll send you a pitcher; thanks." He smiled.

They left, the smile stopped. *Fill the pitcher.* He filled a pitcher, his hand smarting. *Clean up, damn it.* He cleaned up, wiping off disaster while the floor absorbed and fangs of glass disappeared under the bar. As the agate bar-top dried he saw the white-edged shatter flower, tendrils of hairline crack shooting out a hand's-breadth on every side. He began to trace them with a rigid finger, counting softly . . . *She loved me, she loved me not, she loved me—*

"Two cepheids and a wine, Soldier!"

"Soldier, come hear what we saw on Chrysalis if you're through!"

He nodded and poured, blinking hard. *God damn sweetsmoke in here . . . God damn everything!* Elsah was going out the door with a boy in tight green pants and a star-map-tattooed body. He stared them into fluorescent blur. And remembered Brandy going out the door too many times . . .

"Hey, *Sol*-dier, what are you doing?"

He blinked himself back.

"Come sit with us?"

He crossed the room to the nearest bulky table and the remaining crew of the *Dirty Old Man–428.*

"How's your hand?" Vlasa soothed it with a dark, ringed finger.

"It only hurts when I laugh."

"*You* really are screwed up!" Ling-shan's smile wrinkled. "Oh, Soldier, why look so glum?"

"I chipped my bar."

"Ohhh . . . nothing but bad news tonight. Make him laugh, somebody, we can't go on like this!"

"Tell him the joke you heard on Chrysalis—"

"—from the boy with a cat's-eye in his navel? Oh. Well, it seems there was . . ."

His fingers moved reluctantly up the laces of his patchwork shirt and began to untangle the thumb-sized star trapped near his throat.

He set it free; his hand tightened across the stubby spines, feeling only dull pressure. Pain registered from somewhere else.

"—'Oh, they fired the pickle slicer too!' "

He looked up into laughter.

"It's a tech-one joke, Soldier," Ling-Shan said helpfully.

"Oh . . . I see." He laughed, blindly.

"Soldier, we took pictures of our black hole!" Vlasa pulled at his arm. "From a respectable distance, but it was bizarre—"

"Holograms—" somebody interrupted.

"And you should see the effects!" Brigit said. "When you look into them you feel like your eyes are being—"

"Soldier, another round, please?"

"Excuse me." He pushed back his chair. "Later?" Thinking, *God won't this night ever end?*

His hand closed the lock on the pitted tavern door at last; his woven sandal skidded as he stepped into the street. Two slim figures, one all in sea-blue, passed him and red hair flamed; he recognized Marena, intent and content arm in arm with a gaudy, laughing Tail. Their hands were in each other's back pockets. They were going uphill; he turned down, treading carefully on the time- and fog-slicked cobbles. He limped slightly. Moist wraiths of sea fog twined the curving streets, turning the street lights into dark angels under fluorescing haloes. Bright droplets formed in his hair as he walked. His footsteps scratched to dim echoes; the laughter faded, leaving him alone with memory.

The presence of dawn took him by surprise, as a hand brushed his shoulder.

"Sojer, 'tis you?"

Soldier looked up fiercely into a gray-bristled face.

"Y'all right? What'ree doin' down here at dawn, lad?"

He recognized old Makerrah the fisherman, finally. Lately it amused the old man to call him "lad."

"Nothin' . . . nothin'." He pulled away from the brine-warped

rail. The sun was rising beyond the mountains, the edge of fog caught the colors of fire and was burned away. It would be a hot day. "G'bye, ol' man." He began to walk.

"Y'sure y're all right?"

Alone again he sat with one foot hanging, feeling the suck and swell of water far below the pier. *All right* . . . ? When had he ever been all right? And tried to remember into the time before he had known her, and could find no answer.

There had never been an answer for him on his own world, on Glatte; never even a place for him. Glatte, with a four-point-five technology, and a neo-feudal society, where the competition for that technology was a cultural rationale for war. All his life he had seen his people butchered and butchering, blindly, trapped by senseless superstition. And hated it, but could not escape the bitter ties that led him to his destruction. Fragments of that former life were all that remained now, after two centuries, still clinging to the fact of his alienness. He remembered the taste of fresh-fallen snow . . . remembered the taste of blood. And the memory filled him of how it felt to be nineteen, and hating war, and blown to pieces . . . to find yourself suddenly half-prosthetic, with the pieces that were gone still hurting in your mind; and your stepfather's voice, with something that was not pride, saying you were finally a real man. . . . Soldier held his breath unaware. His name was Maris, consecrated to war; and when at last he understood why, he left Glatte forever.

He paid all he had to the notorious spacer women; was carried in stasis between the stars, like so much baggage. He wakened to Oro, tech one-point-five, no wars and almost no people. And found out that now to the rest of humanity he was no longer quite human. But he had stayed on Oro for ninety-six years, aging only five, alone. Ninety-six years: a jumble of whiteness climbing a hill, constant New Piraeus; a jumble of faces in dim-blue lantern light, patterning a new life. A pattern endlessly repeated, his smile welcoming, welcoming with the patience of the damned, all the old/new faces that needed him but never wanted him, while he wanted and needed

them all. And then she had come to Oro, and after ninety-six years the pattern was broken. Damned Tin Soldier fell in love, after too many years of knowing better, with a ballerina who danced between the stars.

He pressed his face abruptly against the rail, pain flickered. *God, still real; thought it all turned to plastic, damn, damn . . .* And shut out three times twenty-five more years of pattern, of everyone else's nights and cold, solitary mornings trying to find her face. Ninety-one hundred days to carry the ache of returned life, until she would come again, and—

"See? That's our ship. The third one in line."

Soldier listened, unwillingly. A spacer in lavender stood with her Tail where the dock angled to the right, pointing out across the bay.

"Can't we go see it?" Blue glass glittered in mesh across the boy's back as he draped himself over the rail.

"Certainly not. Men aren't allowed on ships; it's against regulations. And anyway—I'd rather stay here." She drew him into the corner; amethyst and opal wrapped her neck in light. They began to kiss, hands wandering.

Soldier got up slowly and left them, still entwined, to privacy. The sun was climbing toward noon; above him as he walked, the skyline of New Piraeus wavered in the hazed and heated air. His eyes moved up and back toward the forty-story skeleton of the Universal Bank under construction, dropped to the warehouses, the docks, his atrophying ancient lower city. Insistent through the cry of sea birds he could hear the hungry whining of heavy machinery, the belly of a changing world. *And still I triumph over Death, and Chance, and thee, O Time—*

"But I can't stand it." His hands tightened on wood. "I stood it for ninety-six years; on the shelf." Dolefully the sea birds mocked him, creaking in the gray-green twilight, *now, now—* Wind probed the openings of his shirt like the cold fingers of sorrow. *Was dead, for ninety-six years before she came.*

For hours along the rail he had watched the ships in the bay; while he watched, a new ship had come slipping down, like the sun's tear. Now they grew bright as the day ended, setting a bracelet on the black water; stiffness made him lurch as he turned away, to artificial stars clustered on the wall of night.

Choking on the past, he climbed the worn streets, where the old patterns of a new night reached him only vaguely, and his eyes found nothing that he remembered anymore. Until he reached the time-eaten door, the thick, peeling mudbrick wall beneath the neon sign. His hand fondled the slippery lock, as it had for two hundred years. TIN SOLDIER . . . loved a ballerina. His hand slammed against the lock. *No—this bar is closed tonight.*

The door slid open at his touch; Soldier entered his quiet house. And stopped, hearing the hollow mutter of the empty night, and found himself alone for the rest of his life.

He moved through the rooms by starlight, touching nothing, until he came to the bedroom door. Opened it, the cold latch burning his hand. And saw her there, lying asleep under the silver robe of the Pleiades. Slowly he closed the door, waited, opened it once more and filled the room with light.

She sat up, blinking, a fist against her eyes and hair falling ash-golden to her waist. She wore a long soft dress of muted flowers, blue and green and earth tones. "Maris? I didn't hear you, I guess I went to sleep."

He crossed the room, fell onto the bed beside her, caressing her, covering her face with kisses. "They said you were dead . . . all day I thought—"

"I am." Her voice was dull, her eyes dark-ringed with fatigue.

"No."

"I am. To them I am. I'm not a spacer anymore; space is closed to me forever. That's what it means to be 'dead.' To lose your life . . . Mactav—went crazy. I never thought we'd even get to port. I was hurt badly, in the accident." Fingers twined loops in her hair, pulled—

"But you're all right."

She shook her head. "No." She held out her hand, upturned; he took it, curled its fingers into his own, flesh over flesh, warm and supple. "It's plastic, Maris."

He turned the hand over, stroked it, folded the long limber fingers. "It can't be—"

"It's numb. I barely feel you at all. They tell me I may live for hundreds of years." Her hand tightened into a fist. "And I *am* a whole woman, but they forbid me to go into space again! I can't be crew, I can't be a Mactav, I can only be baggage. And—I can't even say it's unfair. . . ." Hot tears burned her face. "I didn't know what to do, I didn't know— If I should come. If you'd want a . . . ballerina who'd been in fire."

"You even wondered?" He held her close again, rested her head on his shoulder, to hide his own face grown wet.

A noise of pain twisted in her throat, her arms tightened. "Oh, Maris. Help me . . . please, help me, help me. . . ."

He rocked her silently, gently, until her sobbing eased, as he had rocked a homesick teenager a hundred years before.

"How will I live . . . on one world for centuries, always remembering. How do you bear it?"

"By learning what really matters. . . . Worlds are not so small. We'll go to other worlds if you want—we could see Home. You'd be surprised how much credit you build up over two hundred years." He kissed her swollen eyes, her reddened cheeks, her lips. "And maybe in time the rules will change."

She shook her head, bruised with loss. "Oh, my Maris, my wise love—love me, tie me to the earth."

He took her prosthetic hand, kissed the soft palm and fingers. *And make it well* . . . And knowing that it would never be easy, reached to dim the lights.

REASONABLE PEOPLE

In which we learn there is more than one way to skin an alien invader.

Joanna Russ

The foreigner appeared in our skies at an acceleration of 15.3 feet per second per second, his automatic warning system—whether bemused or fascinated or perhaps frightened by the new place—having stopped dead, but I do not think he thought in those terms. I think he prided himself on his realistic attitude. He caused himself to be ejected automatically from the ship, and the last we saw of it, it was plunging toward the Pole as if infatuated beyond the dictates of reason. But he didn't think in those terms, either. He merely lingered in the stratosphere for a few minutes, hanging (so it would seem to anyone else) between heaven and earth. Five miles down and the sky grew light, ten miles and it was blue; stupendous mountains rose on his right, dark forests sucked up sunlight on his left, and on the horizon flickered and died the green auroral glow of the Pole. His parachute opened with a jerk and blossomed above him in a brilliant, sun-shot print of white. Still he fell. I believe,

from what my cousin overheard, that at this point he frowned and said to himself, quite audibly, "I don't like things that aren't *reliable.*"

Now he has been sitting all evening in a tavern, arguing price with my cousin, who is the clairvoyant and local guide of the neighborhood; the young foreigner does not believe that my cousin is a trained or gifted person, and this I find incredible; our foreigner must be from the cities of the temperate zone where there are so many people that Uncertainty has almost disappeared. My cousin has had to put an irritable finger to his irritable nose, refuse a lower price, shake his head vehemently, and then make as if to stand up and go away. That does it. So they rise in mutual detestation, the foreigner smiling round, I think to declare his good humor and reasonableness, and my cousin retiring sourly into his cloak. The young man has to bend under the lintel of the door but my cousin makes himself into a ramrod; the foreigner runs hands pleasantly through his curly hair and my cousin—who is of course all in black —touches with two fingers his tongue, his forehead, his heart, and his sex. We always halt on the way out of buildings; human habitations stay the same, and so do the clothes that people wear and the land they cultivate and the tools they use, at least unless you direct very strong thoughts at them. And the bodies of sane people never change. But outside it's a different matter—we must brace ourselves for the possible strangeness: beauty, agony, chaos. So the two men hesitate before they go out, my cousin feeling unhappily and very carefully what's going on in the night air this night.

"In addition to being a charlatan," says the young foreigner, rather shrilly, "you are also a fool."

My cousin retreats, shocked, behind his handkerchief.

"Black! Black! Black!" cries the foreigner. "What for?"

My cousin says nothing. To let the night hear such questions! It's necessary for a clairvoyant to be unseen, to become part of the dark itself, but it's very dangerous. And who talks about it?

"This place is underdeveloped," says the young man, "as to the matter of density of population. What do you people think land is

for?" He squints ahead into the dark. He says, heartfelt, something I don't understand; he says, "Oh, *damn!*"

Outside the inn courtyard things are indeed the same, which is a great pleasure to my cousin and me; there are no grassy lawns, no scrubby second growth, none of the waste places that are the worst form of Mutability or Uncertainty, only the old solid dark and the smell of pine needles. The old trees cut out the light of the stars. Now (this is a long time later) the forest thins and melts away silently; slowly fading into one another the somber huge trees become dwarf trees and the dwarf trees the last trees of all; this is the way it has always been, which is very reassuring; they are now riding along between sand dunes with grass running like a coarse fringe over the ridges. It's the foreigner's trip; they are going five hundred miles north to find his machinery, so you'd think he'd be awake, but he's been dozing as if it were all my cousin's job to make the journey; now he wakes up and bobs on his horse, confused. Far away the horizon has begun to turn grey.

"What," he says.

"We have to go round," says my cousin uncertainly.

"I don't see anything."

"Neither do I." My cousin throws back his head and rides off the path, which has appeared from nowhere: ten feet one way, ten feet the other.

"What the devil are you doing?" says the foreigner. He is a spoiled young man.

"Looking."

"Find anything?" (sarcastically)

"You should know," says my cousin, astonished.

"Well now, how *should* I know?" the foreigner asks nobody in particular. He repeats this peevishly to himself, "How should *I* know?" as if he wanted to change guides, though that's impossible now, as if he were angry, and for no reason at all. It's an awful place. The light is lingering between false dawn and dawn with a

sickening, faint smell, as if the morning had been embalmed or frozen to death. My cousin stops again, with that agony you get.

"What now?" says the foreigner, apparently controlling himself.

My cousin—ill—says nothing.

"I remarked," says the foreigner, with rising sarcasm, "what now? And—"

"It stinks," says my cousin mildly. The other man should know how hard it is to talk. Is this man a better seer than my cousin, to bear it all so easily? Why is he so confident? He shakes his head.

"A swamp," he says and takes the lead. "Nothing but a swamp."

As they ride on, the light increases and the pools of ice along the path turn the color of lead. My cousin fixes his eyes unhappily on the horizon, he massages one side of his face, unhappily he shifts in the saddle. Again he knows he must stop. The foreign man, jolted out of sleep, looks along my cousin's outstretched arm. "What?" he says thickly. He's a big man, never still, always moving uncomfortably in the saddle. My cousin points toward the east where something rises like the skeleton of a beached whale; from the foreigner I learn that this is an unfinished building for people to be in, that it is two hundred "stories" high, that it is made of "steel." They have, like poor damned fools, come to one of the Changing Places, the Unsafe Places, they've blundered on it through some awful mistake, maybe the foreigner's insistence, which now looks either stupid or horribly vicious, and once you've done that, the only thing to do is get away as fast as you can. My cousin speaks urgently to his horse; they swing round.

"Where are you going?" says the young foreigner, and then "Oh, I see," as he makes out the ten-foot-thick walls and the "emplacements" that will hold the "big guns." I don't know what these are. That insane man is proud of himself. Perhaps he is not a true person but a piece of a Mutable Place that's attempting to fool us by taking on the shape of a man—though how he could come into a human habitation is a mystery to me. And Places can't think,

anyway; they're just rotten bits in the world where anything can come in. Only a saint can live through a Changing Place. So who is this madman after all? No saint, to be sure, for the next crazy thing he says is:

"I'm going to sleep there." (I can feel my cousin's horror.) "No more words."

"But—"

"Never you mind. You mind your own business."

"But I—"

"Shut up!"

They stare at each other and I think both are surprised at their own anger. The foreigner spurs his horse away down the path that leads—happy and smooth, smooth, smooth!—toward the Big Thing; now he's a toy, a dot, a speck, at the base of that monolith; now he's a pinprick on the lowest of those two hundred horizontal streaks of steel that seem to hang by themselves against the livid light. My cousin turns to go, but a cry arrests him. Against the dictates of reason he runs forward—you can't ask an animal to go into one of those places—and floundering in the sand, falling on one arm and getting up again, stumbling, cursing himself, he reaches the Thing and pitches onto his knees. The Place has drawn him right up against its wall. There is a something-nothing there, a solid, transparent thing that holds his face. It lets you see inside the belly of the Thing and there—not three inches away—is the face of the young foreigner, lying on its side, white, with its mouth open in a piteous O and its round eyes staring into my cousin's. Something has changed, changed mightily under him or around him or in him.

The poor young man is dead.

With a gasp my cousin vaults to his feet, presses his hand against his side, wrings his hands. He ought to run away now. On his left a swell of sand shivers and slides. My cousin throws out both hands blindly and stares agonized at the sunrise as if even now he feels the pains of death take hold of him. It's the worst time, neither night nor day. Don't think clairvoyants are afraid of bodily death; we

know what waits for the mind in those pits of Mutability. I send him my thoughts. We both pray.

And then, with a yellowing of sand and a glinting of steel, the sun rises. With a noiseless flicker, with a simplicity that makes it even more real than the disappearing of smoke, the Big Thing vanishes. A reprieve. The desert changeless again. Safe.

My cousin weeps. He mounts his horse, sets spurs, and throws back his cloak in a passion of haste. Blood rushes to his face. For hours he does nothing but ride, think of riding, go, think of going. Then, once in the salt flats, his face takes on a dreaming, abstracted sweetness. He's very sorry for the young man. He's thinking. Can there be Uncertain Places out there between the suns, bogs, pits of waste and change in the sky? And did that poor fool come from one of them? Did he even speak our language or was it just that my cousin is such a gifted man? Would a worse seer have been able to understand the foreigner at all? My cousin thinks: We must be charitable. We must help one another. The suns are too hot to change and the world itself too massive, but on the surface of the world anything can happen. Anything at all: chaos, agony, beauty. My cousin stretches in the saddle. He appreciates the fact that horses stay horses when people ride them. He enjoys the air that wasn't there yesterday. It's a good world, better than the temperate cities, where there are so many persons and so many used things that one might almost forget what Change is like, or that Change exists, one might get careless and arrogant there. Like that poor young man. My cousin looks about the salt flats and says to me, who am a thousand miles away in the sleeping jungle, where the Uncertain Places are as green as nightmares, where plants become animals and animals plants, where rocks grow wings and fly away:

Isn't it a lovely world?

And so it is. It is.

For reasonable people.

ROYAL LICORICE

You too can live forever. The formula is simple—
if you know which is the true licorice.

R. A. Lafferty

1

From catfish crop and mud-goose tears
And Cimmaron mud river:
For fifty cents a thousand years,
And for a buck for-iver.

Boomer Flats Ballads

Black Red had been sixteen years at stud. This was after a strict colthood and eight years of competitive horse-racing. Now he had become a very slow and undependable stud. He was one old horse.

He gnawed a clump of prickly pear. He had been a stupid and rock-headed horse from his youth, and now that his eyes were shot he would eat anything. His owner chewed on a length of big blue-

stem grass and contemplated him. It was too bad to sell, for nine dollars for cat meat, a horse that had earned five million dollars. But what else could be done with the old animal?

But Black Red smelled a brother horse, an old flyer like himself, and he raised his head. So did the owner, and he saw in the distance a rare contraption: an ancient horse pulling an ancient medicine wagon that had once known gay paint. And the driver was more than ancient; he was timeless.

Then the contraption had bridged the distance too quickly to be believed, and it came to a halt in that grassy lane across the rail fence from Black Red and his owner.

"I, sir," said the driver of the contraption, "am selling Royal Licorice, the concoction that will halt and reverse aging in any creature. Buy it and use it, and you can have for your horse restored youth and great length of days. I sell it for fifty cents a small jug and a dollar a large."

"Why don't you use it yourself, old man?" the owner of Black Red asked.

"I do. Would you believe that I am more than a thousand years old?"

"No, I wouldn't, but you look as if you were. And your own horse?"

"Would you believe that he also is more than a thousand years old? Why do you hesitate? I don't make a lot of this, and I offer it only by chance as I go. It's by your happy chance that I've met you here today, sir."

Black Red neighed hopefully.

"See," said the peddling man. "He wants it. Your horse is smarter than yourself, sir."

"Not at all. Some of my horses may be, but Black Red is a rockhead. In his own day he made his way by his great speed and strength. He'd never have made it by his wits."

Black Red reached a very long neck through the rail fence, grasped the small jug of Royal Licorice in his uneven teeth, and then swallowed the whole thing in one brave, horsy gulp.

"Will it hurt him, do you think?" the owner asked. "It won't matter really, for he's about at the end of his line. But I like the Roman-nosed fool, and I'd not have him suffer a choking death."

"It will hurt him not at all," the timeless peddling man said. "The clay of the jug dissolves at once when it reaches the stomach. Watch now! The change is startling if you've never seen it before. You have the finest and fastest colt in the world here, sir. Watch."

Black Red gave a great snort, a youthful snort. He took off through the short cropped bluestem with a clatter of hoofs. He ran, and he changed. His was a great coltish gallop, and he now had the movements and appearance of a fine colt. When he was a half-mile off, he half turned as if going into the backstretch. He stretched and he ran, and the owner was seized with the shouting madness. That man knew speed when he saw it, real speed, winning speed. And the big colt was growing more glossy and more beautifully muscled by the second. He was dark cherry color. He was heroically swift.

"You owe me fifty cents for the small jug he took," the peddler said.

"Yes, here," said the owner. "I don't believe it, but my eyes have never lied to me before. Where can I find you if I want some more of it?"

"Oh, I'll be around before he needs it again."

"What's your name, old fellow? Or should I say thousand-year-young fellow?"

"They call me the Licorice Man."

Old Cyrus Slocum was throwing rocks at a fencepost. This was up in the gypsum hills where old Cy had his ranch. It wasn't much of a ranch, but the rocky, bitter gypsum of it was in accord with the man himself.

Slocum wasn't really unhappy. He had money; he had his stingy land (as stingy as he used to be with a bingle); he had his memories; he had his good right arm, a little mellow now, it's true; he had a few cattle.

Cy Slocum (you may not remember it about him if you are young, young for the first time) had been about the greatest baseball pitcher ever. But the end of his career had been more than forty years before. He had been a six-hundred-game winner. He had once pitched ninety-nine consecutive scoreless innings; he had maintained an earned-run average of .92 over a five-year period. He had had it all.

And even now, as an old man, Slocum was hitting that fencepost resoundingly. He would angle off a knee-high slider that just caught a bit of the post. He would hit it dead center with a shoulder-high fast rock. And when he threw his change-up, that fencepost seemed to lean weakly toward him in frustration.

"I could have been halfway to second, and you skylarking there on the mound," came a voice, friendly but full of timeless authority. "What? Do you no longer use the eyes in the back of your head?"

"I remember you from somewhere," Slocum said as he turned to see the ancient man with the venerable horse and medicine wagon. How could it have slipped up on him when it had to clatter up that rough and rocky gypsum road?

"It was the year you first tried out with the St. Louis Browns," the timeless man said, "and what antiquarian remembers the old Browns now? You ran athwart a barnstorming bunch of bearded men."

"The House of David!" said Slocum with friendly awe in his voice. "Now they were ball players, and they beat many of the major-league teams. But we took them three to nothing that afternoon. I two-hit them."

"It's another and more outsized bunch of bearded blokes that I meant," said the ancient traveler.

"Now you open an angry wound," Slocum almost moaned. "That afternoon-mare of a game has stuck in my undermind for more than half a century. They called themselves the Flats, I believe it was. Odd name, odd bunch. They had half a dozen real giants; must have been over eight feet tall, some of them. The Flats, the Boomer Flats they called themselves."

"Yes, we had some pretty good-sized fellows on our team," the traveling man said. "They were the Uncles, the Old Bachelors, the Bashful and Silent Ones."

"You'd unwind pretty long," Slocum said, "but not that long."

"I'm six six," said the traveler. "I was a little taller then but I'm not one of the Uncles. I'm the little shrimp who played third base."

"Eighteen runs they tagged me for in that first inning," Slocum remembered blackly, "and the man kept me in there and let me suffer."

"It was fortuitous," said the traveler. "You made every mistake that a young pitcher could make. But most of them you never made again. 'Twas luck you met us. Slocum, how would you like to have your arm back again, at its strongest, and at the same time keep your wits at their wisest? How would you like your youth back without losing a drop of your later-acquired wisdom and savvy?"

"Wouldn't that be something, fellow? Who are you?"

"I'm the Licorice Man. This horse here is named Peegosh. He's better than my regular horse. He belongs to the Comet: but the Comet isn't traveling this year, and Peegosh wanted to amble the country with me a bit. What I sell is Royal Licorice: fifty cents a small jug, a dollar a large."

"I'll take a small one," Cy Slocum said. They transacted. Then Slocum took a great swig of the stuff. He began to throw rocks at a fencepost again, but now he was throwing at the fourth post down the line. Hitting it, too. And he was throwing like a young man.

"It works, doesn't it," Slocum said.

"Sure it works. Always does. And your hair is turning black again."

"I know it. I can feel it." He continued to throw. How that young fellow could throw those rocks!

The indomitable old dame had been driving an indomitable old Dusenberg. Both of them had been restored, polished, and groomed in amazing fashion, and both looked good. The old dame and her

old car had received a special award at the Antique Auto Festival Southwestern Division show. And the award read: *For class, which doesn't have to be defined.* There was no money attached to this award as there was to the first and second and third prizes. That didn't matter. The old dame didn't need it. She was pleased about the whole thing. She purred along in the sporty Dusie on a fine little country road, she remembering, and the snazzy little old car remembering.

Then they were passed by a long-legged, fast-ambling horse that pulled a flake-painted medicine wagon. Listen, nobody passed the old dame and the old Dusie like that! A horse and wagon sure did not.

She noticed, however, that while the hoofs of the stilt-legged striding horse struck sparky fire at every step, these hoofs did not quite touch the roadway. That horse was going along six inches in the air. (Don't mention it, though: there would have to be explanations or denials.)

Then the horse was reined in ahead, and the old dame stopped the Dusie beside the wagon. An old, tall, raffish gentleman got out of the wagon and came over to her.

"Ma'am," he asked, "aren't you Flambeau La Flesche?"

"Sir," she said, "I am the socially prominent Mrs. Gladys Glenn Gaylord, a fancier of antiques and myself an antique."

"No, no," the man insisted. "You used to be in vaudeville. After that, you were a movie star."

"And now I am an old character actress," she said, "playing that old character, myself. You really remember?"

"Sure. Some of us used to dress up and take the train out of Boomer over to Tulsa whenever you played at the Orpheum. You *are* Flambeau La Flesche, are you not?"

"I was. The publicity man who coined that name for me is buried in a potter's field somewhere, I hope. He couldn't even spell Flesh. But now I am the socially prominent Mrs. Gladys Glenn Gaylord. What are you chewing?"

"Royal Licorice Plug Tobacco."

"Well, don't be ungallant. Cut a plug for me too. I'm a country girl originally. You're from Boomer, are you? That dump!"

"No. No. I said we used to take the train out of Boomer. But I'm really from Boomer Flats."

"I apologize. They're as different as dusk and darkness, are they not? And the elixir you are selling, is it also called Royal Licorice?"

"Yes. Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder. You catch on fast, Flambeau."

"I always did," she said, and she spat a beautifully straight stream of black Royal Licorice tobacco. The Licorice Man almost hesitated to offer her the benison of returning youth. She was one dame who had grown old gracefully. But he was a peddler deep in the long bones of him, so he didn't hesitate very much.

"Flambeau, it goes at fifty cents a small jug, a dollar a large one," he said with his easy finesse.

"All right, I'll take a small one then." She took a thoughtful drink of it. "What's it made out of?"

"Catfish crops, mud-goose tears, Cimmaron river water, Royal Licorice chewing tobacco."

"Mud-goose tears? Tell me, Licorice, what *can* make a mud-goose cry? What's the one thing that can do it? This had better be good."

The Licorice Man looked around furtively, though there was no one else within a mile. Long-faced drollery had taken over his phiz.

"It's a little raunchy, Flambeau," he said then. "I'd better whisper it to you."

"I'll use it," she said a while later as she wiped the smeared remnants of laughter from her face. "Raunchy, I'll say. But lots of times we used words in my skits and movies, and raunchy tales go well with me." She took another thoughtful drink of the elixir.

"Yes, I do feel something," she said. "Wouldn't it be funny if I could come back that way, all the way? I'd give them all fits if I

had my girlhood again. And never was the competition shabbier. The little babes these days, they have so little talent that all they can do is peel it down to the buff. Me, I had class, so I never had to do that. I always kept my garters on. They called me the Golden Garter Girl."

"I remember, Flambeau."

"Oh, it's working all right. I can feel it. Say, Licorice, pour a big jug of that into Dusie's tank. He'd like to be young again too, not merely restored."

The Licorice Man poured a big jug of Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder into the tank of the snazzy little car. Flambeau paid him. Then she took off in the Dusie, leaving the smell of burning rubber and returning youth to drift above that fine little country road.

Tell all the boys that Flambeau La Flesche is back.

Did you tell them all?

Sure, tell those in the graveyard too. Them especially. It will give them a lift, and those who have proper clothes will come to see her.

Ex-President Hiram Andrew Clayborne Johnson was fishing along Exendine Creek on the Ex-Presidential Ranch in Kaw County, Oklahoma. He was himself of a dead-fish complexion now, and so shrunken that the great cowboy hat and the sharkskin boots fitted him ill.

The Exendine Creek was only four feet wide at this place, but old Ex had cast his line far beyond its banks and had tangled it in some sumac bushes sixty feet on the other side of the creek.

Old Ex believed that the sumac bushes were Republican congressmen out to thwart him. He cursed them, and he chopped off their appropriations. Some days this would intimidate the bushes and cause them to release the line, but today they held it fast.

A man with an animal and wagon came bumping along.

"Are you registered, friend, and will you vote right?" Ex asked the man in what had once been a great voice.

"I am and I will," said the man. He was the Licorice Man: no use keeping it a secret from you; you'd find out anyhow. And the Licorice Man was untangling Ex's line from the bushes.

"And the donkey, is he registered?" Ex asked.

"He's a horse and not a donkey," the Licorice Man said. "He is registered, but how he votes is his own secret. Reel in, man."

"I know that a donkey will always vote my way," Ex said, reeling in his line, "but I never trusted a horse. What did you do with the fish that was on my hook?"

"Don't you one-up me, Hiram Andrew Clayborne," the Licorice Man said. "How would you like to be restored to your youth and to your faculties? Then you could run again. You have just nine days to file for the first primary."

"There's no restoring needed for me," old Ex said. "My wits are as they always were."

"True, true," said the Licorice Man. "Sad but true."

"And I still have my same fund of fine stories, and I still have my great name. I always say that I am the only Apostle who ever became President. There was an earlier President Andrew Johnson, it's true, but he wasn't the apostolic type. But I have the Andrew Johnson in my name somewhere. Andrew, as you know, was the brother of Peter. Boy, look up chapter and verse for me quickly! I wonder where that boy has gone. He's never around anymore. And Christ once said 'Peter, Son of John,' so that was his name, 'Son of John'—'Johnson,' get it? And I, as Peter's brother, am Andrew Johnson, the only Apostle who ever became President."

"Yes, you still have your same fund of stories," the Licorice Man agreed. "And you still have your great name. But there *are* restorations needed. Your voice is cracked and broken. Your eyesight is about gone. You are stooped and old and toothless and hairless and deaf, and you smell like a goat. As you are, you just don't inspire confidence."

"Have I aged? Is it true that I have aged?" old Ex asked.

"It's true. Now, what I can do is . . ."

"How much?"

"Yours is a hard case. Nothing short of a big jug will do it. One dollar."

"Have you figured excise tax in that? Ex-Presidents are exempt from excise taxes, you know. I had that regulation passed myself."

"Seventy-one cents then."

Old Ex fished out the seventy-one cents from somewhere. He took a jolt from the jug; then another; then another. He began to fill out to the size of the great cowboy hat and the sharkskin boots. He began to talk in the high manner.

The horse Peegosh was restive. So horse, man, and wagon took their bumpy farewell. Behind them the apostolic voice of Hiram Andrew Clayborne rose in cracked and broken thunder. And then the cracks were healed by the miracle of Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder.

The strength and timbre came back to that voice. The power came back. It was a restoration, a resurrection. It was a new manifestation in all its former glory. It was itself again: the Golden Guff. Country, look out!

And there were other persons restored and reyouthified in those crisp late winter days. But if all that happened was told, there'd not be paper enough in the world to record it all.

2

For both, the year bloomed pulsy red:
Contraries and compliants.
A springtime of the ghosts, they said;
A springtime of the giants.

Boomer Flats Ballads

The wonder colt Red Licorice seemed ready to sweep the big four that year, from his bruited reputation. And this was when the

public had not yet seen him run. There was a big noise about him from the men who knew these things. No unknown was ever so widely known so quickly.

He was possibly the last colt ever sired by that grand old champion Black Red. And Black Red, full of years and honors, had died only a short time before this, according to his owner. He had been buried at a private ceremony, very private; but an imposing stone, red granite with black obsidian inset, had been erected over the grave. There were now several hundred visitors a day who came to that grave, and these visitors were told that the horse buried there now lived again in his son.

Red Licorice was the absolute image of his great sire. Early films of Black Red as a colt were run, and you would almost swear that this was the same animal that now trained daily at the Red Hills Farm. The long low gallop, the laid-back ears, the rhythmic hooved thunder, the snorting that sounded half horse and half wolf, the red-black mahogany gleam, the bowed neck that was almost bull-like, the very long and large (and, some said, empty) head, the flowing tail and streaming mane, these were all identical in the father and the son.

But Red Licorice had sheared three seconds off the mile-and-a-half time of Black Red, on the same practice track, under the same almost-perfect conditions.

Then Red Licorice won four warmup mile-and-a-quarter races, and he won them easily—this against the best colts in the world in what was billed as the Year of the Great Colts. Red Licorice set four new track records in doing this, and three of them had been held by his father.

Derby time came, too soon, too soon. The steep interest in the affair was still climbing. But it would be a Derby to be remembered as long as Men and Derbies last. Red Licorice took the Derby in really sensational fashion, and now this magic colt had taken the fancy of all racedom. As rock-headed as his father had been, he also had his father's outrageous talent as a ham actor. How that big colt could cavort about a track!

Here were memories being made as one watched. Big bluestem grass of the pastures where the colts were raised; black loam and red clay mixed and mingled and managed into the fine straightaways; smell of hot horses in the springtime and the summer (smell compounded of clover and green oats and manure); weathered grandstands and the blue-green infields at the tracks; winged money flying with the winged horses; the sign of Equus and the summer solstice: these were ever the hinges of the year for millions of fine folks. And one magic colt could always turn it into a magic year.

Cyrus X. Slocum the Third had shown up in training camp at Phoenix, unsolicited, uncontracted, unknown.

Yes, he was the grandson of the original Cy Slocum, he said. "You can't trade on even a great name," the manager told him. "You would have to make it entirely on your own." "I know it, I know it," young Cy said. "Just let me pitch. Let me pitch and I'll show everyone." Well, he did look and move like an athlete. He did look very much like those old pictures of his grandfather. He had a strong personality, a strong arm, and outrageous confidence. "And it never *hurts* things for a player to have a great name," the club's publicity man said. So young Cy was given a tryout in the training camp.

They always kept the wraps on the pitchers for a couple of days at first, but Cy was ready to blast loose.

"Shape up my arm slowly?" he asked. "Man, my arm is always in shape. Haven't we any heftier catchers than those? I'd blow them clear out of the park. You don't have a steel backstop here? I like to warm up with a sixteen-pound shot at regulation distance, but hard as I throw it, it'd go right through anything here."

Cy was scolded somewhat for standing against the centerfield fence and throwing half a dozen balls clear over the grandstand, very high above home plate and still rising till they went out of sight.

"Not only will you throw your arm away with that showboating," one of the coaches told him, "but balls are too expensive to toss half a dozen of them away like that."

"Nah," Cy said. "The balls aren't gone. I was throwing my famous return ball then. I put a little twist on it when I throw it, and it comes back to me."

A small dot appeared in the sky far above and beyond the grandstand. The dot grew, it came as fast as a bullet, it grew to baseball size and it zanged into Cy's glove there by the centerfield fence. And the other five balls followed it quickly.

"A long time ago I—uh, I mean my grandfather—used to lob the ball up to the batters," Cy said. "It would come almost all the way to a batsman, near enough to draw his swing most of the time. Then it would zoom back to my glove, I mean to my grandfather's glove. I finally quit throwing it though. The umpires got together and decided to call them balks instead of strikes whenever I threw my return ball even if the batter took a full swing at it."

"The old-timers say that your grandfather told tall stories too," the coach commented.

Cy pitched in intersquad games, three innings one day, six the next, nine the day after that. The batters couldn't even touch him. He pitched about fifty intersquad innings and never gave up a hit. The reporters were making a great to-do about this bright new rookie with the bright old name.

The team played the Giants, who also trained in Phoenix then. They threw Cy at them in the first game and he no-hit them. Three days later he did it again.

He burned his way through all those exhibition games. He had a great collection of pitches of his own; and every good pitch that he saw he mastered instantly and added to his repertoire. He had the strength and speed of youth. He also had, from somewhere, such maturity and wisdom and judgment as could hardly be acquired in less than a lifetime.

The regular season began.

"Now we'll see what this early-blooming crocus can really do," a few of the unsold critics muttered.

Young Cy Slocum, pitching every third day, won his first thirteen

games without a loss. There would be no limits at all to such a career as was opening up before him.

"How old are you anyhow, Cy?" a reporter asked him one day.

"Eighty-one," Cy said promptly. Then he corrected himself. "No, no, I mean eighteen. I have a speech affliction: I sometimes get my numbers transposed."

Flambeau La Flesche the zoom-zoom girl had zoomed to the top of everything with electronic swiftness. She was on live; she was on 2D, 3D, and 4D (you have to be smarter than hell even to know how to watch 4D; only Mensa members are allowed to apply for tickets); she was on Voxo; she was in five simultaneous musical comedies; she was on Vodvil and Sound in the Round; she was in the Old Time Electric Theatre; and she was big in Metranome. Already she looked like a shoo-in to take the Nobel Prize in the Centerfold Division. Few were the media in which she had not quickly become outstanding.

But had there not been a Flambeau La Flesche a long time ago? Had that other young girl not been identical to this both in name and appearance? Yes, even in voice.

"I suspect that I'm the same kid, only refleshed," Flambeau told an interviewer. "I'm reincarnated, that's what I am, and you have to have the right kind of flesh to do that. That's what it means. I'm very carnal. That's why I reincarnate so easy."

Really, what else can you say of Flambeau? She did have the flesh, she did have a spirit as torchy as her name. She did have all the forms and resonances. She was everything, just as her preincarnation had been everything so many years before.

And she found, as had the previous she, that there were only twenty-four or twenty-six hours in the day; she could never remember which, but there weren't enough. Then she had a hot idea to save everyone money and to save herself drudgery and time.

"You, moguls, why don't you just dig out the old movies that I made in my previous life," she said. "I haven't changed any since

then. When you have class you don't have to change. Just get them out and fill in the scratches and cracks and run them again. Nobody can know that it isn't me, because it will be me."

They did it. It worked. They ran all those old ones and they were explosive hits.

Oh, the names of those two-timing great movies are like music: *Louisiana Haystack, Popsie, The Cremation of Betty Lou, Zephyr Jones, The Day the Lilac Bush Burned Down, Nine Dollar Dog, Three Fish Out, Little Audrey, Crabgrass Street, Slippery Elm, Spider Spider Down Inside Her, Lady Bug Bongo, Accolade,* and *Accolade Revisited.* (This last had been titled *Son of Accolade* the first time around.)

What drama, what comedy, what music, what memories!

But Flambeau wasn't quite so happy with it that second time around. "I knew that the competition nowadays was nothing," she said once, "but, after all, what is there to compete for? The *Accolades* aren't what they used to be. And *Accolade Revisited* has an emptiness and irony that wasn't, at first, intended. The thing about us excelling types is that when we ascend to great heights it is the same as if we stood still and the world went downhill. We must have excelled too much; the world sure has gone down."

"Miss Flambeau," another interviewer asked her, "we know that you are an old-car fancier, but many of the big-time restorers are puzzled and jealous about the restoration job you've had done on that old Dusenberg. It's almost as if it were new. What's the secret?"

"It is new," Flambeau said. "The secret is to buy a dollar jug. A fifty-cent jug is all right for people, but it just isn't enough for a snazzy speedster like that."

But the interviewer didn't seem to understand.

"Why don't we produce *The World Under Louisiana Haystack* again?" she asked her producer. "That was a movie a girl could really put herself into."

"But, Flambeau, *The World Under Louisiana Haystack* was never finished," the producer said. "There were difficulties with it."

"Let's finish it then," she said. "The difficulties are the best part."

They set about the task of finishing it. There were real difficulties. The resolution of these difficulties might take all things to the end of this account, or to the end of the world, whichever came first.

"This is a job that calls for another jug," Flambeau said. "It may even call for a dollar jug this time."

Clayborne Hiram Andrew Johnson (great-nephew of Hiram Andrew Clayborne Johnson) had won the first of the Presidential primaries, that of Massachusetts and Connecticut Plantations. So he was off and running ahead.

He took Florida State Conglomerate. That was expected. He took Los Angeles State, and that had not been expected. It was a big one.

Johnson was speaking well, often nine times a day. It was the Golden Guff itself, and no one could do it like young Clayborne Hiram Andrew Johnson. In this, he reminded old-timers and historians of his own great-uncle Hiram Andrew Clayborne Johnson. That Ex-President, by the bye, was unavailable for comment or for appearance.

But the young Johnson campaigned energetically and wantonly, if not always well. He wore a serape and grass sandals when he campaigned in Chicano districts, though the Chicanos did not wear these things and many had never seen them before. He was decked out in Navajo beadwork and a Sioux war bonnet when he spoke at a supermarket in Indianapolis. Indianapolis really meant Indian City, didn't it? Johnson went equipped with skullcap and nine phrases of Yiddish into the affluent Jewish suburbs. He wore a miter and alb and carried a crosier when he went into Irish Catholic neighborhoods, and he offered what he said was holy water from Exendine Creek. "Nine doctors out of ten state that it is more efficacious than Lourdes water," he declared, "and it contains eleven more additives." He wore a zebra-hide cape and crocodile-tooth necklace when he entered the black suburbs. "For our common African heritage," he would say. "One of my ancestors was Postmaster General for the Pharaoh Ro-ta-ta."

He opened a wild but calculated bloodletting against the other candidates of his own party. "They have turned the House of our Fathers into the Outhouse of our Fathers," he would roar in his golden roar. There was nothing gingerly about his attacks: he left no stone unthrown in his assaults. What matter? He could always unlet the blood, he could always unthrow the stones again when there might come the proper time for it. Often he hummed to himself that old healing melody, "Will you love me in September as you hated me in May?" Of course they'd all love him in September, if he won the nomination. Their heads would roll else.

He won the primary in Chicago Metropolitan, a high-number delegate state. He won it narrowly by means of a little over a million votes that came in or were discovered very late, the morning after the voting. They had been unaccountably overlooked in the tabulations of the evening before.

He most handily won the primary in Missouri Valley, that grand old state with its capital at Omaha. He had lost a few along the way, but we will not mention those. He was leading, it was believed, and he would increase his lead in what was still a close race.

Then it came, a threatening and chilling storm out of a cloud no bigger than a man's thorax. While yodeling at Swiss Colony Wisconsin, Johnson's golden voice broke; it broke in a cavernous old-man cough. Several rude persons laughed. This could go badly. There is nothing so contagious or epidemic as laughter. Johnson got his broken voice temporarily fixed at nearby Koffkoff, Wisconsin, the cough-drop capital of the world. But he knew that the fixing was only temporary.

"I'll have to get hold of that Licorice Man," C. H. A. Johnson told himself. "I'd better get another big jug of it. That'll come to seventy-one cents, taking the exemption for excise tax. I'll have to find a way to afford it."

3

Deprived of elixir, a horse,
A pitch, a Pres, a lassie:
And three erupted crass and coarse,
And one was kind of classy.

Boomer Flats Ballads

There would have to be confrontation. And just how does one go about arranging a confrontation with a vagabond peddler like the Licorice Man who has no regular residence except the misty, muddy, half-mythical place named Boomer Flats?

One uses intuition; one uses deduction; one uses that other thought process whose name is at the moment forgotten. And one does not eschew luck. (Is eschew a real word? It sure does sound funny, and it sure does look funny.)

Young Cy Slocum had pitched in Dallas the day before, and he had lost three to nothing. Never before in his young career had he allowed three runs in one game. He had tired. And new gray hairs had been peppering his youthful head for several days now. He needed another jug of the Royal Licorice and he needed it quickly. He got permission to drive up to his ranch in the gypsum hills. He borrowed a car and drove. He stopped at his ranch only an hour or so. Then he drove at random. His receptors were open to any kind of signal.

Half a dozen miles from his own ranch, on the fringe of the Big Bluestem Country, by the side of a little country road where the gypsum begins to merge with honest limestone, Slocum saw an angry young colt who seemed not quite so young as he should be. This colt was widely known, and his name was Red Licorice.

With the colt was his owner, a man whom Slocum had known casually for a dozen years.

"Are we looking for the same thing, Cy?" the owner asked.

"I think so," said the young, but not quite so young as he should have been, Cy Slocum.

"Red got a package from that devilish old codger," the colt owner said. "It was full of either pills or dung-beetle rollings. Red took a few of them. They didn't have the same restoring effect on him as the original elixir had. They had an effect quite otherwise, unique, and unpleasant. I can't stand a horse when he gets too smart."

Red Licorice snorted his contempt for his owner, for the old codger who had sent him either pills or dung-beetle rollings, and for the woozy world itself.

Eleven new, beautiful, turreted, bulletproof cars approached in caravan. They stopped by the pitcher, the colt owner, and the angry young colt. Out of the cars boiled Presidential candidate Clayborne Hiram Andrew Johnson, a speechwriter, a lawyer who was also bodyguard, a chauffeur, and twenty-one security men.

"Disperse, all of you!" the head security man ordered. "We are commandeering this area. An important meeting will take place here soon."

"I think so too," the colt owner said, "but I'll not be commandeered into or out of anything."

"You are standing in a public roadway," that head security man said. "And the road was built with mixed funds that included five percent Federal monies. Therefore, we as Federal men *can* commandeer this region."

The colt owner took one step backward.

"I'm on my own land now," he said. "Let's see you commandeer me."

"It is all right," Candidate C. H. A. Johnson said. "I know the colt and both the men. All three are solid citizens."

"Careful, careful," the speechwriter said. "You'll put your foot in it some way." (Johnson wasn't supposed even to say good morning unless he read it off a piece of paper handed to him by his speechwriter.)

A golden-haired young, or almost young, lady came over the hill in a Dusenberg car. The Dusenberg also was almost young, but it had developed a bad cough. It stopped and died there.

"So, that's the way it is," said the almost-young lady. "A sharp young pitcher (but not quite as sharp as he was for a while) who is his own grandfather; a rock-headed colt who's had to run on his father's hoofs; a Presidential candidate trying to stand out of his great-uncle's shadow, but those shadows grow longer when evening comes and they will swallow a man. Who are we kidding? We are all second-timers. We are all in the same barkentine. But the Licorice Man will be along in a moment. I heard the hoofbeats of the horse Peegosh: the hoofs never quite touch the road, you know."

And the Licorice Man, the medicine wagon, and the horse Peegosh had arrived suddenly in clattering silence (the clatter was on a different plane: these weren't normal people, not the Licorice Man, not the wagon, not the horse Peegosh).

"Quickly, quickly, a large jug," said Candidate Johnson. "That will be seventy-one cents, figuring the excise-tax exemption."

"Careful, careful," the speechwriter said. "You'll put your foot in it some way." The speechwriter rapidly wrote out something on a sheet of paper and handed it to Candidate Johnson to read.

"Quickly, quickly, a large jug," Candidate Johnson read dutifully. "That will be seventy-one cents, figuring the excise-tax exemption."

"My equine associate would like a dollar jug of the elixir this time," the colt owner said. "I'm afraid that the effect of the fifty-cent jug has worn a little thin."

"I'll have to have a stock of it to last me through the season," Pitcher Cy Slocum said. "And I'll have to have a firm guarantee of sufficient supply every springtime. You let me run short, Licorice. They tagged me for seven hits yesterday, and that's something that never happens."

"I'm not sure that I want any more for myself," said Flambeau

La Flesche. She was the golden-haired almost-young lady. "If I ever do want it and want it bad enough, I could probably make it myself. After all, I know the one thing that makes a mud-goose cry. I never did use that story, Licorice. Really, it was a little too raw to tell.

"But Dusie here needs a jug now. This poor car has been suffering all sorts of ailments for the last several days."

"No, you'd not be able to make it yourself, Flambeau," the Licorice Man said. "Licorice can mean so many different things. I alone use the genuine licorice, and I alone know which it is. Do you believe it is the *lykyrrhiza* or wolf-root? Or that it is the *glykyrrhiza* or sweet-root? Try them and see."

"Enough of this," said Cy Slocum the pitcher. "You have customers waiting while you jabber. A large dollar jug, please, and enough more to carry me through the season."

"There's only one jug of it left," said the Licorice Man, "and I'm going to pour it into the car Dusie. There won't be any more of it. I'm going on to other things."

"Aw, horse hokey!" snorted the horse Red Licorice.

"There's got to be more of it. Say, how come that horse can talk?" Cy Slocum asked in angry puzzlement.

"I sent him some smart pills," the Licorice Man said. "That's what I'm working on now. Anyone else want to try some smart pills?"

"No, I sure don't. I'm plenty smart now," Cy said emphatically. "I want the elixir!"

"Smart pills are the one thing I don't need," declared Candidate Johnson. "I've got more smart than anyone I've ever seen. I want some of the youth elixir. I want all of it!"

"Would smart pills make me smart enough to do that tough scene in *The World Under Louisiana Haystack?*" little golden-head asked.

"No, Flambeau. *The World Under Louisiana Haystack* should not be finished. *Accolade Revisited* shouldn't have been finished

either, you know, and it was. Too bad. Here, try these. One is a smart pill. The other is a dung-beetle rolling. Take one."

"They look just alike."

"Not to a really fine eye."

Flambeau La Flesche took one of the offered pellets, plopped it in her mouth, chewed it and swallowed it. The Licorice Man dropped the other pellet into the tank of the Dusie and also poured the world's last jug of Royal Licorice Youth Restorer and Clock Retarder in there.

"Thanks," said the Dusie, setting its motor to going with the sweetest purr ever. "I needed that."

"You gave Dusie the smart pill," Flambeau said. "Then I ate the dung-beetle rolling."

"I want a jug of that elixir!" Pitcher Cy Slocum swore, "or I'll spill con-man brains and horse brains and wagon brains all over the road." With his terrific speed he began to rifle fist-sized rocks at the contraption. They didn't reach it. There seemed to be an airy but impermeable shield around horse and wagon and Licorice Man. They were a special case, and the rocks dropped back from them harmlessly.

"Fire on them, security men," Candidate Johnson barked with his full golden voice. "Withholding the elixir is a warlike act against myself. Fire on them!"

Twenty-one security men raised service revolvers and fired all together in one grand volley. And twenty-one bits of long lead bounced back from the airy shield and rolled around in the roadway.

"Give me a jug or I'll kick the three of you to pieces!" Red Licorice swore madly in horsy hate. And he began to let fly hoofs at the withholders.

"Watch it, horseface," the Licorice Man said rather testily.

"Watch it, junior," the paint-flaked medicine wagon said.

"Watch it, Buster," the horse Peegosh neighed. "Two can play that kicking game, and I've never been bested." Peegosh, it was

now seen, had hoofs of flame, and they did not quite reach down to the roadway. Neither did the wheels of the wagon, or the feet of the Licorice Man.

Nobody ever heard such a display of shouting, bawling, snorting, neighing, and just plain bad manners as followed. It was enough to make one ashamed of being a man or horse. Slocum beat on the airy shield with now bloody fists and shouted vile obscenities. Pray that his youthful admirers never glimpse that side of the man! Johnson belched sulfur flame and gave that merchandising conglomerate very hell as he ordered volley after volley to be fired into it. And the ignoble Red Licorice was the worst of them all, cursing in man and horse talk, stomping, gnashing, making dirty noises. That horse should never have been given smart pills.

The only bright spot was the golden-haired Flambeau. "I kind of liked that rolled-up dung-beetle ball," she laughed. "When I am next the socially prominent Mrs. Gladys Glenn Gaylord, I will obtain a quantity of them and serve them to my guests. So few of that set are country people, they won't know what they're getting. Now back to being the old character actress and doing the indomitable-dame bit. Toodle, all."

She zoomed away in the Dusie. She was a pleasant golden blob in the far distance. She had class. Who else ever had the finesse to grow old gracefully twice?

Recent irrigation projects in Rhodesia have increased the number of acres available for agriculture, and have also increased the aquatic snail population. The snails are an intermediate host for parasitic blood flukes which cause a debilitating disease, schistosomiasis. "In the early stages the patient experiences irritation of the skin which is later followed by a cough, headaches, loss of appetite, various aches and pains, and often difficulty in breathing. When the disease reaches a more advanced stage nausea is common, accompanied by dysentery, with bloody stools, in intestinal schistosomiasis; or by bloody urine (haematuria), in the urinary variety. The liver becomes enlarged, as does the spleen, and the abdomen often becomes bloated, while the body is emaciated. It is in the advanced stages that the patients often develop cancerous growths." The disease is painful, and the treatment is more so.

Schistosomiasis is endemic in the Nile Delta, where perennial irrigation provides a favorable environment for the snails. The delta is described as "rotting with the disease"; life expectancy there is twenty-seven years for women and twenty-five for men.

The upper Nile valley has been relatively free of the disease throughout historic times because of its annual ("basin") irrigation caused by the flooding of the river. Now, with the completion of the Aswan High Dam, the upper valley will have the benefits of perennial irrigation, and of massive infection with schistosomiasis.

Copper sulfate, widely used to keep down the snail population,

also kills plants and fish, and contributes to the eutrophication of lakes. In Israel, near Tel Aviv, a small river was infested with snails which were hosts for schistosomiasis. "From the point of view of public health, it was hardly a problem because less than five cases a year occurred; people knew that it was forbidden to bathe in this river due to the danger of infection. Notwithstanding these facts, a large campaign was undertaken to eradicate *Bulinus* [the snail] which is a vector of *Schistosoma haematobium* in this river. Several applications of molluscicide were made. All aquatic life was effectively eradicated except *Bulinus,* because at least part of the population left the water to sit on the stems of reeds or dug into the soil along the banks only to return later after the molluscicide diminished. A year after this campaign the river contained almost nothing other than *Bulinus.*"

These and the following quotations are taken from *The Careless Technology,* edited by M. Taghi Farvar and John P. Milton (The Natural History Press, 1972, $25). The book consists chiefly of the papers presented to the Conference on the Ecological Aspects of International Development, jointly sponsored by the Center for the Biology of Natural Systems, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, and the Conservation Foundation, Washington, D.C. Some other horror stories:

The introduction of grazing animals into the upper Rio Grande valley in the late nineteenth century upset the balance of vegetation and caused erosion followed by rapid silting of rivers and man-made reservoirs. In order to counteract the erosion, salt cedars were introduced. They grew so explosively that in twelve years they took over 24,000 acres of irrigable land and used up about 45 percent of the area's available water. Damming of streams to irrigate more land has increased salinization so much that the river can no longer handle it. In the San Joaquin valley, salinization has reached the point where a master drain is required to carry off the saline and insecticide-laden water. It has been calculated that such a drain could be directed from San Francisco Bay into the Pacific at a cost of $100 million a year for at least fifty years.

These are not new and unique problems. "We now have good reason to believe that the decline of the ancient irrigated civilizations of Mesopotamia and Central Asia was due not to climatic change or to Atilla the Hun, but to soil depletion, waterlogging and salinity." In more recent times, the same mistakes have been made over and over, often by those who should know better.

Why do we do it? One reason is ignorance. In a discussion Gilbert F. White[1] said, "I wonder whether anybody has any evidence of a systematic effort to canvass the total consequences of any one of these major interventions before it is undertaken. I don't know of any really systematic venture in this direction."

Another reason was suggested by Henry van der Schalie:[2] "Now, why can't I get money in a place like Michigan to study swimmer's itch [animal schistosomes]? The answer is very simple. We have a thing called tourism. On our license plates, you will see that Michigan is the great water wonderland. Don't you mention swimmer's itch. It is a naughty word."

There is no one discipline that covers all the possible effects of a new dam or irrigation system. Engineers and politicians build it; biologists and economists are called in later, if at all. Engineers are often aware that irrigation now will call for drainage later, but in order to get their projects approved they are willing to leave that for the next generation.

Another factor is cited by Michel Batisse:[3] "There is a kind of convergence of interest in what I might call the ribbon-cutting complex where you want to have the president of the republic come with scissors and cut a red ribbon, issue a postal stamp and so on. It has to be a very big structure; otherwise, it is not interesting."[4]

1. Professor of geography and director of the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado.

2. Professor of zoology and curator of mollusks in the Museum of Zoology at the University of Michigan.

3. Director of the Natural Resources Research Division of UNESCO in Paris.

4. The Aswan High Dam has seventeen times the volume of the Cheops Pyramid.

All over the world, massive projects undertaken with the best of intentions are backfiring lethally. New roads, built where it is easiest to build them, bring colonists to virgin land unsuitable for cultivation: the results within a few decades are "rural slums, ecological disaster areas." Large mechanized agricultural projects, particularly monoculture, drive people off the land and into cities, where they add to the unemployed. "In Algeria, by government's admission, unemployment rates are something on the order of 50 per cent."

Here is an arresting statement from John Cairns, Jr.:[5] "The agriculture industry has probably been responsible for more pollution than any other single industry. This is so primarily because regulatory agencies are mostly looking at point sources of pollution and not particularly at dispersed and intermittent pollution." Here is another from E. Walter Russell:[6] "Sulfate of ammonia is, I suppose, the most dangerous fertilizer used in Africa, because it makes such large demands on the calcium supplies of the soil, and in most of Africa the calcium supplies are very low. . . . It is unfortunately now a by-product of nylon manufacture, and the manufacturers have to get rid of the stuff, so it is cheap."

The Careless Technology is 1,030 pages long, and large parts of it are dry. It should be widely read, nevertheless, for its survey of what might be called second-stage technological failures—disasters brought about by our efforts to avert disaster.

If some of these papers are heavy going, the discussions that follow each section are compellingly readable. Here is an edited sample:

KASSAS[7]: The second point I would like to make concerns the impact of bilharziasis (schistosomiasis) on the human population. We can say that Egypt has a population that has lived with bilharziasis for thousands of

5. Research professor of zoology at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

6. Professor of soil science at the University of Reading, England.

7. Mohammad Abdul Fattah Kassas, professor of applied botany at the University of Cairo.

years. Bilharziasis eggs were discovered in ancient Egyptian mummies dated to the second or third dynasties. We might say at the minimum, then, that the Egyptians as a population have failed in several thousand years to eradicate and rid themselves of bilharziasis. But I can look at this fact another way and say that the Egyptian has managed to live with bilharziasis and bilharziasis has failed to eradicate Egyptians for thousands of years. In Dr. van der Schalie's paper, we are told that bilharziasis kills one out of every five people who die in Egypt. I wonder whether it is more painful to die of bilharziasis or die of hunger. I believe it is more demoralizing to die of hunger than to die of bilharziasis.

FARVAR[8]: Unfortunately for the peasants in the countryside they are the victims of schistosomiasis. These are also the people who produce the "food" which urban people consume. Thus, assuming that irrigation and technological development are indeed used to produce more food, we have the urban dwellers who make the decision to exchange food (for themselves) with disease (for the peasants). Naturally, from the point of view of the urbanite it is more demoralizing for him to die of hunger than for the peasant to die of schistosomiasis. The actual situation is even worse because the irrigation and the technology are not even used to produce food [so much] as they are to produce cash crops like cotton, and electricity (again for the enjoyment of the city people). How much should the peasants have to suffer in order to fulfill the whims of those who are ruling them from the cities? Who asks the peasants what price *they* are willing to pay? And when the cost is finally pointed out, the answer is invariably: "The solution is being field-tested just around the corner!"

MYRDAL[9]: Do you agree with my fundamental assumption for all development thinking: that we have a moral imperative to do our best to cure illnesses and prevent premature death?

BOULDING[10]: No. I think death is absolutely essential to mankind. The greatest disaster that the human race could ever face is immortality. By

8. Mary A. Farvar, an anthropologist at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.

9. Gunnar Karl Myrdal, professor of international economics at the University of Stockholm.

10. Kenneth E. Boulding, professor of economics at the University of Colorado.

the time our molecular biologists are finished, they may find out what it is that creates aging and tweak it out. This would be an unprecedented and unspeakable disaster.

I recommend this book particularly to science fiction writers, for the overview it gives of the world's present and near-future problems, and also (a by-product) for the opportunity to eavesdrop on real scientists and observe how much more intelligent, more interesting, and more human they are than their fictional counterparts.

Billion Year Spree by Brian W. Aldiss (Doubleday, 1973, $7.95)
Imaginary Worlds by Lin Carter (Ballantine, 1973, $1.25)

In these two books Brian Aldiss and Lin Carter have almost but not quite parceled out the history of imaginative fiction between them. Aldiss takes s.f. for his portion (from Mary Shelley onward). Carter claims the rest, i.e. fantasy, but in fact his subject is a subgenre, the dream-world story, stemming from Eddison and Howard. Between them falls the great bulk of fantasy writers, from Algernon Blackwood to Italo Calvino: even so, there are places where the two schemata interestingly overlap. Carter praises the invented place-names of Lovecraft; Aldiss mocks them as "anagrams of breakfast cereal names." Carter calls A. Merritt "an absolute master of the adventure fantasy"; Aldiss writes: "Merritt's overheated style exactly matched his plots, which were up to here in serpents, feathers, fur, great black stallions, freaks, naked women, evil priests, golden pigmies, talismen, monsters, lovely priestesses, sinister forces, and undefined longings." Carter praises William Hope Hodgson's *The Night Land;* Aldiss finds it unreadable. Carter calls William Morris's *The Wood Beyond the World* "the first great masterpiece of the imaginary-world tradition"; Aldiss reports that the novel "belongs to the tushery school ('She said, in a peevish voice: "Tush, Squire, the day is too far spent . . ." ')."

These examples sufficiently show the very different positions from

which the two writers begin; nevertheless Aldiss and Carter are both aficionados, and these books are labors of love.

Aldiss postpones his discussion of Lucian, Cyrano & Co. (he calls them "the Pilgrim Fathers") in order to begin his narrative with Erasmus Darwin, Charles Darwin's grandfather, whose influence on s.f. he traces from Erasmus' long poem *The Temple of Nature,* published posthumously in 1803, through Erasmus' contemporary William Godwin, author of *Caleb Williams,* to Godwin's daughter Mary, who wrote *Frankenstein.* Aldiss considers this work "the first real science fiction novel" (although he quotes Wells, who said the monster was animated by "jiggery-pokery magic"). Because it is a Gothic novel, and because there are undeniable traces of Gothic in later s.f., Aldiss has been tempted to propound a theory (which some may think perverse) that science fiction, along with the Western, is "no more than a lively sub-genre of Gothic."

Aldiss is at his best in discussing the literary progenitors of science fiction; he is illuminating on Walpole and Beckford, brilliant on Poe. Surprisingly, he devotes more than half his book to authors who he says did not write s.f. Although he quotes Kingsley Amis's famous couplet,[1] he appears to say, in several convoluted sentences,[2] that Jonathan Swift, Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce & Co. did not write s.f. *because they wrote literature.* But if their literature is not s.f., why not? Aldiss does not say. By ducking the problem in this traditional and circular way he vitiates his argument and leaves the question as vexed as ever.

In dealing with Wells, Heinlein, and Edgar Rice Burroughs, Aldiss is penetrating and witty. He is illuminating on the subject of such writers as Lewis Padgett (but he gives all the credit to Kuttner, forgetting that C. L. Moore was part of that by-line too), Olaf

1. "Sf's no good," they bellow till we're deaf.
"But this looks good."—"Well then, it's not sf."

2. E.g., "The greatest of these books would be the greatest of science fiction books if they were science fiction; but they are not, and it is only the growth of the genre since, stimulated by their vigorous example, which makes them seem to resemble it as much as they do."

Stapledon, and Walter Miller, Jr. ("cordon bleu pemmican"). He does somewhat less well with Haggard, "Saki," Chesterton, Hodgson, Kafka, and Lovecraft, and astonishingly misjudges van Vogt (good God, "tenderness"!).

About Gernsbackian s.f. he writes, "As long as the stories were built like diagrams, and made clear like diagrams, and stripped of atmosphere and sensibility, then it did not seem to matter how silly the 'science' or the psychology was." And about the New Wave: "To argue for either side in such a controversy is a mistake; phonies are thick on either hand, good writers few." There is much sound sense here, along with a certain amount of inevitable tedium. In the end, the book is faintly disappointing because of its muddy conception; Aldiss never confronts the problem of deciding what his subject is, and as a result he takes in at once too much and too little.

The book is marred by many evidences of haste, and by a coy use of French ("the more *au fait* citizens") and a genteel avoidance of the word "I" ("for this critic's taste"). Aldiss sometimes attempts American slang, e.g., "the wish to escape from urban civilization, where there are lousy jobs like railroad cop going."

Like Aldiss, Lin Carter lays his groundwork in a chapter of name-dropping—Gilgamesh, the Vedic hymns, the *Odyssey,* Akhnaton's *Hymn to the Sun,* etc. It is evident that he loves his subject enough actually to have read these works and many others. He writes knowledgeably of the *Mabinogion* and of Beckford's *Vathek.* His discussions of William Morris and Lord Dunsany, and of Tolkien (for whom he has a measured enthusiasm), are lucid and informative. His style is chatty, well larded with clichés. Like Aldiss, he has a healthy sense of his own unique importance; like Aldiss, he graces his text with many gratuitous allusions to himself and his works. Although his book is subtitled "The Art of Fantasy," and Carter maintains it is the first ever written on that subject, after the first few chapters it quickly narrows down to the kind of thing Carter writes himself, i.e., sword & sorcery. Within this narrow focus Carter's judgment is reliable if lenient; outside it, he is unde-

pendable. (He dismisses Thurber's *The Thirteen Clocks* as "essentially a sort of joke" because it scans and occasionally rhymes.) His chapter on technical problems is stupefyingly dull; he solemnly informs us that a kingdom is not the same thing as an empire, that great cities frequently arise near the mouths of rivers, etc. He quotes with approval C. S. Lewis's list of examples of realistic details in fiction, then, by his additions to it, shows that he has completely missed the point. He introduces the idea of stage business in fiction and manages to misunderstand *that*. The latter half of his book is trivial because its subject is trivial.

Nevertheless, these books give eloquent testimony of the two kinds of fascination that keep s.f. and fantasy obstinately alive. Aldiss: "These days, we all have two heads. Frankenstein's monster plunges along beside us, keeping just below the Plimsoll line of consciousness, buoyant with a life of its own." Carter: "All I know is that something within me wakes and thrills and responds to phrases like 'the splendid city of Celephais, in the Valley of Ooth-Nargai, beyond the Tanarian Hills,' where galleys 'sail up the river Oukranos past the gilded spires of Thran,' and 'elephant caravans tramp through perfumed jungles in Kled,' where 'forgotten palaces with veined ivory columns sleep lovely and unbroken under the moon.' "

DAMON KNIGHT

THE STARS BELOW

Only a madman would look for them underground.

Ursula K. Le Guin

The wooden house and outbuildings caught fire fast, blazed up, burned down, but the dome, built of lath and plaster above a drum of brick, would not burn. What they did at last was heap up the wreckage of the telescopes, the instruments, the books and charts and drawings, in the middle of the floor under the dome, pour oil on the heap, and set fire to that. The flames spread to the wooden beams of the big telescope frame and to the clockwork mechanisms. Villagers watching from the foot of the hill saw the dome, whitish against the green evening sky, shudder and turn, first in one direction then in the other, while a black and yellow smoke full of sparks gushed from the oblong slit: an ugly and uncanny thing to see.

It was getting dark, stars were showing in the east. Orders were shouted. The soldiers came down the road in single file, dark men in dark harness, silent.

The villagers at the foot of the hill stayed on after the soldiers

had gone. In a life without change or breadth a fire is as good as a festival. They did not climb the hill, and as the night grew full dark, they drew closer together. After a while they began to return to their villages. Some looked back over their shoulders at the hill, where nothing moved. The stars turned slowly behind the black beehive of the dome, but it did not turn to follow them.

About an hour before daybreak a man rode up the steep zigzag, dismounted by the ruins of the workshops, and approached the dome on foot. The door had been smashed in. Through it a reddish haze of light was visible, very dim, coming from a massive beam that had fallen and had smoldered all night inward to its core. A hanging, sour smoke thickened the air inside the dome. A tall figure moved there and its shadow moved with it, cast upward on the murk. Sometimes it stooped, or stopped, then blundered slowly on.

The man at the door said, "Guennar! Master Guennar!"

The man in the dome stopped still, looking toward the door. He had just picked up something from the mess of wreckage and half-burnt stuff on the floor. He put this object mechanically into his coat pocket, still peering at the door. He came toward it. His eyes were red and swollen almost shut, he breathed harshly in gasps, his hair and clothes were scorched and smeared with black ash.

"Where were you?"

The man in the dome pointed vaguely at the ground.

"There's a cellar? That's where you were during the fire? By God! Gone to ground! I knew it, I knew you'd be here." Bord laughed, a little crazily, taking Guennar's arm. "Come on. Come out of there, for the love of God. There's light in the east already."

The astronomer came reluctantly, looking not at the grey east but back up at the slit in the dome, where a few stars burned clear. Bord pulled him outside, made him mount the horse, and then, bridle in hand, set off down the hill leading the horse at a fast walk.

The astronomer held the pommel with one hand. The other hand, which had been burned across the palm and fingers when he picked up a metal fragment still red-hot under its coat of cinders,

he kept pressed against his thigh. He was not conscious of doing so, nor of the pain. Sometimes his senses told him, "I am on horseback," or, "It's getting lighter," but these fragmentary messages made no sense to him. He shivered with cold as the dawn wind rose, rattling the dark woods by which the two men and the horse now passed in a deep lane overhung by teasel and brier; but the woods, the wind, the whitening sky, the cold were all remote from his mind, in which there was nothing but a darkness shot with the reek and heat of burning.

Bord made him dismount. There was sunlight around them now, lying long on rocks above a river valley. There was a dark place, and Bord urged him and pulled him into the dark place. It was not hot and close there but cold and silent. As soon as Bord let him stop he sank down, for his knees would not bear; and he felt the cold rock against his seared and throbbing hands.

"Gone to earth, by God!" said Bord, looking about at the veined walls, marked with the scars of miners' picks, in the light of his lanterned candle. "I'll be back; after dark, maybe. Don't come out. Don't go farther in. This is an old adit, they haven't worked this end of the mine for years. May be slips and pitfalls in these old tunnels. Don't come out! Lie low. When the hounds are gone, we'll run you across the border."

Bord turned and went back up the adit in darkness. When the sound of his steps had long since died away, the astronomer lifted his head and looked around him at the dark walls and the little burning candle. Presently he blew it out. There came upon him the earth-smelling darkness, silent and complete. He saw green shapes, ochreous blots drifting on the black; these faded slowly. The dull, chill black was balm to his inflamed and aching eyes, and to his mind.

If he thought, sitting there in the dark, they were not thoughts that found words. He was feverish from exhaustion and smoke inhalation and a few slight burns, and in an abnormal condition of mind; but perhaps his mind's workings, though lucid and serene, had never been normal. It is not normal for a man to spend twenty

years grinding lenses, building telescopes, peering at stars, making calculations, lists, maps and charts of things which no one knows or cares about, things which cannot be reached, or touched, or held. And now all that which he had spent his life on was gone, burned. What was left of him might as well be, as it was, buried.

But it did not occur to him, this idea of being buried. All he was keenly aware of was a great burden of anger and grief, a burden he was unfit to carry. It was crushing his mind, crushing out reason. And the darkness here seemed to relieve that pressure. He was accustomed to the dark, he had lived at night. The weight here was only rock, only earth. No granite is so hard as hatred and no clay so cold as cruelty. The earth's black innocence enfolded him. He lay down within it, trembling a little with pain and with relief from pain, and slept.

Light waked him. Count Bord was there, lighting the candle with flint and steel. Bord's face was vivid in the light: the high color and blue eyes of a keen huntsman, a red mouth, sensual and obstinate. "They're on the scent," he was saying. "They know you got away."

"Why . . ." said the astronomer. His voice was weak; his throat, like his eyes, was still smoke-inflamed. "Why are they after me?"

"Why? Do you still need telling? To burn you alive, man! For heresy!" Bord's blue eyes glared through the steadying glow of the candle.

"But it's gone, burned, all I did."

"Aye, the earth's stopped, all right, but where's their fox? They want their fox! But damned if I'll let them get you."

The astronomer's eyes, light and wide-set, met his and held.

"Why?"

"You think I'm a fool," Bord said with a grin that was not a smile, a wolf's grin, the grin of the hunted and the hunter. "And I am one. I was a fool to warn you. You never listened. I was a fool to listen to you. But I liked to listen to you. I liked to hear you talk about the stars and the courses of the planets and the ends of time. Who else ever talked to me of anything but seed corn and cow

dung? Do you see? And I don't like soldiers and strangers, and trials and burnings. Your truth, their truth. What do I know about the truth? Am I a master? Do I know the courses of the stars? Maybe you do. Maybe they do. All I know is you have sat at my table and talked to me. Am I to watch you burn? God's fire, they say; but you said the stars are the fires of God. Why do you ask me that, 'Why?' Why do you ask a fool's question of a fool?"

"I am sorry," the astronomer said.

"What do you know about men?" the count said. "You thought they'd let you be. And you thought I'd let you burn." He looked at Guennar through the candlelight, grinning like a driven wolf, but in his blue eyes there was a glint of real amusement. "We who live down on the earth, you see, not up among the stars . . ."

He had brought a tinder box and three tallow candles, a bottle of water, a ball of pease pudding, a sack of bread. He left soon, warning the astronomer again not to venture out of the mine.

When Guennar woke again a strangeness in his situation troubled him, not one which would have worried most people hiding in a hole to save their skin, but most distressing to him: he did not know the time.

It was not clocks he missed, the sweet banging of the church bells in the villages calling to morning and evening prayer, the delicate and willing accuracy of the timepieces he used in his observatory and on whose refinement so many of his discoveries had depended; it was not the clocks he missed, but the great clock.

Not seeing the sky, one cannot know the turning of the earth. All the processes of time, the sun's bright arch and the moon's phases, the planets' dance, the wheeling of the constellations around the pole star, the vaster wheeling of the seasons of the stars, all these were lost, the warp on which his life was woven.

Here there was no time.

"O my God," Guennar the astronomer prayed in the darkness under ground, "how can it offend you to be praised? All I ever saw in my telescopes was one spark of your glory, one least fragment of

the order of your creation. You could not be jealous of that, my Lord! And there were few enough who believed me, even so. Was it my arrogance in daring to describe your works? But how could I help it, Lord, when you let me see the endless fields of stars? Could I see and be silent? O my God, do not punish me any more, let me rebuild the smaller telescope. I will not speak, I will not publish, if it troubles your holy Church. I will not say anything more about the orbits of the planets or the nature of the stars. I will not speak, Lord, only let me see!"

"What the devil, be quiet, Master Guennar. I could hear you halfway up the tunnel," said Bord, and the astronomer opened his eyes to the dazzle of Bord's lantern. "They've called the full hunt up for you. Now you're a necromancer. They swear they saw you sleeping in your house when they came, and they barred the doors; but there's no bones in the ashes."

"I was asleep," Guennar said, covering his eyes. "They came, the soldiers . . . I should have listened to you. I went into the passage under the dome. I left a passage there so I could go back to the hearth on cold nights. When it's cold my fingers get too stiff, I have to go warm my hands sometimes." He spread out his blistered, blackened hands and looked at them vaguely. "Then I heard them overhead . . ."

"Here's some more food. What the devil, haven't you eaten?"

"Has it been long?"

"A night and a day. It's night now. Raining. Listen, Master: there's two of the black hounds living at my house now. Emissaries of the Council, what the devil, I had to offer hospitality. This is my county, they're here, I'm the count. It makes it hard for me to come. And I don't want to send any of my people here. What if the priests asked them, 'Do you know where he is? Will you answer to God you don't know where he is?' It's best they don't know. I'll come when I can. You're all right here? You'll stay here? I'll get you out of here and over the border when they've cleared away. They're like flies now. Don't talk aloud like that. They might look

into these old tunnels. You should go farther in. I will come back. Stay with God, Master."

"Go with God, Count."

He saw the color of Bord's blue eyes, the leap of shadows up the rough-hewn roof as he took up the lantern and turned away. Light and color died as Bord, at the turning, put out the lantern. Guennar heard him stumble and swear as he groped his way.

Presently Guennar lighted one of his candles and ate and drank a little, eating the staler bread first, and breaking off a piece of the crusted lump of pease pudding. This time Bord had brought him three loaves and some salt meat, two more candles and a second skin bottle of water, and a heavy duffel cloak. Guennar had not felt cold. He was wearing the coat he always wore on cold nights in the observatory and very often slept in, when he came stumbling to bed at dawn. It was a good sheepskin, filthy from his rummagings in the wreckage in the dome and scorched at the sleeve ends, but it was as warm as ever, and was like his own skin to him. He sat inside it eating, gazing out through the sphere of frail yellow candlelight to the darkness of the tunnel beyond. Bord's words, "You should go farther in," were in his mind. When he was done eating he bundled up the provisions in the cloak, took up the bundle in one hand and the lighted candle in the other, and set off down the side tunnel and then the adit, down and inward.

After a few hundred paces he came to a major cross-tunnel, off which ran many short leads and some large rooms or stopes. He turned left, and presently passed a big stope in three levels. He entered it. The farthest level was only about five feet under the roof, which was still well timbered with posts and beams. In a corner of the backmost level, behind an angle of quartz intrusion which the miners had left jutting out as a supporting buttress, he made his new camp, setting out the food, water, tinderbox, and candles where they would come under his hand easily in the dark, and laying the cloak as a mattress on the floor, which was of a rubbly, hard clay. Then he put out the candle, already burned down by a quarter of its length, and lay down in the dark.

After his third return to that first side tunnel, finding no sign that Bord had come there, he went back to his camp and studied his provisions. There were still two loaves of bread, half a bottle of water, and the salt meat, which he had not yet touched; and four candles. He guessed that it might have been six days since Bord had come, but it might have been three, or eight. He was thirsty, but dared not drink, so long as he had no other supply.

He set off to find water.

At first he counted his paces. After a hundred and twenty he saw that the timbering of the tunnel was askew, and there were places where the rubble fill had broken through, half filling the passage. He came to a winze, a vertical shaft, easy to scramble down by what remained of the wooden ladder, but after it, in the lower level, he forgot to count his steps. Once he passed a broken pick handle; farther on he saw a miner's discarded headband, a stump of candle still stuck in the forehead socket. He dropped this into the pocket of his coat and went on.

The monotony of the walls of hewn stone and planking dulled his mind. He walked on like one who will walk forever. Darkness followed him and went ahead of him.

His candle burning short spilled a stream of hot tallow on his fingers, hurting him. He dropped the candle, and it went out.

He groped for it in the sudden dark, sickened by the reek of its smoke, lifting his head to avoid that stink of burning. Before him, straight before him, far away, he saw the stars.

Tiny, bright, remote, caught in a narrow opening like the slot in the observatory dome: an oblong full of stars in blackness.

He got up, forgetting about the candle, and began to run toward the stars.

They moved, dancing, like the stars in the telescope field when the clockwork mechanism shuddered or when his eyes were very tired. They danced and brightened.

He came among them, and they spoke to him.

The flames cast queer shadows on the blackened faces and brought queer lights out of the bright, living eyes.

"Here, then, who's that? Hanno?"

"What were you doing up that old drift, mate?"

"Hey, who is that?"

"Who the devil, stop him—"

"Hey, mate! Hold on!"

He ran blind into the dark, back the way he had come. The lights followed him and he chased his own faint, huge shadow down the tunnel. When the shadow was swallowed by the old dark and the old silence came again he still stumbled on, stooping and groping so that he was oftenest on all fours or on his feet and one hand. At last he dropped down and lay huddled against the wall, his chest full of fire.

Silence, dark.

He found the candle end in the tin holder in his pocket, lighted it with the flint and steel, and by its glow found the vertical shaft not fifty feet from where he had stopped. He made his way back up to his camp. There he slept; woke and ate, and drank the last of his water; meant to get up and go seeking water again; fell asleep, or into a doze or daze, in which he dreamed of a voice speaking to him.

"There you are. All right. Don't startle. I'll do you no harm. I said it wasn't no knocker. Who ever heard of a knocker as tall as a man? Or who ever seen one, for that matter. They're what you *don't* see, mates, I said. And what we did see was a man, count on it. So what's he doing in the mine, said they, and what if he's a ghost, one of the lads that was caught when the house of water broke in the old south adit, maybe, come walking? Well, then, I said, I'll go see that. I never seen a ghost yet, for all I heard of them. I don't care to see what's not meant to be seen, like the knocker folk, but what harm to see Temon's face again, or old Trip, haven't I seen 'em in dreams, just the same, in the ends, working away with their faces sweating same as life? Why not? So I come along. But you're no ghost, nor miner. A deserter you might be, or a thief. Or are you out of your wits, is that it, poor man? Don't

fear. Hide if you like. What's it to me? There's room down here for you and me. Why are you hiding from the light of the sun?"

"The soldiers . . ."

"I thought so."

When the miner nodded, the candle bound to his forehead set light leaping over the roof of the stope. He squatted about ten feet from Guennar, his hands hanging between his knees. A bunch of candles and his pick, a short-handled, finely shaped tool, hung from his belt. His face and body, beneath the restless star of the candle, were rough shadows, earth-colored.

"Let me stay here."

"Stay and welcome! Do I own the mine? Where did you come in, eh, the old drift above the river? That was luck to find that, and luck you turned this way in the crosscut, and didn't go east instead. Eastward this level goes on to the caves. There's great caves there; did you know it? Nobody knows but the miners. They opened up the caves before I was born, following the old lode that lay along here sunward. I seen the caves once, my dad took me, you should see this once, he says. See the world underneath the world. A room there was no end to. A cavern as deep as the sky, and a black stream falling into it, falling and falling till the light of the candle failed and couldn't follow it, and still the water was falling on down into the pit. The sound of it came up like a whisper without an end, out of the dark. And on beyond that there's other caves, and below. No end to them, maybe. Who knows? Cave under cave, and glittering with the barren crystal. It's all barren stone there. And all worked out here, years ago. It's a safe enough hole you chose, mate, if you hadn't come stumbling in on us. What was you after? Food? A human face?"

"Water."

"No lack of that. Come on, I'll show you. Beneath here in the lower level there's all too many springs. You turned the wrong direction. I used to work down there, with the damned cold water up to my knees, before the vein ran out. A long time ago. Come on."

The old miner left him in his camp, after showing him where the spring rose and warning him not to follow down the watercourse, for the timbering would be rotted and a step or sound might bring the earth down. Down there all the timbers were covered with a deep glittering white fur: saltpeter perhaps, or a fungus; it was very strange, above the oily water. When he was alone again Guennar thought he had dreamed that white tunnel full of black water, and the visit of the miner. When he saw a flicker of light far down the tunnel, he crouched behind the quartz buttress with a great wedge of granite in his hand: for all his fear and anger and grief had come down to one thing here in the darkness, a determination that no man would lay hand on him. A blind determination, blunt and heavy as a broken stone, heavy in his soul.

It was only the old man coming, with a hunk of dry cheese for him.

He sat with the astronomer, and talked. Guennar ate up the cheese, for he had no food left, and listened to the old man talk. As he listened the weight seemed to lift a little, he seemed to see a little farther in the dark.

"You're no common soldier," the miner said, and he replied, "No, I was a student once," but no more, because he dared not tell the miner who he was. The old man knew all the events of the region; he spoke of the burning of the "Round House" on the hill, and of Count Bord. "He went off to the city with them, with these black-gowns, to be tried, they do say, to come before their council. Tried for what? what did he ever do but hunt boar and deer and foxen? is it the council of the foxen trying him? What's it all about, this snooping and soldiering and burning and trying? Better leave honest folk alone. The count was honest, as far as the rich can be, a fair landlord. But you can't trust them, none of such folk. Only down here. You can trust the men who go down into the mine. What else has a man got down here but his own hands and his mates' hands? What's between him and death, when there's a fall in the level or a winze closes and he's in the blind end, but their hands, and their shovels, and their will to dig him out? There'd be

no silver up there in the sun if there wasn't trust between us down here in the dark. Down here you can count on your mates. And nobody comes but them. Can you see the owner in his lace, or the soldiers, coming down the ladders, coming down and down the great shaft into the dark? Not them! They're brave at tramping on the grass, but what good's a sword and shouting in the dark? I'd like to see 'em come down here . . ."

The next time he came another man was with him, and they brought an oil lamp and a clay jar of oil, as well as more cheese, bread, and some apples. "It was Hanno thought of the lamp," the old man said. "A hempen wick it is, if she goes out blow sharp and she'll likely catch up again. Here's a dozen candles, too. Young Per swiped the lot from the doler, up on the grass."

"They all know I'm here?"

"*We* do," the miner said briefly. "*They* don't."

Some time after this, Guennar returned along the lower, west-leading level he had followed before, till he saw the miners' candles dance like stars; and he came into the stope where they were working. They shared their meal with him. They showed him the ways of the mine, and the pumps, and the great shaft where the ladders were and the hanging pulleys with their buckets; he sheered off from that, for the wind that came sucking down the great shaft smelled to him of burning. They took him back and let him work with them. They treated him as a guest, as a child. They had adopted him. He was their secret.

There is not much good spending twelve hours a day in a black hole in the ground all your life long if there's nothing there, no secret, no treasure, nothing hidden.

There was the silver, to be sure. But where ten crews of fifteen had used to work these levels and there had been no end to the groan and clatter and crash of the loaded buckets going up on the screaming winch and the empties banging down to meet the trammers running with their heavy carts, now one crew of eight men worked: men over forty, old men, who had no skill but mining. There was still some silver there in the hard granite, in little veins

among the gangue. Sometimes they would lengthen an end by one foot in two weeks.

"It was a great mine," they said with pride.

They showed the astronomer how to set a gad and swing the sledge, how to go at granite with the finely balanced and sharp-pointed pick, how to sort and "cob," what to look for, the rare bright branchings of the pure metal, the crumbling rich rock of the ore. He helped them daily. He was in the stope waiting for them when they came, and spelled one or another on and off all day with the shovel work, or sharpening tools, or running the ore cart down its grooved plank to the great shaft, or working in the ends. There they would not let him work long; pride and habit forbade it. "Here, leave off chopping at that like a woodcutter. Look, this way: see?" But then another would ask him, "Give me a blow here, lad, see, on the gad, that's it."

They fed him from their own coarse meager meals.

In the night, alone in the hollow earth, when they had climbed the long ladders up "to grass" as they said, he lay and thought of them, their faces, their voices, their heavy, scarred, earth-stained hands, old men's hands with thick nails blackened by bruising rock and steel; those hands, intelligent and vulnerable, which had opened up the earth and found the shining silver in the solid rock. The silver they never held, never kept, never spent. The silver that was not theirs.

"If you found a new vein, a new lode, what would you do?"

"Open her, and tell the masters."

"Why tell the masters?"

"Why, man! we gets paid for what we brings up! D'you think we does this damned work for love?"

"Yes."

They all laughed at him, loud, jeering laughter, innocent. The living eyes shone in their faces blackened with dust and sweat.

"Ah, if we could find a new lode! The wife would keep a pig like we had once, and by God I'd swim in beer! But if there's silver

they'd have found it; that's why they pushed the workings so far east. But it's barren there, and worked out here, that's the short and long of it."

Time stretched behind him and ahead of him like the dark drifts and crosscuts of the mine, all present at once, wherever he with his small candle might be among them. When he was alone now the astronomer often wandered in the tunnels and the old stopes, knowing the dangerous places, the deep levels full of water, adept at shaky ladders and tight places, intrigued by the play of his candle on the rock walls and faces, the glitter of mica that seemed to come from deep inside the stone. Why did it sometimes shine out that way? as if the candle found something far within the shining broken surface, something that winked in answer and occulted, as if it had slipped behind a cloud or an unseen planet's disk.

"There are stars in the earth," he thought. "If one knew how to see them."

Awkward with the pick, he was clever with machinery; they admired his skill, and brought him tools. He repaired pumps and windlasses; he fixed up a lamp on a chain for "young Per" working in a long narrow dead-end, with a reflector made from a tin candle holder beaten out into a curved sheet and polished with fine rock-dust and the sheepskin lining of his coat. "It's a marvel," Per said. "Like daylight. Only, being behind me, it don't go out when the air gets bad, and tell me I should be backing out for a breath."

For a man can go on working in a narrow end for some time after his candle has gone out for lack of oxygen.

"You should have a bellows rigged there."

"What, like I was a forge?"

"Why not?"

"Do ye ever go up to the grass, nights?" asked Hanno, looking wistfully at Guennar. Hanno was a melancholy, thoughtful, soft-hearted fellow. "Just to look about you?"

Guennar did not answer. He went off to help Bran with a timbering job; the miners did all the work that had once been done by crews of timberers, trammers, sorters, and so on.

"He's deathly afraid to leave the mine," Per said, low.

"Just to see the stars and get a breath of the wind," Hanno said, as if he was still speaking to Guennar.

One night the astronomer emptied out his pockets and looked at the stuff that had been in them since the night of the burning of the observatory: things he had picked up in those hours which he now could not remember, those hours when he had groped and stumbled in the smoldering wreckage, seeking . . . seeking what he had lost . . . he no longer thought of what he had lost. It was sealed off in his mind by a thick scar, a burn scar. For a long time this scar in his mind kept him from understanding the nature of the objects now ranged before him on the dusty stone floor of the mine: a wad of papers scorched all along one side; a round piece of glass or crystal; a metal tube; a beautifully worked wooden cogwheel; a bit of twisted blackened copper etched with fine lines; and so on, bits, wrecks, scraps. He put the papers back into his pocket, without trying to separate the brittle half-fused leaves and make out the fine script. He continued to look at and occasionally pick up and examine the other things, especially the piece of glass.

This he knew to be the eyepiece of his ten-inch telescope. He had ground the lens himself. When he picked it up he handled it delicately, by the edges, lest the acid of his skin etch the glass. Finally he began to polish it clean, using a wisp of fine lamb's wool from his coat. When it was clear, he held it up and looked at and through it at all angles. His face was calm and intent, his light wide-set eyes steady.

Tilted in his fingers, the telescope lens reflected the lamp flame in one bright tiny point near the edge and seemingly beneath the curve of the face, as if the lens had kept a star in it from the many hundred nights it had been turned toward the sky.

He wrapped it carefully in the wisp of wool and made a place

for it in the rock niche with his tinderbox. Then he took up the other things one by one.

During the next weeks the miners saw their fugitive less often while they worked. He was off a great deal by himself: exploring the deserted eastern regions of the mine, he said, when they asked him what he did.

"What for?"

"Prospecting," he said with the brief, wincing smile that gave him a very crazy look.

"Oh, lad, what do you know about that? She's all barren there. The silver's gone; and they found no eastern lode. You might be finding a bit of poor ore or a vein of tinstone, but nothing worth the digging."

"How do you know what's in the earth, in the rock under your feet, Per?"

"I know the signs, lad. Who should know better?"

"But if the signs are hidden?"

"Then the silver's hidden."

"Yet you know it is there, if you knew where to dig, if you could see into the rock. And what else is there? You find the metal, because you seek it, and dig for it. But what else might you find, deeper than the mine, if you sought, if you knew where to dig?"

"Rock," said Per. "Rock, and rock, and rock."

"And then?"

"And then? Hellfire, for all I know. Why else does it get hotter as the shafts go deeper? That's what they say. Getting nearer hell."

"No," the astronomer said, clear and firm. "No. There is no hell beneath the rocks."

"What is there, then, underneath it all?"

"The stars."

"Ah," said the miner, floored. He scratched his rough, tallow-clotted hair, and laughed. "There's a poser," he said, and stared at Guennar with pity and admiration. He knew Guennar was mad, but the size of his madness was a new thing to him, and admirable. "Will you find 'em then, the stars?"

"If I learn how to look," Guennar said, so calmly that Per had no response but to heft his shovel and get back to loading the cart.

One morning when the miners came down they found Guennar still sleeping, rolled up in the battered cloak Count Bord had given him, and by him a strange object, a contraption made of silver tubing, tin struts and wires beaten from old headlamp sockets, a frame of pick handles carefully carved and fitted, cogged wheels, a bit of twinkling glass. It was elusive, makeshift, delicate, crazy, intricate.

"What the devil's that?"

They stood about and stared at the thing, the lights of their headlamps centering on it, a yellow beam sometimes flickering over the sleeping man as one or another glanced at him.

"He made it, sure."

"Sure enough."

"What for?"

"Don't touch it."

"I wasn't going to."

Roused by their voices, the astronomer sat up. The yellow beams of the candles brought his face out white against the dark. He rubbed his eyes and greeted them.

"What would that be, lad?"

He looked troubled or confused when he saw the object of their curiosity. He put a hand on it protectively, yet he looked at it himself without seeming to recognize it for a while. At last he said, frowning and speaking in a whisper, "It's a telescope."

"What's that?"

"A device that makes distant things clear to the eye."

"How come?" one of the miners asked, baffled. The astronomer answered him with growing assurance. "By virtue of certain properties of light and lenses. The eye is a delicate instrument, but it is blind to half the universe—far more than half. The night sky is black, we say: between the stars is void and darkness. But turn the telescope eye on that space between the stars, and lo, the stars! Stars too faint and far for the eye alone to see, rank behind rank, glory beyond glory, out to the uttermost boundaries of the universe.

Beyond all imagination, in the outer darkness, there is light: a great glory of sunlight. I have seen it. I have seen it, night after night, and mapped the stars, the beacons of God on the shores of darkness. And here too there is light! There is no place bereft of the light, the comfort and radiance of the creator spirit. There is no place that is outcast, outlawed, forsaken. There is no place left dark. Where the eyes of God have seen, there light is. We must go farther, we must look farther! There is light if we will see it. Not with eyes alone, but with the skill of the hands and the knowledge of the mind and the heart's faith is the unseen revealed, and the hidden made plain. And all the dark earth shines like a sleeping star."

He spoke with that authority which the miners knew belonged by rights to the priests, to the great words priests spoke in the echoing churches. It did not belong here, in the hole where they grubbed their living, in the words of a crazy fugitive. Later on, one talking to another, they shook their heads, or tapped them. Per said, "The madness is growing in him," and Hanno said, "Poor soul, poor soul!" Yet there was not one of them who did not, also, believe what the astronomer had told them.

"Show me," said old Bran, finding Guennar alone in a deep eastern drift, busy with his intricate device. It was Bran who had first followed Guennar, and brought him food, and led him back to the others.

The astronomer willingly stood aside and showed Bran how to hold the device pointing downward at the tunnel floor, and how to aim and focus it, and tried to describe its function and what Bran might see: all hesitantly, since he was not used to explaining to the ignorant, but without impatience when Bran did not understand.

"I don't see nothing but the ground," the old man said after a long and solemn observation with the instrument. "And the little dust and pebbles on it."

"The lamp blinds your eyes, perhaps," the astronomer said with humility. "It is better to look without light. I can do it because I have done it for so long. It is all practice—like placing the gads, which you always do right, and I always do wrong."

"Aye. Maybe. Tell me what you see—" Bran hesitated. He had not long ago realized who Guennar must be. Knowing him to be a heretic made no difference, but knowing him to be a learned man made it hard to call him "mate" or "lad." And yet here, and after all this time, he could not call him "Master." There were times when for all his mildness the fugitive spoke with great words, gripping one's soul, times when it would have been easy to call him Master. But it would have frightened him.

The astronomer put his hand on the frame of his mechanism and replied in a soft voice, "There are . . . constellations."

"What's that, constellations?"

The astronomer looked at Bran as if from a great way off, and said presently, "The Wain, the Scorpion, the Sickle by the Milky Way in summer, those are constellations. Patterns of stars, gatherings of stars, parenthoods, semblances . . ."

"And you see those here, with this?"

Still looking at him through the weak lamplight with clear brooding eyes, the astronomer nodded, and did not speak, but pointed downward, at the rock on which they stood, the hewn floor of the mine.

"What are they like?" Bran's voice was hushed.

"I have only glimpsed them. Only for a moment. I have not learned the skill; it is a somewhat different skill . . . But they are there, Bran."

Often now he was not in the stope when they came to work, and did not join them even for their meal, though they always left him a share of food. He knew the ways of the mine now better than any of them, even Bran, not only the "living" mine but the "dead" one, the abandoned workings and exploratory tunnels that ran eastward, ever deeper, toward the caves. There he was most often; and they did not follow him.

When he did appear amongst them and they talked with him, they were more timid with him, and did not laugh.

One night as they were all going back with the last cartload to

the main shaft, he came to meet them, stepping suddenly out of a crosscut to their right. As always, he wore his ragged sheepskin coat, black with the clay and dirt of the tunnels. His fair hair had gone grey. His eyes were clear. "Bran," he said, "come, I can show you now."

"Show me what?"

"The stars. The stars beneath the rock. There's a great constellation in the stope on the old fourth level, where the white granite cuts down through the black."

"I know the place."

"It's there: underfoot, by that wall of white rock. A great shining and assembly of stars. Their radiance beats up through the darkness. They are like the faces of dancers, the eyes of angels. Come and see them, Bran!"

The miners stood there, Per and Hanno with backs braced to hold the cart from rolling: stooped men with tired, dirty faces and big hands bent and hardened by the grip of shovel and pick and sledge. They were embarrassed, compassionate, impatient.

"We're just quitting. Off home to supper. Tomorrow," Bran said. The astronomer looked from one face to another and said nothing.

Hanno said in his hoarse gentle voice, "Come up with us, for this once, lad. It's dark night out, and likely raining; it's November now; no soul will see you if you come and sit at my hearth, for once, and eat hot food, and sleep beneath a roof and not under the heavy earth all by yourself alone!"

Guennar stepped back. It was as if a light went out, as his face went into shadow. "No," he said. "They will burn out my eyes."

"Leave him be," said Per, and set the heavy ore-cart moving toward the shaft.

"Look where I told you," Guennar said to Bran. "The mine is not dead. Look with your own eyes."

"Aye. I'll come with you and see. Good night!"

"Good night," said the astronomer, and turned back to the side tunnel as they went on. He carried no lamp or candle; they saw him one moment, darkness the next.

In the morning he was not there to meet them. He did not come.

Bran and Hanno sought him, idly at first, then for one whole day. They went as far down as they dared, and came at last to the entrance of the caves, and entered, calling sometimes, though in the great caverns even they, miners all their lives, dared not call aloud because of the terror of the endless echoes in the dark.

"He has gone down," Bran said. "Down farther. That's what he said. Go farther, you must go farther, to find the light."

"There is no light," Hanno whispered. "There was never light here. Not since the world's creation."

But Bran was an obstinate old man, with a literal and credulous mind; and Per listened to him. One day the two went to the place the astronomer had spoken of, where a great vein of hard light granite that cut down through the darker rock had been left untouched, fifty years ago, as barren stone. They retimbered the roof of the old stope where the supports had weakened, and began to dig, not into the white rock but down, beside it; the astronomer had left a mark there, a kind of chart or symbol drawn with candleblack on the stone floor. They came on silver ore a foot down, beneath the shell of quartz; and under that—all eight of them working now—the striking picks laid bare the raw silver, the veins and branches and knots and nodes shining among broken crystals in the shattered rock, like stars and gatherings of stars, depth below depth without end, the light.

A BROTHER TO DRAGONS, A COMPANION OF OWLS

This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I *am,* and *there is* none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.

Kate Wilhelm

It is late in the afternoon, a warm, hazy autumn day; the frost has already turned the leaves golden and scarlet, and the insects are quieted for the season. Although there are no fires in the city, no smokestacks sending clouds to meet clouds, the air is somehow thick and blurs the outlines of things in the distance. In the distance the buildings seem more blue than stone-colored, more grey than they are, and they have no distinct edges. Finally the canyons of the buildings and the thick air blend and there is only the grey-blue. The city is still.

In the fourth-floor apartment of one of the buildings overlooking a park, an old man sits at a table that is six feet long, covered with books and notebooks. There is a kerosene lamp on the table, not lighted at this hour. The books are Bibles, and a concordance that is a thousand pages thick. Another table abuts the work table, and it is covered also, but most of the material there is the old man's

writing. Notebooks filled, others opened, not yet completed, card files, piles of notes on yellow paper.

The old man is bent over the table, following a line of print with his finger, pursing his lips, his face rigid with concentration. He wears glasses that are not properly fitted, and now and again he pushes them onto the bridge of his nose. Occasionally he pauses in his reading and looks at the park across the street, the source of the yellow in the light. The trees at this end of the park are almost uniformly gold now. The old man thinks that one day he will study the trees and relearn their names—he knew them once—and the names of the flowers that are still blooming, having become naturalized in the park long ago. Wildflowers, that is all he knows about them. They are yellow also. The old man thinks that it is shameful that he knows so little about the trees, the flowers, the insects. They all have names, every tree its own name, every kind of grass, every kind of insect. The clouds. The kinds of soils, the rocks. And he knows none of them. Only recently has he begun to have such thoughts. He rubs his eyes; they tend to water after reading too long, and he wonders why so many of the Bibles were printed in such small type. He thinks it was to save paper, to keep the weight manageable, but that is only a guess. Perhaps it was custom. He pushes his glasses up firmly and bends over the books again.

The old man is strong, with good muscles in his legs and arms, his back strong and straight. His hair is very light, and even though it has whitened in the past three years, it looks much the same as always, except that now it has become very fine, almost like baby's hair. It is as if his hair is wearing out before anything else. He has a beard that is soft also, not the coarse pubic hair of many beards. When the wind blows through it, it parts in unfamiliar ways, just as a girl's long hair does, and when the wind is through rearranging it, it falls back into place easily and shows no disarray. The old man reads, and now he turns and searches among the many notebooks, finds the one he wants and draws it to him. On the cover is his name, written in beautiful script: Llewellyn Frick.

He begins to write. He is still writing when the door is flung open and another man runs in wildly, his face ashen. He is plump and soft, unfinished-looking, as if time that has carved the old man's face has left his untouched. He is forty perhaps, dressed in a red cape that opens to reveal a blue robe. He is barefoot. He rushes to the desk and grabs the old man's arm frantically.

"Not now, Boy," the old man says, and pulls his arm free. He doesn't look up. Boy has made him trail a thick line down the page and he is too irritated to show forgiveness immediately, but neither does he want to scold. Boy shakes him again and this time his insistence communicates itself and the old man looks at him.

"For God's sake, Boy . . ." The old man stops and stands up. His voice becomes very gentle. "What is it, Boy? What happened?"

Boy gestures wildly and runs to the window, pointing. The old man follows, sees nothing on the streets below. He puts his arm about Boy's shoulders and, holding him, says, "Calm down, Boy, and try to tell me. What is it?"

Boy has started to weep, and the old man pulls him away from the window and forces him into a chair. He is much stronger than Boy, taller, heavier. He kneels in front of Boy and says soothingly, "It's all right, Boy. It's all right. Take it easy." He says it over and over until Boy is able to look at him and start to gesticulate in a way the old man can understand.

Once, many years ago, a pack of wild dogs entered the city and almost ran Boy down. He fled through the alleys, through stores, through backyards, every short cut that he knew, and they followed, yelping, driven by hunger. The old man heard them blocks from the apartment building and went out with his shotgun.

Now Boy makes the same motions he made then. *They almost caught him. They were after him.* The old man returns to the window. "Dogs?" He looks out and the city is quiet; the sun is very low now and the shadows fall across the streets, fill the streets. Boy runs after him and tries fiercely to pull him away from the window, shaking his head. *Not dogs.*

He shakes his head wildly now, and he touches the old man,

touches himself, then holds his hand at waist level, then a bit higher, a bit lower. "Animals?" the old man asks. Again the wild shake. "People? Little people? Children?"

Children! The old man stares at Boy in disbelief. Children? In the city? Boy pulls at him again, to get him away from the window. The old man searches the darkening shadows and sees nothing. The city is very quiet. No wind blows. There is nothing out there to make a sound.

Children! Again and again he demands that Boy change his story. It was animals. Dogs. Wild cats. Anything but children. Boy is weeping again, and when the old man starts to light the lamp, Boy knocks it from his hands. The oil spills and makes a gleaming, dark pattern on the tile floor, a runner from the door to the center of the room. The old man stares at it.

"I'll have to tell the others," the old man says, but he doesn't move. He still can't believe there are any children in the city. He can't believe there are any children anywhere in the country, in the world. Finally he starts to move toward the door, avoiding the oil. Boy tugs at him, holds his robe, clutches at his arm.

"Boy," the old man says gently, "it's all right. I have to tell everyone else, or they might make fires, put lights on, draw the children this way. Don't you understand?" Boy's eyes are insane with fear. He looks this way and that like an animal that smells the blood of slaughter and is helpless to communicate its terror. Suddenly he lets go the old man's robe and darts to the door, out into the hall, and vanishes into the shadows that are impenetrable at the end of the hall.

It is not so dark outside, after all. The twilight is long at this time of year, but there is a touch of frost in the air, a hint that by morning the grass will have a white sheath, that the leaves will be silver and gold, that the late-blooming flowers will be touched and that perhaps this time they will turn brown and finally black. The old man walks through the corner of the park, and it makes little difference to him if there is light or not. For thirty-two years he has lived in that building, has walked in this park at all hours; his

feet know it as well by night as by day. It is easier to walk in the park than on the city streets and sidewalks. Whole sections of roadways have caved in, and other sections are upthrust, tilting precariously. Everywhere the grass has taken hold, creeping along cracks, creating chasms and filling them. When the old man emerges from the trees, he is on the far side of a wide street from a large department store. This side of the building is almost all open. Once it was glass-fronted and very expensive; now it is Monica Auerbach's private palace.

Inside the palace graceful columns of black marble rise out of sight. The counters have been removed and oddities now occupy the spots where the rough construction might otherwise show. A bronze Buddha from the garden shop; a cupid with a birdbath, chalklike in the dim light; a bookcase with knick-knacks on its shelves—china cups in matching saucers, a teapot, a jade bowl, owls. Monica is very fond of owls. There is something draped in tattered and brittle material that over the years has turned to a strange blue with a violet sheen. Farther back everything fades into shadows as the light fails. The old man starts up the wide, ornate stairs. On the second floor he calls her. On the third floor he finds her.

This floor once housed the furniture department and a plush restaurant. One side is open to the last rays of the still bright western sky, and the sunlight slants through a forest scene, not yet finished, but already thick with greenery. It even smells like a living forest, and the old man realizes what Boy's missions for Monica have been during the past weeks: there are dozens of six- to eight-foot evergreens in planters in the foreground, and a small hill of pine cones. Monica is creating a green spot to see her through the coming winter.

Now the old man sees Monica. She is tying red balls on one of the plastic trees. She must have scoured the city for the greenery, there is so much of it. Palm trees, vines, garlands of leaves. Monica glances his way and her face sets in hard lines; she is furious with him for ruining her surprise, for intruding before opening day. She

ignores him, passes behind the tree she is decorating, and continues to tie on the red balls.

The old man walks over a carpet of plastic earth and grass (but the rocks scattered on the path are real) and approaches her. Across the room are lanterns already lighted; often Monica works on into the night.

"Boy saw children in the city today, Monica."

She turns her back on him and studies the tree, her eyes narrowed in thought.

"Boy saw children!" he shouts at her.

Her hands shake now when she reaches for the tree, and she jerks them back behind her.

"There are children in the city, Monica! You should not show any lights tonight, until we decide what to do. Do you understand?"

Monica is pouting. She looks away from him and he is afraid she is going to weep because he has spoiled her surprise. The old man begins to turn off the lanterns. Monica doesn't look at him. She is a silhouette against the pale sky, slender still, elegant-looking with her hair carefully done up, wearing a long dress that, in this dim light, no longer shows the slits where brittle age has touched it. She is looking at the city when he leaves.

Now the stars are out, and the streets are too dark to see more than a hundred yards in any direction. The old man hesitates outside the church, then resolutely goes inside and climbs to the belfry. The bell has always been their signal to gather. And if the children hear? He shakes his head and pulls the rope; the bell sounds alarmingly loud. The children already know there is someone in the city, and perhaps they are still too far from this area to hear the bell. He catches the clapper before it can strike a second time.

He waits in the church for the others to assemble, and he tries to remember when the last night session was called. He has only one candle burning, its light far from the massive doors. As the others arrive, the one light is a message, and they become subdued and fearful as they enter and silently go to the front of the church. They are as quiet as ghosts, they look like ghosts in their floor-length robes

and capes. Sixteen of the surviving twenty-two residents attend the meeting. The old man waits until it seems likely that no one else will come, and then he tells them about the children. For an hour they talk. There is Sam Whitten, the senior member, who is senile and can't cope with the idea of children at all. There is Sandra Littleton, who wants an expedition sent out immediately to find the children, bring them in to the warmth of her fires, who wants to feed them, school them, care for them. There is Jake Pulaski, who thinks they should be caught and killed. Someone else wants them run out of town again. Another thinks everyone should hide and let the children roam until they get tired and leave. And so on, for an hour. Nothing is decided.

Boy is still hiding when the old man returns to his apartment. He may hide for days or weeks. The old man prepares his dinner and eats it in an inner room where the lights won't show, and then he stands at the window looking at the dark city for a long time. The old man and Boy are the only ones who live in rooms this high; everyone else has found a first- or second-floor apartment, or a house, and sometimes they complain about the old man's stairs. Sometimes they have to stand in the street and shout for him when they need his help. Recently the old man's legs have been bothering him a bit, not much, not often, but it is an indication that before long he will have to descend a floor or two. He will do it reluctantly. He likes to be able to look out over the city, to be above the trees.

It is very cold when he finally goes to bed, chilled. He has decided not to have a fire. No fire, no smoke, no lights. Not yet. Sometime in the night Monica slips into his bed.

"Lew, are there really children?"

"Boy says so."

She is silent, warmer than he is, sharing her warmth with him.

"And we have grown so used to thinking that we were the last," she says after a long time. "Everything will change now, won't it?"

"I don't know. Maybe they'll just vanish again."

Neither of them believes this. After a time they sleep, and when

the old man awakens, at the first vague light of dawn, Monica is gone. He lies in the warm bed and thinks about the many nights they shared, not for warmth, and he has no regrets, only a mild curiosity that it could have died as it did, leaving memories without bitterness.

The children play in the rubble of the burned-out block of apartments visible from the old man's building, between the park and the river warehouse district. The old man is standing at an eighth-floor window watching one of them, a small girl, through a telescope that brings her so close he feels he can reach out and touch her golden hair. There are seven of them, the oldest probably no more than thirteen, the youngest, the blond girl, about five or six.

"Let me have a turn, Lew," Myra Olney says. Her eyes are red. She has been weeping ever since she first saw the children. She is waiting for her son Timmy to come home. Timmy has been dead for fifty-five years. The old man moves aside, and Myra swings the telescope too far and loses the children. Walter Gilson adjusts it for her and rejoins the others.

"We can't just ignore them, pretend they don't exist," Walter says. He hoists his robe to sit down, and it drapes between his knees. Only three of the men still wear trousers. Their robes are made of wool, old blankets, cut-apart overcoats sewn together in a more practical style. The wool holds up better than any other material. The synthetics have split and cracked as they aged.

"Just exactly what did Boy say?" Sid Elliston asks for the third time.

"I told you. He said they tried to catch him. He could have been frightened and imagined it. You know he's terrified of anything out of the ordinary."

They all know about Boy. He is cleverer than most of them about practical things: he found the tanks they all use to collect water on the roofs, and the pipes to provide running water. He found nuts and a grinder, so they have flour of a sort. He found the hospital

supplies deep in a hidden vault. They know that without Boy their lives would be much harder, perhaps impossible. Also, they know that Boy is strange.

Sid has taken Myra's place at the telescope, and she sits by the old man and clutches his arm and pleads with him. They all seem to regard the children as his problem, perhaps because Boy found them, and they know Boy is his problem.

"You have to go out there and bring them in," Myra says, weeping. "It's getting colder and colder. They'll freeze."

"They've managed to stay alive this long," Harry Gould says. "Let them go back to where they came from. It could be a trap. They draw us out and then others grab our houses, our food."

"You know we could feed a hundred times that many," Walter says. "They ain't carrying nothing. What do you suppose they've been eating?"

"Small game," someone suggests. "Boy says there are rabbits right here in the city, and birds. I saw some birds last week. Robins."

The old man shakes his head. Not robins. They come in the spring, not in the fall.

He goes back to the window, and Sid doesn't question his right to the telescope but moves aside at his approach. The old man locates the children and searches for the little blond girl. They are throwing sticks and stones at something, he can't make out what it is. A can? There are no cans; they have all rusted away. A rat? He wonders if there are rats again. Monica has told him that before he arrived in the city there were millions of rats, but their numbers have dwindled, and he has seen none at all for five years or more.

"We will bring them in," he says suddenly, and leaves the window. "We can't let them starve or freeze."

"It's our God-given duty," Myra says tearfully, "to care for them. It's the start of everything again. I knew it couldn't all just end like that. I knew it!"

"We'll have to educate them! Teach them math and literature!"

"Maybe they'll be able to make the lights work again!"

"And they will plant crops. Corn. Wheat. String beans."

"And keep cattle. I can teach them how to milk. My father had fifty head of cattle on his farm. I know how to milk."

"We shall teach them to live by ethics. No more religion. No sects. No discrimination. A pure system of ethics."

"What do you mean? How can you teach them ethics without religion? A contradiction in terms, isn't it?" Walter glares at Sid, who turns away scowling.

"We'll teach them all religions, in a historical sense, so they'll grasp the allusions in the books they'll read."

"And democracy . . ."

"What do you know about democracy? What we have, what's worked for us is pure anarchy, nothing more or less."

At the telescope Mary Halloran suddenly screams softly and backs away from the eyepiece, her hands over her mouth. "Lew! Look at them!"

He looks and sees that they have built a fire, and they are roasting rats. He can see the rats clearly; they are not yet dead, but writhe and squirm, and he imagines he can hear their shrill cries. The children are squatting in a circle about the fire, watching intently. The blond girl's face is still, and a spot appears at the corner of her mouth and catches the light, glistens in the light. She is drooling.

"Savages!" Mary whispers in horror. "They're savages! Let them go back to the wilderness where they belong."

"They're survivors!" Sid yells at her, suddenly furious. "Look at us! Tons of freeze-dried food, enough to feed thousands of people. Warm buildings. Water. Plenty of clothes. Books. And they've got nothing except courage. I'm going down there!"

Harry stops him at the door. "You're right. We have to try, but maybe we shouldn't bring them here. You know? Why let them know exactly where we are, where our stuff is until we're sure about them? There could be others still hiding."

And so it is agreed. Sid and Harry and two of the women will meet the children and take them to the far end of the park, to the

hospital, over a mile from the nearest home. The old man will join them later in the afternoon. He will examine the children. The old man is the nearest thing they have to a doctor. He was in his first year of medical school when the end came. He knows his limitations, but he also knows he can do little harm with what is available to him; sometimes he can do a little good. No one expects miracles. He is very good at tooth extractions. The people's teeth are all very bad. Those who had dentures before are the lucky ones.

Myra pleads to be allowed to go with Harry and Sid, but they won't let her; they know she cannot walk that far. Mary and Eunice are chosen, and they decide to take a gift of food with them. They ask the old man for some of Boy's wild honey, but he refuses. Let Boy offer it if he wants, he tells them, and they have to be content with that. Boy has never told anyone where he finds the honey; he can barter it for clothes and music. He will listen to Myra play her violin for as long as she is willing to play. He gives honey freely to the old man, asking nothing in return.

The old man stays with the telescope until the children vanish among the buildings, and then he returns to his apartment on the fourth floor. Monica is there with Ruth and Dore Shurman. Ruth is seventy and Dore a little older. It is the first time in ten years that he has entertained them in his home. He is very pleased to have them here. Monica has already given them food, flat cakes baked on a grill. The cakes are nutty, crisp, very good.

"We want to go north," Ruth says. "Remember? Where the cottages are still standing? They won't come there. Too much rubble between the city and the suburbs."

"But why?"

"I think Boy was telling the truth when he said they tried to catch him. I think they're dangerous."

The old man pities Ruth; he knows she will never be able to travel even to the edge of her own district, much less the ten miles or more to the suburb she is talking about. He looks at Dore and knows he also understands.

"You have nothing to fear," he says finally. "Even if they are

wild, they wouldn't bother any of us. Why should they? There's enough food for all of us. Enough shelter. God knows, we won't go out of our way to harm them."

"You never know what will threaten someone else," Ruth says firmly.

Thirty-two years ago, when the old man first came to the city, Ruth was lovely, with abundant chestnut-colored hair, mature figure, and no trace of the fear that turned her husband into an invalid. Ruth had had three children, and she was still fertile, she told Lew. Perhaps they could produce yet another child or two, she and Lew. For three years he lived with them, cared for Dore and made love to Dore's wife, until suddenly Ruth stopped menstruating. There was no menopause; she simply stopped, and she went back to her husband. Slowly Dore regained his sanity, but he has no memory of the bad years. The old man has always thought Dore understands much more than he has ever indicated by word or action. A firm friendship has grown up between the two. When Ruth turned away from Lew, she changed. Terror seized her with the realization that there would be no more children, and gradually Dore has come to be her support, as she had been his while there was still hope. Time has healed her fears, and resignation is the scar. But now she is terrified again.

"Lew, come with us. Don't go to the children, today or ever. Let them live or die as God wills, don't help them."

The old man doesn't look at her. He can't tell her that she will never make it out of the city; her heart is bad, she has grown too fat, her blood pressure is too high.

"There are only seven of them, for heaven's sake," Monica says reasonably. "Even if they breed like guppies, we'll all be dead long before they could be a threat to us."

"Lew, please come with us," Ruth pleads. "I'm afraid to go without you. What if Dore has an attack, or I do?"

"Look, Ruth, go home and stay inside for the next few days. All right? No one will tell them where any of us live, I promise you. This was a city of over a million people. And there are only seven

of them, and three of them are very little." He visualizes again the small girl's intent face as she waited for the rat to stop jerking on the stick. "Very little," he repeats. "They could never find us in such a big city."

They finally leave him and Monica in his apartment. "Are you so sure they aren't dangerous?" Monica asks. She is elegant in a long gown that she made out of a heavy blue brocade. She sews beautifully, always has new clothes. She does her hair up in intricate swirls; it is so white it looks false.

"They're too few and too young," he says impatiently. "Unless they're full of disease germs, something like that. They could be."

She clutches her throat. For many years no one in the city has had a cold, flu, sore throat. Nothing but age, he thinks. Boy is the youngest resident of the city, or was before today.

"I have to get back," she says hastily. "I have to water my trees."

The old man sits at his work table for a long time after Monica leaves him. He wonders for the first time why he is working on a concise edition of the Bible. For whose benefit? And isn't it blasphemy? Supposing, of course, that one believed in God. He is puzzled by the repetitions in the Bible, the same story told over and over in different versions. With proper editing, he has reasoned, the Bible will be an eighth of its present length.

Boy has not come out of hiding by the time the old man leaves for the hospital. He knows it would be futile to try to find him. He walks under the golden sycamores with his usual long, unhurried stride. He tries not to think of the children yet. He thinks instead of the fear shown by Mary, by Monica, Ruth and Dore. The others will come to feel it also, he knows, just as he is feeling it.

The hospital is a rambling two-story building, ultramodern when built, with outside windows for every room, wide vinyl-floored corridors, flowered wall coverings, spacious, airy waiting rooms and lounges. It was designed as an emergency center for this section of the country, with room after room of subbasements stocked with freeze-dried food, blankets, clothing, medical supplies. No one has ever raided it. No one has distributed the food, the oil, the clothing,

blankets. Years ago Boy discovered the cache, and the citizens of the city, one hundred twenty people or more then, took what they needed—most of them would never have to return for anything else—and they left the remaining stores undisturbed.

In those early years in the city, the old man used to play doctor. He dressed in a surgical gown, tied on a mask, and stalked the corridors in search of a patient. He read all the medical books, some of them many times, and handled the equipment until he was familiar with it. More recently, only five or six years ago, he found himself one night sitting at the side of a bed, garbed in white, with a stethoscope and a thermometer, talking earnestly to a nonexistent patient. Frightened, he left the hospital, and he hasn't been back since. He finds that he is walking somewhat slower than before, and deliberately he lengthens his stride.

Eunice is waiting on the top step; she comes forward to meet him. She is stout and robust-looking, with a florid complexion and iron-grey hair in long braids down her back. Now she is pale and frightened. "Lew, they were awful! They really are savages. We caught one of them, but the others all ran away, and they threw stones at us. Sid is hurt."

"Where are they?"

"In your examination room. They had to tie up the boy. He tried to bite Harry, and he kicked, and scratched like a devil. He's more like a wildcat than a human being."

The examination room is the former emergency room of the hospital. It has two padded tables, several desks, scales that no longer work, a cabinet of surgical implements, gauze. It is seldom used any longer; they all have first-aid kits in their homes, and the old man sees them there when they need him.

The boy is on one of the tables, strapped down at ankles and wrists, a band of elastic bandaging about his chest, another about his throat to keep his head down. The old man doesn't approach him, after one glance to be certain he is all right.

Sid is on another table, conscious but pale from shock and loss

of blood. A gauze pad is on his head, blood-soaked, and when the old man lifts it, he knows that Sid needs stitches. The cut is jagged and deep, from above his eyebrow across his temple to his ear.

"I'll have to sew it up, Sid," the old man says, and Sid's eyelids flutter. "Cover him up, keep him warm. I'll get things going." He washes his hands, cleans them again from a freshly opened bottle of alcohol, opens a sealed package of surgical gloves, another of needles and gut and bandages, and another of a local anesthetic that the directions say will remain potent for one hundred years. All the supplies have been labeled this way: date of packing, date of expiration of potency. In one of the pharmaceutical books the old man has found explicit directions for combining ingredients in order to make sedatives and tranquilizers. Previously compounded medicines, he assumes, have long since lost their potency. Those that he makes up are all very effective.

Eunice prepares Sid; she shaves his eyebrow, part of his beard, some of his hair. The old man is not as swift as he would like to be, but he is thorough, and when he finishes, he knows that a real doctor would not have done better with the wound. Sid is breathing shallowly; he is still in shock. Only after he is finished with Sid does the old man approach the other table.

The boy is filthy, his hair caked and matted, his fingernails jagged, packed with grime; he looks as if he has never had a bath. He is wearing a one-piece garment, a shiftlike thing made of coarse material, tied at the shoulders. It has been twisted about him and conceals little. His muscles show good development; his teeth, which remain bared from the time the old man nears him until he steps back, seem good.

"I don't want to move Sid for a couple of hours, maybe not until tomorrow," the old man says. "Let's give this little beggar a bath and have a better look at him."

The boy strains against his bonds, and a low moaning sound starts deep in his throat. Eunice brings a basin of water. There are tanks on the hospital roof, overflowing probably, since no one uses

the water here. The water is cool, not cold enough to hurt the child, but he howls when the old man starts to scrub him, and doesn't stop until the old man is through.

The boy is sun-browned, with pale skin where the garment has covered him. His hair is brown, with a slight wave; his eyes are grey. His legs are covered with old wounds, all well healed. The old man purses his lips, however, as he makes a closer examination. The testicles are atrophied. He kneads the boy's stomach, listens to his heart, his lungs, and finally sits down and stares at the child.

"You finished with him?" Harry asks. He has been staring at the child and has said very little. Like most of the men, Harry is bearded, has rather long hair. There is a long red scratch on his hand. The boy has stopped screaming and howling. He is watching the old man.

"Yes, that's all. Healthy as a boy ought to be. Eight, nine years old. Boy, what's your name?"

The boy makes no sign that he understands.

"Okay, Lew, now it's my turn," Harry says. He has found a thick leather strap and has it wrapped around his hand, with a loose end of two and a half feet that he hits against his leg from time to time. "I aim to beat the hell out of the little bugger."

The boy's eyes close involuntarily and he swallows, and again strains to get loose.

The old man waves Harry back. "Not so fast, Harry. What happened when you found the kids?"

"We didn't find them. We went down to the warehouse section and looked around and they were gone. Then we put the food and stuff down where they could find it and started back, and they jumped us."

"They didn't jump us," Mary says. "We startled them. We scared them to death, coming on them suddenly like we did. They began to pick up anything they could find to throw at us, and they ran. This one fell over something and Sid grabbed him. That's when someone hit him with the rock. He fell on top of this boy and held him down until Harry got to them."

"What do you mean, you came on them suddenly?"

"We went down there out in the open, in the middle of the street, not trying to hide or anything. Then, I don't know why, when we couldn't find them, we sort of quieted down, and we weren't making any noise at all on the way back, and we were in old Wharf Alley, you know how narrow it is, how dark. They were coming out of one of the warehouses, just as we approached it. I don't know who was more scared, them or us."

Eunice nods at Mary's recital, and Harry hits his leg with the strap, watching the boy.

"So, as far as they know, you jumped them and then made off with one of them. Kidnapped him." The old man is watching the boy, and he knows the boy has understood everything. "I'll take him back," the old man says suddenly.

"No! By God! Make him tell us a few things first." Harry steps closer to the table.

"Harry, don't be an ass," Mary says. "We can't hold this child. And you certainly are not going to beat him."

Harry looks from one to the other of the women, then to the old man. Sullenly he moves back to the other table, where Sid is, and pays no more attention to the boy.

The old man starts to loosen the bands about the boy's chest and throat. "Now, you listen to me, son. I'm taking you back to where your friends are. I'm going to keep your hands tied until we get there, and I'm going to hold the cord. You understand. No rock throwing, no biting. When we get there, I'll turn you loose and I'll leave. If you want us, you can come back here. Tell the others the same thing. We won't come to find you again."

The old man takes the boy out the front of the hospital, through the ruined city streets. He doesn't want him to associate the park with any of the people in the city, just in case there are adults using the children as decoys. He talks as they go.

"We have plenty of food and warm clothes. There are a lot of empty buildings and oil to heat them. You and your friends, or

brothers and sisters, whatever they are, can live here if you want to. No one will hurt you or bother you."

The boy walks as far from the old man as the tether will permit. He looks at him from the corner of his eye and gives no sign of comprehension.

"I know damn well that you understand," the old man says conversationally. "I don't care if you ever answer me. I'm just telling you what to tell the others. The oldest one, the girl, you tell her what I said, you hear? And the big boy. They'll know what to do. You tell them."

Midway to the dock area the old man knows they are being followed. The boy knows it also. Now he is looking over his shoulder, past the old man, to the other side of the street. They won't start throwing as long as the boy is so close to him, the old man hopes. He stops at the mouth of an alley and takes out his knife. The boy's eyes widen with fear, and he is shaking when the old man cuts through the cord.

"Now scat," the old man says, and steps into the dark alley. No rocks are thrown. He doesn't wait to find out if the truce is to be a lasting one.

It is a time of waiting. The old man visits Sid often; his head is healing nicely, but he is nervous and demanding. Eunice is caring for him.

Most of the people are staying indoors now, waiting. A week has gone by since the children arrived, and no one has seen or heard them again. The old man visits all his friends during the week. Dore and Ruth are pretending that nothing at all has happened, nothing has changed. Ruth's heart has developed a new palpitation that the old man does not understand, does not know how to treat.

Monica is in her palace creating her garden and refuses to see him. Boy is still in hiding. Every afternoon now, the old man walks to the hospital and remains there for an hour or two.

The hospital corridors have remained bright; the windows are unbroken except for a pane or two on the west side where the storm

winds most often come. The old man's sandals make little noise on the cushioned floors. He walks each corridor in turn, examines the surgery wing, pauses there to people the rooms and watch the skillful surgeons for a time, then walks some more. The children have been all through the hospital. They have found the food. There are open containers, contents strewn about; they don't know about freeze-dried food, to them it is inedible. They have raided the blankets, however. At least they will be warmer. And they have taken a number of surgical instruments.

In his room the old man continues to work on his Bible project. It is a lifetime occupation, he knows, more than enough for one lifetime. Of those who now survive, only one or two do not have such preoccupations. Harry Gould has become a fine leather craftsman; they all wear his sandals and shoes. Dore has studied until he has made himself an expert in chess. He has written several books, reanalyzing championship games of the past. Myra is copying the library of music in India ink on skins, to preserve it forever. And so on. The empty ones were the first to go.

The old man glances over his most recent notes and presently is engrossed in them once more. The Biblical narrative from the Creation to the Ten Commandments is treated in his Bibles in the first eighty pages or so. By editing out the many begats, he thinks, that will come down to fifty pages. He has a theory that the begats are simply to show with some force that before the Flood man's lifespan was over eight hundred years, and that after it, his span gradually decreased to about one hundred years. He has written: *A drastic change in climate? An increase in the amount of ultraviolet light penetration of the atmosphere?* If the begats are included in order to establish a lineage, then the same thing could be done with a simple statement. The same is true of the census in Numbers. Then there is the question of the function of the Books of Moses—part of Exodus, almost all of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They exist in order to detail the numerous laws of the Israelites. Since the laws, with the exception of the Decalogue, were so temporal, applying to such a small group of people in particular circum-

stances, he has decided to extract and summarize them in a companion volume. A modern counterpart of the Books of Moses, he thinks, would be a city's books of ordinances, or a state's laws, including everything from the legal definition of murder down to grade-school admission requirements. He has been puzzled by the various versions of the story of Abraham and his wife, Sarah, whom Abraham calls his sister. Which is the original? He stares at the fine print, tapping his fingers, and then swings around to find his notebook. Boy is standing at the door. The old man doesn't know how long Boy has been in the room. He stands up and embraces Boy, makes him sit down in his usual chair.

"Have you eaten? Are you all right?"

Boy is fine, he has eaten. He keeps glancing toward the window, but now his terror is contained.

The old man doesn't return to his work. He sits opposite Boy and says quietly, "Do you remember when I found you? You were very small, no more than seven or eight. Remember?" Boy nods. "And you were hurt. Someone had hurt you badly, left you for dead. You would have died if I hadn't found you, Boy. You know that, don't you?" Again Boy nods.

"Those children will probably die, Boy, if we don't help them."

Boy jumps up and starts for the door again, his face quivering. Boy has never learned to read or write. He makes things, finds things; that is his preoccupation. What he is thinking, what he feels, is locked inside him. The outer signs, the quivering of his face, the tears in his eyes, the trembling of his hands, how much of the whirlwind of his mind do they convey? The old man stops him at the door and draws him back inside.

"They won't hurt you, Boy. They are children. I'll keep you safe." Boy is still pulling away. The old man says, "Boy, I need you," and Boy yields. The old man is ashamed of himself, but he is afraid that Boy will run away, and winter is coming.

"Can you find them for me, Boy? Don't let them see you. Just find out where they are, if they are still nearby."

Boy nods and indicates with a lowering of his hand and a wave

at the sky that he will wait until night. The old man is satisfied. "Go rest now, Boy. I'll be here. There's nothing to be afraid of."

Boy has found the children. His hands fly as he describes their activities of the past three days. They hunt rats, birds, dig up grubs and worms to eat. They huddle about a fire, wrapped in blankets at night. They avoid the buildings, staying in the open, under trees, or in the ruins where they are not threatened by walls. Now they are gathered at the hospital, apparently waiting for someone from the city to come to them. Belatedly Boy indicates that one of them is hurt.

"I'll go," the old man says. "Boy, take a note to Sid for me. I'll want him. They should see that he is not dead, that I cured him." He scribbles the note and leaves, feeling Boy's anxious gaze on his back as he starts across the park. He walks fast.

The children are under the overhang of the ambulance entrance. They are all filthy. The boy stands up and points to the injured child. A girl has a long sliver of metal strap sticking out of her leg. It is embedded deeply in her thigh and she is bleeding heavily. God, not an artery, the old man prays silently, and he kneels down close to the girl, who draws away, her hands curled up to strike like a cat's. She is blanched-looking, from loss of blood or from fear, he cannot say. The old man stands up and takes a step back.

"I can help her," he says slowly, carefully. "But you must bring her inside and put her on the table. Where the boy was." The oldest girl, thirteen, possibly even fourteen, shakes her head hard. She points to the child imperiously. The old man crosses his arms and says nothing. The adolescent girl is their leader, he thinks. She is as dirty as the others, but she has the unmistakable bearing of an acknowledged leader. The older of the two boys is watching her closely for a sign. He is almost as tall as she, heavier, and he is holding one of the scalpels they have stolen. The old man doubts that he is very adept with it, but even a novice can do great damage with a scalpel. He continues to stand silently.

The girl makes a motion as if withdrawing the metal from the thigh of the injured child. She watches the old man.

"You'll kill her if you remove it," he says. "She'll bleed to death." The girl knows that, he thinks. That's why they brought the child for him to treat. He wonders how much else she knows.

She is furious, and for an instant she hesitates, then turns toward the boy with the scalpel. He grasps it more firmly and takes a step toward the old man. The girl points again to the injured child.

"Inside," the old man says quietly.

Suddenly the smaller boy says, "Look!" He points, and they all look at the park. Sid is coming toward them. He is alone. The little boy whispers to the girl. He motions, puts his hand on his head, closes his eyes, a dramatic enactment. The girl suddenly decides.

"Bring her in," she says, and she walks around the building toward the entrance.

Sid is his assistant when he performs the operation. The metal must have been packaging material, the old man thinks. It is a strap, flexible still, but pitted with corrosion. Probably it came from a box that has long since rotted away under it. The warehouses near the river are full of such junk, easy enough to fall on in the dark there. He has to use an anesthetic, and the child's unconsciousness alarms the other children. They huddle and whisper, and stop when the old man begins to speak softly. "She'll sleep and then wake up again. I shall cut into her leg and take out the metal and then sew it up, and she will feel nothing. Then she will awaken." Over and over he says this, as he goes about the operation. The child's body is completely covered with sheets, she is motionless. She'd better awaken, he thinks. He is doing the best he can.

Afterward he lights a space heater, and now the children are regarding him with large, awed eyes. The room grows warm quickly. It is getting dark outside and tonight there will be a hard freeze.

The children sleep on the floor, wrapped in blankets, all except the boy with the scalpel, who sits watching the old man. He watches sharply, closely, with intelligence. He will remember what he sees.

The old man asks Sid to bring up food, and together they prepare it and cook it over the space heater. There is no cooking stove in the hospital, except the giants in the kitchen that no one has used in sixty years. Sid makes a thick aromatic stew. The boy refuses to taste it. He has said nothing throughout the afternoon and night. But the children can talk, and they speak perfectly good English. Where did they come from? How have they survived? The old man eats his stew and ponders the sleeping children. Presently Sid climbs onto one of the examination tables to sleep, and the old man takes the other.

For three days the old man remains in the hospital and cares for the child. Either the leader girl or the older boy is always there. The others come and go. Sid leaves and returns once. The people are uneasy about the old man. They want him out of there, back in his own home. They are afraid he might be hurt by the children. And they need him.

"The children need me more than they do," the old man says. "Tell them I'm all right. The kids are afraid of me, my powers." He laughs as he says this, but there is a bitterness in his laugh. He doesn't want them to fear him, but rather to trust him and like him, confide in him. So far they have said nothing.

After the leader girl smelled a plate with steak on it, then moved back, shaking her head, they have refused his offers of food. They won't talk to him. They watch his every movement, the older boy especially. The old man watches them closely for signs of hunger, and finds none. The only one he knows is eating regularly is the injured little girl, and he feeds her.

On the fourth day Sid returns again, and this time Harry and Jake Pulaski are with him. "Come out here, Lew!" Harry calls from the hospital yard.

"What's wrong?" the old man asks before he reaches them.

"Myra Olney is gone," Jake says. "She'll freeze in this weather. We have to find her."

"Gone? What do you mean?" Myra wouldn't run away.

"No one's seen her for days," Harry says. "Eunice went over to find out if she was hurt or something and she was gone. Just not there at all."

Myra is soft and dependent, always looking for someone to help her do something—the last one who would try to manage alone. "If you find her and she's hurt," the old man says finally, "bring her over here. I'll stay here and wait." They never find her.

His small patient is recovering fast. He takes the stitches out and the wound looks good. She is a pretty little girl—large grey eyes, the same soft brown hair that her brother has, with slightly more wave in it than his. She is the first to smile at him. He sits by her and tells her stories, aware that the others are listening also. He tells her of the bad places to the east, places where they must never go. He tells her of the bad places to the south, where the mosquitoes bring sickness and the water is not good to drink. He tells her how people bathe and keep themselves clean in order to stay healthy and well, and to look pretty. The little girl watches him and listens intently to all that he says. Now when he asks if she is thirsty or hungry, she answers.

The next day the old man realizes the oldest girl is menstruating. She has swathed herself in a garment tied between her legs, and looks very awkward in it, very uncomfortable. Conversationally, not addressing her at all, he tells the small girl about women and babies and the monthly blood and says that he has things that women use at those times.

The adolescent stands up and says, "Show me those things."

He takes her to one of the lounges and says, "First you must bathe, even your hair. Then I shall return with them."

One day he brings wool shirts from the basement and cuts off the sleeves to make them fit the smaller children. He dresses his patient and leaves the other shirts where the children can help themselves. The smaller boy strips unhesitatingly and puts on a warm shirt. It covers him to mid-calf; the sleeves leave his hands free. Presently the others also dress in the shirts, all but the older boy, who doesn't go near them all morning. Late in the afternoon he

also pulls off his filthy garment, throws it down, and picks up one of the shirts. His body is muscular, much scarred, and now the old man sees that he never will impregnate a woman either. Both boys have atrophied testes. He feels his eyes burn and he hurries away, down the corridor, to weep alone in one of the patients' rooms.

As soon as the little girl can walk again, the children leave the hospital and vanish into the city once more. The old man sits alone in the examination room and feels empty for a long time after they leave. There were no good-byes, no words exchanged, no backward glances. That afternoon he returns to his apartment and stares at the work spread on his tables. It is many days before he can bring himself to open one of the Bibles again.

In December Ruth dies in her sleep. They bury her with the others at the west side of the park where the wildflowers carpet the ground in spring and ferns grow in summer. The night after her burial Boy wakes the old man with a hand pressed hard on his lips. He drags at him, trying to get him out of bed, and thrusts robe and stout winter shoes at him. He has no light, nor does he need one. Boy is an owl, the old man thinks, awake now, but sluggish and stiff.

Boy leads him out and into the park, winding among the cedars that are as black as coal. A powdery snow has fallen, not enough to cover the ground, but enough to change the world into one unfamiliar and beautiful.

Boy stops abruptly and his fingers are hard on the old man's arm. Then he sees them. The children are dragging Ruth's body from the grave. Sickened, he turns away. Finally he knows by the silence that they have gone. Boy's face is a white blank in the dark night, his fingers start to shake spasmodically on the old man's arm. They can arouse the city, ring the church bell, hunt the children down, recover the corpse and rebury it, but then what? Kill the children? Post a grave watch? And Dore, what would it do to Dore? The old man can't seem to think clearly, all he can do is stare at the empty grave. If they knew, if the people knew, they would hunt down the children, kill them all. Many of the men

still have guns, ammunition. He has a shotgun and shells. It can't be for this that the children have survived so long! That can't be what they came here to find!

Finally he says, "Go get two shovels, Boy. Bring them here. Quietly. Don't wake anyone."

And they fill in the grave again. And smooth the tracks and then go home.

The winters have grown progressively worse for the people of the city. Each bitter cold snap enervates them all, and each winter claims its toll. This year Sam Whitten has become more and more helpless, until now he is a bed-ridden invalid who must be attended constantly. His talk is all of his childhood.

They seldom mention the children. It is hoped that they will depart with the spring. Meanwhile, it is easier to pretend that they are not in the city at all.

The old man nurses Sam Whitten so conscientiously that Sid intervenes, spokesman for the rest of the people, he says.

"If you wear yourself down, then who'll they have if they need help?"

The old man knows Sid is right, but if Sam dies, will the children steal his body also? He is tormented by the thought and can tell no one of his fears. His sleep is restless and unsatisfying; he wakes often and stares into darkness wondering if he has been awakened by a noise too close by, wondering if the children are prowling about the city while everyone sleeps.

In January they have their first real snowfall, only a few inches, and it doesn't last more than two days, but now the weather turns bitter cold, Arctic weather. And Mary Halloran disappears. This time the bell in the church tower clamors for attendance, and everyone who is able gathers there.

"Jake, you tell them," Harry says, his voice harsh. He is carrying his rifle, the first time he has had it out in fifteen years.

"Yeah. Me and Eunice and Walter and Mary was going to play

pinochle this afternoon, like we always do. Mary didn't come and I said I would go get her. When I got to her house, she wasn't there. And there's blood on her floor. Her door wasn't closed tight either."

"She could have hurt herself," Sid says, but there is doubt in his voice. "She could be wandering out there right now, dazed. We have to search for her before it gets dark."

"Stay in pairs," Jake says harshly.

"Today we'll search for Mary, and tomorrow we'll search for those goddamn kids," Harry says.

"Boy knows where they are," Jake says. He looks around. "Where is he? I saw him a minute ago."

Boy is gone again. The old man waits up for him until very late, but he doesn't come back. The next day the old man finds Sid in his room when he returns from his morning visit to Sam Whitten.

"You joining the hunt?" Sid asks.

"No. You?"

"No. They won't find the kids. Too many places to hide. Someone'll have a heart attack out there in the cold." Sid looks out the window toward the park. "Will you come over to the hospital with me in a little while?"

"Something wrong, Sid?" The old man can't keep the anxiety out of his voice.

Sid shakes his head. "I want to put my notebooks, diaries and stuff, in the vault. Seems like a good time."

The old man is silent for a moment, then he says, "We can use Boy's wagon. Do you have much to take over?"

"Couple of boxes. We'd need the wagon."

That afternoon they walk through the park, two old men in dark cloaks, pulling a stout wagon over the frozen ground. Their breath forms white clouds in front of their faces.

"They didn't get a glimpse of the kids," Sid says. "Didn't think they would."

"Are they going out again?"

"Sure. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow."

They smile briefly at each other and walk, taking turns pulling the wagon. It is hard to pull over the uneven ground.

"I keep wondering," Sid says presently, "if this wasn't part of the plan. Give us all time to die off and then bring out the new people and let them take over."

"They can't take over," the old man says bitterly. "If that was the plan, it's as much a failure as the first one was." And he tells Sid about the boys' testicles.

"That will change their minds for them," Sid says thoughtfully. "The others who are holding back now. Harry only got five others to go with him and Jake, you know. The rest will go out too if they know this. Why not? Them or us. And we're all doomed anyway."

"I know." They are almost through the park now.

"You think you could get Boy near that girl?"

The old man makes a rude noise. "He'd sooner couple with a snake. I don't think he could, anyway. Psychologically. Even if I could explain and make him understand, which I probably couldn't." He considers it another moment, then shakes his head. He could never make Boy understand.

They take the wagon up the ramp and inside the hospital, and with much struggling they get it down the stairs to the subbasements. The vault is a freezer unit. There is a second section where the temperature was even colder once, and this part made tears come to the old man's eyes when he first found it. He closed the door of the sperm bank that day, long ago, and hasn't opened it since. The vault hasn't been chilled at all for sixty years. It is simply a good place to store valuables. They cleared the shelves of blood plasma, medicines, unidentified vials, and now in their place are boxes of jewelry, books, photographs.

"You in a hurry?" Sid asks. "Might make just one more entry. What you just told me sure has changed everything."

The old man shrugs and lights another lamp. Already Sid is writing with concentration, and the old man goes out into the cor-

ridor. No one has ever visited this section of the hospital often. Machinery is stored here, spare parts for the surgical units, tanks for oxygen, collapsible wheelchairs. The old man has never paid much attention to the machinery. They have had little use for motors to raise and lower hospital beds. Now he strolls through the storage room. Near the back of the room, he stops and stares. A generator. Boxed, a metal-clad box, in fact. Meant to be stored for an indefinite time. Taped to the box is a booklet of instructions. The air in the subbasements is very dry, the booklet is legible.

Sid is still writing, doesn't notice when the old man glances in at him. The old man follows the diagram in the front of the booklet, through a door marked A-1, to the end of the room with miscellaneous pipes and tanks, to the far end where there is a small stainless steel door four feet above the floor. Behind the door there is a gauge registering full, a valve, a set of instructions riveted to a curved shiny surface. Twenty thousand gallons of fuel oil in a stainless steel tank! The pipes and the holding tanks are all designed so that the oil will flow by gravity when the valves are opened. They provided a Diesel-powered generator to be connected to the freezer unit, he realizes, with enough oil in storage to run it for years. No one ever started the generator; no one ever opened the valves. His feet drag when he leaves the room and joins Sid once more in the vault.

Sid is no longer writing. He is leafing through his diaries, first one, then another, not pausing long anywhere.

"What happened, Sid? How did it start?"

Sid shrugs. "I was reading some of the earliest books," he says. "Didn't realize at the time how contradictory the statements were. First they said China hit Russia with missiles. Then they said that type A flu virus was pandemic. Then biological warfare. God knows."

"I was home on vacation," the old man says. "We started to run. My father was afraid we'd all die of plague. The cities were emptied practically overnight. I remember that. Was it plague?"

Again Sid shrugs. "A combination, I guess." He snaps the book shut, puts it back in the box with the others, and pushes the box against the wall. "Ready?"

There are many meetings now. No one is to live alone any longer. Each group must have a man with a gun, and they have to fortify their homes, put bars on the windows, locks on the doors. No one is to wander outside alone, or after dark. And the daily expeditions to find the children will continue. Sid doesn't disclose the old man's secret. To the old man he says, "I won't help them find the kids and destroy them. Neither will I help the kids in any way."

The old man is tormented now, unable to sleep, and all the while it seems that an obsession is growing within him. He knows that his people are threatened, that the children are the enemy, that their hunger will be more powerful than the strategems adopted by the people. And still he is obsessed with the idea that he has to act for them, make them accept his help. This old man and the man who is his son in all but the flesh, they will save humanity. He is hardly aware when Sam Whitten dies. The ground is frozen now; they will bury him in the spring, and until then the cold will preserve the thin old body. The people have become despondent and more fearful. There are outbursts of talk, then a strained silence among them as they listen to hear if the shadows are alive. Dore and Sid have moved into Monica's palace. She is tearing down the forest in order to create an early American tavern. The old man doesn't visit her.

Only Boy still ventures out after dark, but his forays are less frequent and most of the time he is close to the old man. Every day they go to the hospital, where they clean out the vault. They assemble the generator according to instructions and turn on the valves and start one Diesel; slowly the vault is chilled below zero. Unquestioningly Boy does what the old man tells him to do. The old man often addresses him as "Son," and Boy accepts this also.

Somehow, the old man thinks, he must learn about artificial insemination. He must collect sperm from Boy. He must impregnate

the wild girl with it. And he must instruct her, or the eunuch boys, in the method so that when the other girls reach childbearing age, they also can be impregnated. And in the privacy of his rooms, the old man laughs. Boy watches him fearfully. Sid and Dore also watch him when they are there, and Dore's face reveals his worry. They think he is going mad, the old man knows, and he doesn't know how to demonstrate that he is not.

Now when Boy starts to leave him, the old man says, "Don't go out. Don't leave me alone." And Boy obediently sits down again. The old man is afraid that Boy will go out and won't come back again, that he will not be allowed to finish what he knows he must do. He feels ashamed, implicitly lying to Boy, but he does it repeatedly in order to keep Boy nearby. He knows that he has to collect the semen very soon, that time may be working against him now.

Every night he prepares tea for himself and Boy; sometimes they have the flat nut cakes, sometimes the freeze-dried food, which is not as nourishing as it once was. This night the old man drugs Boy heavily and while he sleeps the old man kneels over him, weeping silently, and masturbates him and collects the ejaculate in a sterile flask. He is too blinded by tears to be certain he has covered Boy properly when he leaves him. Later he returns and arranges the blankets, and kisses Boy on the forehead.

It is cold, but not cold enough to preserve the semen; he has to take it to the vault that night, divide it among several vials, seal them, label them, freeze them. It is almost dawn when he returns and drops to his bed exhausted. Time and age, he thinks, unable to sleep, aching and afraid of the way his heart is palpitating. Time and age.

Every night he makes his solitary journey to the hospital with another flask, and each day his face is greyer, he is more fatigued. Dore is insistent that the old man move to the palace, or at least let someone come and stay with him in his apartment. The old man refuses irritably, and Dore leaves him alone. But they are talking about him, he knows. It is hard to find time alone now. Some-

one always seems to be with him, observing him, afraid that if he breaks, they will be without any medical help at all. How very old they all are, he thinks one day, surprised that he has never realized it before. The survivors are all over seventy, all except Boy. It is time for them all to die.

That night when he returns from the hospital, Boy is gone.

For hours the old man sits at his window, staring blindly at the dark city. He is frozen, he cannot weep, cannot think, cannot feel. Soon after dawn he unwraps his shotgun and carefully inspects it, rubs the metal with an oil-soaked rag, and then examines his shells. He loads the gun and puts the rest of his shells into a pouch that he wears like a necklace, and then he goes to the eighth floor where the telescope is. Slowly, painstakingly, he scans what he can see of the city, not looking at the ruined streets and buildings but at the black line where city and sky meet, and finally he finds a place where the air shimmies, and, squinting, he believes he can see smoke. It is very far away, miles up the river, close to the downtown section. He dresses warmly and starts out, not thinking anything at all.

When he nears the downtown area, he knows where he will find them, and he turns toward the bridge that is still standing, with great gaping holes in the roadbed, and supporting posts that are eaten through in places with corrosion, but not enough to collapse the structure. With their fear of enclosed places, the children will huddle under the bridge, and anyone approaching will be visible a long way off. He doesn't approach yet. He goes inside an office building and climbs up to the third floor where he can look out and see the children. They are here as he expected: four of them, the smaller ones, are huddled close to a small fire; the older ones are not in sight. As he watches, one of the little ones, who are indistinguishable in their blankets, nods again and again and finally lies down on the ground and draws up into a compact ball to sleep. There is no sign of Boy's body.

The old man waits at the window. He dozes and starts into wakefulness many times, and his legs grow stiff with cold and fatigue. There is a ringing in his head, and when he is awake, he

has a sense of euphoria now, of well-being and contentment. Suddenly he wakes thoroughly and knows that he will freeze to death if he doesn't move. He should have eaten. He should have brought food with him. He tries to stand and reels into the wall and nearly falls down, catching himself clumsily. A fall could be fatal, he knows. A broken leg or hip, and he will die in this office building. He flexes his muscles slowly, and with each movement there is a burning pain that races through his body. Finally he is able to move; he stumbles to the door and down to the street again. He stays in the alleys until he is very close to the bridge. The other three children are back. He counts them. Seven. The old man is almost close enough now to reveal himself, to be able to fire into the group and be certain of killing or injuring most of them with the two shots in his gun. He takes another step, and suddenly he hears a whisper behind him.

"Lew! Damn it, wait a minute!" It is Jake Pulaski, with his rifle. Jake hurries to him. "Wait a minute until Harry has time to get to the other side of the bridge, to head them off."

The old man stares at Jake in perplexity; he has forgotten what it was he meant to do. He sees the rifle in Jake's hands and without thinking he swings his shotgun hard, catches Jake in the stomach and knocks him down. And he steps into the open and walks toward the children.

They jump up wildly. Their faces are pinched with cold.

"You get to the hospital and wait for me," the old man says in his hardest voice. "Or you will be killed."

They don't move. Behind him the old man hears Jake advancing, and he hears the click of a safety being released.

"There are many men who are coming to kill you!" the old man thunders. "Run to the hospital and wait for me there!" He whirls around and sees Jake at the alley mouth now, the rifle rising, pointing past him at the group. The old man raises his shotgun and pulls both triggers together, and the shocking noise of his gun drowns out the sound of the rifle. At the noise the children scatter like leaves in a whirlwind.

For hours the old man stumbles in the ruins. He weeps and his tears freeze in his beard. Sometimes he can hear voices close by and he reaches for them, tries to find them, and even as he does so, he knows the voices are in his head. The voices of his mother and father. Monica's voice. Sid's voice. Sometimes he sees Boy ahead and he finds strength to walk on when he would rather sit down and sleep. And finally he comes back to the hospital when the day is finished and the shadows fill all open spaces.

Numbly he lights the stove and then he falls to the floor and sleeps. When he awakens the children are there. The old man sits up, suffering, and he finds his shotgun on his legs. He lifts it and the children cringe away from him.

"You are filth and scum," he says savagely at them. "And I shall punish you. And your punishment will be life, life for your children, for their children." And he laughs.

He drags himself to his feet, each new motion a new agony. He raises his shotgun and the children cover their faces in terror, and bow before him and his terrible wrath.

THE BRIDGE BUILDER

The grave itself is but a covered bridge
Leading from light to light, through a brief darkness.

Gary K. Wolf

I find a lousy coat of particulate muck right near Portland, but a coupla swipes with my Freon rag, I clean it all off my bridge like a dream.

Lemme tell you a story on myself. I think it's kinda funny. I built this bridge once, started in Sioux City, went south-southwest for . . . oh . . . I don't know. Not too far. Wasn't a long bridge as bridges go. To Greenville, I think it went. Yeah, to Greenville, I'm sure. Anyways, 'bout a month before I built it, these mass transit planner types hauled me up in an airplane cause they thought I ought to see where it was gonna go, that bridge of mine, exactly from where to where. So, here I am, see, I'm sitting there right in the middle of all these high level big shots. So what happens? Well, we no sooner get up in the sky than I take one look out that airplane window, and barf all over my lap. You see, heights make me sick. Always have.

I got to yank out a mica in Concord. I replace it with a 4×950. It's a tricky operation, but when I run it through test, it shows right on the money. I could kiss it, it's working so good.

I heard about poor old Tiny Hammond the other day. Tough luck. Had a coupla kids, too. I worked with old Tiny once. He reamed out the suspension on that Ocala-Natchez bridge of mine. A ballsy guy, Tiny. Kind of a daredevil, but I guess that's what it takes to ream a suspension, what with the way you never know if the end'll be there when you are. Too risky for me. Far as I'm concerned, let somebody else ream out the suspensions. I'll stick to building bridges. I ain't no hero.

There's a metallic discontinuity just this side of Greenfield. I catch it on meter just in time to keep it from slicing off my head. I trace out its limits. Just a little fellow, it turns out. Easy as pie, I straighten it out, bend it back around, and rivet it down good. When I get done with it, I know one thing for sure. The bastard ain't gonna pop loose again.

Speaking of bridges, that one I built from Eau Claire to Colter Bay was quite the project. I remember, the suspension's all reamed out, I'm ready to get to work, when along comes this corporate guy who wastes a whole day running something he calls a "mathematically simulated construction analysis." Oh, he don't go through the suspension or nothing. He just pretends to. Anyway, I, he announces waving around a big sheet of numbers after he's all done, have got only a fifty-four percent something or other of building this bridge and staying alive. Do tell, I say (as if this was something new). Thank you very much for that tidbit of information, I say. That throws a whole different slant on things, I say. I'm gonna have to talk to some people about this, I say.

So I shake his hand, and I wait till he's gone, and I hop in the wire, and I build me a bridge.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, but what kind of horseshit is this? The tracking is way under spec, I find bad tolerances bouncing me around like a basketball, and to top it all off, there's a dead zone

in the junction. I tear everything all the way down, strap it back together right, and make Albany feeling like a million bucks.

I been building bridges since I was eighteen.

The bridges I built were a lot shorter in those days. Four, five miles long, max. Nothing like some of the ones you see going up today. My first bridge went from downtown Larchmont to a shopping center just north of New Rochelle. Shopper's Special, the transit guys called it. It was one of the first bridges in the whole goddamned world. Still carrying traffic, too. When I build 'em, I build 'em to last.

My longest bridge came six years ago. Pittsburgh to Reno through Columbus, Kansas City, Arvata, and Provo. I was the proudest man alive when I finished that one.

I had enough time chalked up in the wire after that Pittsburgh to Reno to retire at full pay. Wouldn't have been a bad deal, looking back on it. I was only forty-two. Making eighty-six K a year. Course, I didn't take it.

I love building bridges.

I pick up a degradation in edge speed, some overshoot, and a small ringing just outside Cleveland. Nothing I can't handle. After I retune the Q channel and polish the link coupler, the signal profile shows good and flat. Just like it should.

For me, building bridges comes easy. I got what they call a natural feel for it, you understand? Guys nowadays go to college to learn how to build bridges. To college, for Christ's sake. Know how I learned how to build bridges? By God, I just jumped in a wire and built one, that's how. Or did I tell you already? Too bad if I did, 'cause you're gonna hear it again.

I was eighteen. Just out of high school. Had a double E degree, but you know where that gets you nowadays. So I was looking through the paper one night, scoping the wants, when I see this one reads "Wanted. Bridge installation engineer. Double E preferred. Small mass essential." Seeing's how I measured only five feet two on tiptoes, I hauled my ass down there straightaway yelling "Take me, take me."

Course, they did.

I didn't find out until after that Larchmont to New Rochelle that nobody else had applied.

Right before Indianapolis, I get a foul VSAT on a triple-diffused Darlington. But the Darlington's redundant, so I leave it for maintenance.

I got a wife and four kids. Got a house overlooks Mount Ranier. A cabin on Lake Mead. A dog. A cat. Two block rounders, both Fords. I guess I'm what you might call your typical family man. Now I don't mean to sound sarcastic when I say that. Don't get the idea I don't enjoy my family. I do. Just that sometimes they get on my nerves. Take my wife. For the longest time she's been after me to hang it up, you know, knock it off, throw it the hell in. Gets dreadful monotonous, all that harping, after a while. What do you wanna keep building bridges for, she says, when it's so dangerous, she says. You could retire, she says. She leaves me travel brochures under my goddamned pillow at night, for Christ's sake. She sics the kids on my ass. She's even got our family doctor stopping in once a month on his way home from his office in Wichita. You oughta think about retiring, he says staring at his beer can like this is just something he's reading off of the label. I say, no, thanks, I'm happy building bridges, and he says that's just fine, but I've got to think of my family, too, as he starts quoting me all sorts of facts and figures. The mortality rates and stuff, which, if you believe that crap, means I should have been dead and buried five years ago. For good measure, he rattles off a few of the standard horror stories. The bridge builders who come out missing arms. The bridge builders who come out missing legs. All the shitload of bridge builders who never come out, period. I thank him kindly, and tell him I'll give it some serious thought so he'll go home happy.

See, he means well. He just don't know what it's like to build a bridge.

I find a real bungle in Vandalia. Low-duty cycle on a digital signal, and a weird cross modulation in an MET. I replace all four

klystrons, adjust the timing, and give the whole shebang a pat on the fanny for luck.

Never have been very handy with my hands when it comes to woodworking or putting up storm windows, or fixing broken toys or unstopping drains. Suppose that's why I like building bridges so much. Like I mighta mentioned, I got this knack for building bridges. The only way I can explain it is to say that when I hit that wire, it's nothing more than a little, tiny, reamed-out hole, and it's all rough, like fishhooks poked into sandpaper. But when I leave, it's as big around as a freeway, and that wire is *glass*.

The nice thing about building bridges is that it never gets routine. I liked building my last one every inch as much as my Larchmont to New Rochelle. Course, like I said, I kinda got this *way* when it comes to building bridges. Hit me right off. First time I climbed in the wire. I was only eighteen, like I said. I knew there were goddamned nay-sayers saying the bridges oughta be outlawed on account of them being so different, but, hell, I thought, there was people said that about airplanes, for Christ's sake, and look how many airplanes we used to have flying around. Damn weeping willies didn't spook me. I was a hell of a feisty kid. I just hopped in the wire, and I built the son of a bitch.

I strip a line in East St. Louis, gate a conversion, wire it to a PIN, and I'm back on my way.

I know how much a fancy vacation would mean to my old lady, but it just don't appeal much to me. When I got some time off, I like to ride the wires. See what the competition's up to. You wouldn't believe the boners I catch. If you only knew how some of those so-called bridge builders clank up their bridges, you'd never ride wire again.

That's the trouble with people today. Just out to get the job done any old way they can and that's it. Got no pride in their work, no sense of craftsmanship. To them, a bridge is a bridge. Well, I'll tell you one thing, can't nobody say that about me.

Right outside St. Louis, I stumble across a feeble $\triangle\phi$. Funny,

since the timing input's great and so's the monolithic amp. I bypass the sync amp mainly to give me some time to figure out what's really screwing up.

After you been around bridges long as I have, you find there ain't no two the same. There are good ones and bad ones, like people. There are bridges give you the kind of nice, mushy feeling you got when your girl used to kiss you good night even though she wasn't supposed to, 'cause the neighbors could see. They shape up easy. And there are the bastards. Oh, I should hope to tell you. The rowdies, the hoodlums, the foul balls. You whip one of those SOBs into shape, man, you will know you have built you a bridge.

It gets to be more. A low $\triangle N$. I start to pick up all kinds of glitches, the worst being a nasty power leakage that starts licking around my ankles, but whatever's causing it all, I can't track it down. The parametric amplifier, the microwave filters, the ruby crystals all check out fine. I am really stumped. Must be getting old, hah, hah.

People got no idea what it's like to go across slow. Zipping through like they do, in one end, bingo, out the other, they never get to see it the way I do. My God, but it's pretty in here. All the colors kinda light up your eyeballs and you're everyplace at once except you're not, whichever way you want it. It's kinda like almost a religious thing. You can say whatever you want to and you don't have to feel embarrassed, 'cause nobody's around, but still, you just know that there's somebody listening. But the best part of all is how your brain works like the good Lord meant for it to. I mean, in here, you can figure out all kinds of stuff you ain't never even thought about before, and when you have, you say, Jeez, but ain't that the truth. While I don't like to spread this around 'cause I'd take a lot of ribbing from the guys, in here, it's sometimes so good that I cry.

Damn it, the leakage gets bigger. It creeps up around my waist so I can hardly move. And it starts to hurt a little. My right hand ain't working so good, it turns stiff, and the next thing I know, it

falls off. Why, I don't know, but it strikes me as being a kind of a joke that's so bad you just got to laugh at it. So I chuckle while I one-handed feel my way along a reflector.

There was a war, once, where there was a whole bunch of underground tunnels had to be cleaned out. Little guys like me used to have to go down in them tunnels with only a hunting knife 'cause the bang from a gun would blow out your eardrums. And the guys who built them tunnels used to hang 'em full of snakes so these little guys crawling through, if they weren't careful, would get bit smack in the face and die. Tunnel rats, they called these little guys. So, when I was growing up, and these other kids and me used to play war, and nobody ever used to want me on their side 'cause I was so little, I got to telling the other kids I was being brought up special to be a tunnel rat. One day, over at my house, they called me a liar, so to show 'em, I slipped the grating off one of our hot air registers, and I hopped right on down into the heating duct system. I must have been in there for hours, really loving it. Shining my flashlight around on the lookout for snakes. They didn't have to go and call the fire department. I would have come out when I was ready.

I laugh so hard when my leg disappears, I got all I can do to decouple the quadraxial cabling, especially since I only got one hand to work with.

Know how many bridges I built? Take a guess. Go ahead. Yeah, that's right. I already told you before, ain't I. Well, here's something I never told you. Right after I built my fiftieth bridge, they went and offered me a job at the head office in Albuquerque. Can't you just see me getting all gussied up in a suit every morning so I can go sit behind some desk, shuffling papers around and being worthless.

Piss on that. I'll stick to building bridges.

My other leg disappears, and I stop laughing. For the first time it dawns on me that this ain't no laughing matter. Unless I get cracking, this bridge ain't gonna get built. I slip through multi-

layer capacitors and liquefied feed-thrus like a crazy man, trying to pinpoint the problem. For my trouble, I lose an ear and half of my only remaining hand.

Once I went to San Francisco. They got a bridge there, one of the old iron kind, lot of people told me I ought to go see. So I went and had me a look. Know what? It was nice, sure, real picturesque, but in all modesty, I got a coupla mine I like a whole lot better.

I feel a strong output signal choking me off. I'm a goddamned half-handed broomstick, and I can't swallow air. Then I do an open-loop check straight into the Gunn amplifier.

Being honest, I suppose I'd have to say I am slowing down a little. But, Jesus H. Christ, don't you think I'd be the first one to knock it off if I really thought I couldn't hack it anymore?

The goddamn signal level! It's higher at the input than at the first stage. I got me an oscillating Gunn amp, by Jesus! So I cut back on the accelerating voltage, which stabilizes the signal and sets everything up hunky-dory, except I get caught on the last bad pulse ripple, and I pick up a whole lot of steam.

You know, there are only six hundred and thirty-two qualified bridge builders. Six hundred and thirty-two in the whole frigging world.

I pass Rolla, Carthage, and Joplin, and I'm really rolling.

You should of heard 'em cheer when I came out of the wire that time after three guys before me got creamed.

A few more of my parts fall off, but I don't care so much anymore, 'cause all they were doing was slowing me down.

I hate to keep coming back to this, I know I sound like a broken record, but I like building bridges. It's a real nice feeling to know that you took a job that nobody else wanted, and you did it, and you made something of it, besides.

I zip through the safety interlocks like they ain't even there.

Know what? I get this beautiful dream sometimes where I live in this little cottage I find in a wire. I never come out.

And about faster than light, I hit Tulsa.

THE WINNING OF THE GREAT AMERICAN GREENING REVOLUTION

A Progress Report

Here are all the answers—now what was the question?

Murray Yaco

A Few Weeds of Ignorance in Our Garden of Eden

Almost a generation has passed since a pollution-weary electorate gave its mandate to a revolutionary new political party—the Council of Molecular Biologists—and embraced its brave vision of a biologically engineered America. Yet even today there are superstitious people who believe that "God will punish man" for creating the made-to-order plants and animals we need to heal and transform our environment. Of course, superstition of this sort is rare. In fact, it is usually confined to an ignorant suspicion of experiments conducted by J. P. Holochwost, forty-sixth President of the United States and former molecular biologist who still finds time to "dabble a bit," as he so aptly puts it. Our President's recent part-time achievements include three quite promising biological contributions: 1) An erosion-resisting, bland-tasting, liver-colored, hybrid spinach with the aroma of well-cured soft cheese; 2) the sucker-mouthed

petroleum whale—a mutant leviathan capable of subsisting entirely on a diet of oil spills—and also, unfortunately, of spouting huge clouds of carbon monoxide; 3) the armored berserker luminous devil elephant—more of a biological curiosity than a biological threat—although malicious rumors persist that the migrations of wild herds in evacuated areas of northern California have registered 8.3 on the Richter Scale.

Rescuing Our Water Wonderlands

Not so long ago, our precious lakes and rivers and coastal tidelands were fouled by unsightly masses of scumlike green algae. This condition was caused by the chemicals in household detergents which were discharged into drainage systems. Fortunately, molecular biologists have developed a mutant yeast as a substitute for the detergent chemicals which encouraged the growth of algae. This interesting, made-to-order yeast produces an important new enzyme. The metabolic action of this new enzyme has converted all scumlike green algae in the United States into flotillas of iceberg-shaped, luminous mountains of drifting golden mucus which make our precious lakes and rivers and coastal tidelands unnavigable, but algae-free.

A Vanishing Species No One Will Mourn

Who would have guessed, even a few years ago, that the common lightning bug (sometimes known as the firefly) could be genetically modified to help rid us of the ubiquitous mosquito? Today, the tiny on-off blinks of mutated lightning bugs are a common sight on summer nights—each little flash of light signaling the electrocution of another pesky mosquito. It is interesting to observe these new insects performing the work for which they were designed; of course, it is imperative for the observer (or for anyone venturing outside at night) to first tape a ten-foot length of insulated copper wire alongside his or her spinal column, making certain that one bare

end protrudes well above the head, and that the other trails and makes firm contact with the ground.

A Consciousness Expander by Any Other Name

Even in ancient times, men used fermented beverages and euphorics to obtain occasional relief from stress. Today, plant geneticists continue to seek a satisfactory replacement for distilled beverages. (No grain-neutral spirits have been produced in the United States since a pair of fast-multiplying, baboon-faced hog locusts escaped from a classified project in Utah and neutralized the Corn Belt.) It is hoped that the much-maligned marijuana plant may serve as such a replacement. But attempts to "respectablize" *cannabis sativa* by cross-breeding it with well-accepted American plants have not been completely successful. A recent cross between *cannabis sativa* and the long-stemmed American Beauty rose produces lovely red blossoms that smell like marijuana, but when smoked, taste like smoldering bathroom deodorant.

Healing Mother Earth

Human life depends entirely on the well-being of the shallow covering of topsoil that blankets our earth. Yet in the past we shamefully abused this heritage. Chemical poisons, man-made fertilizers, and exploitive tillage practices came close to sterilizing irreplaceable agricultural lands, and proved especially inimical to the common earthworm. This lowly creature, almost extinct today, had the function of aerating the soil and fertilizing it by passing it through its digestive tract. Fortunately, geneticists have been able to develop a hardy, fast-growing variety of earthworm which seems to thrive on worn-out topsoil. This made-to-order earthworm has produced a dramatic change in the tillage practices of American farmers, who no longer use moldboard plows which would disturb the newly established earthworm colonies. It has also resulted in a dramatic change in the American diet, since most farmers are re-

luctant to practice farming while being chased by forty-foot omnivorous earthworms.

Keeping Things in Balance

Today, biologists help maintain a natural balance of competing species by "building to order" any special predators that may be required. For instance, in order to control excess breeding by giant omnivorous earthworms, biologists have developed a new variety of robin. This mutant robin is an albino (white with pink eyes) and is unusually heavy-bodied (specimens exceeding 1,200 pounds are not uncommon). It can also be identified by its song, which differs from the common robin's early-morning cry of "cheer up, cheer up" in that it only sings at night, making a sound that is often interpreted as the sobbing of dozens of small children consumed by uncontrollable grief. Perhaps because of its long roosting habit, this new predator has not proved completely effective in controlling the giant omnivorous earthworm. The scientific name of this unusual bird is *Mobius ornithgigantus*. It is popularly known as the slugabed robin, or the night-sobbing brunch bird.

AMMT

An interesting competition between two widely separated teams of American plant geneticists may yet provide us with a substitute for the prohibitively expensive Christmas tree. (Commercial Christmas-tree production declined abruptly when North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Illinois were unexpectedly designated as a National Whooping Crane Swamp.) On the West Coast, experimenters have developed a fast-growing, mutated variety of mistletoe, which has some of the propagating characteristics of the common puffball. Its seed pod "explodes" upon ripening—propelling the seeds at surprisingly high velocities toward the tops of the trees where it prefers to grow. Eastern plant geneticists, not to be left behind, have also developed a mutant mistletoe. Its seeding mechanism is a matter of conjecture, but rumors persist

that it is capable of propelling dart-shaped seeds at velocities which enable them to intercept the seeds of the Western variety before they can reach the treetops. Among Western plant geneticists, this interesting Eastern plant is known as the anti-mistle mistletoe.

Stabilizing Our Recreation Playgrounds

The erosion of shorelines and beaches is a natural phenomenon. Attempts to prevent this erosion by building wind and water barriers usually prove costly and futile. Fortunately, these precious recreational resources are no longer threatened by erosion. All of our beaches have been seeded with a made-to-order, deep-rooted sand ivy. This new plant has stopped all beach erosion by anchoring itself so permanently that it resists winds of hurricane force. It has also beautified our beaches by producing an unending profusion of orchidlike blossoms with a memorable fragrance. Most important of all, this new plant has stopped the overutilization of our beaches, since most people have allergic reactions to the plant's fragrant blossoms. The most characteristic syndrome involves watering of the eyes, a temporary vague itching sensation and a permanent tendency to drool and giggle convulsively when sexually aroused.

Pests No Longer Seen Nor Heard

The Venus Fly Trap is an unusual house plant with the curious ability to snare and digest insects. It does this by emitting a subtle odor which seduces the unsuspecting insect into landing on the plant, where it is quickly enmeshed. Plant geneticists have attempted to improve this interesting plant and turn it into a "natural insecticide" that would trap houseflies on a much larger scale. By breeding-in selected characteristics of the tropical breadfruit tree, they have created a much larger variety of Venus Fly Trap that emits mouth-watering odors of freshly baked cookies and tutti-frutti. This new plant no longer requires careful indoor culture. It will grow almost anywhere, although it prefers to reside in patches of heavy shade, such as those cast by sliding-boards in school playgrounds.

FORLESEN

What do you expect of an afterlife where
they can't tell feet from shoes?

Gene Wolfe

When Emanuel Forlesen awoke, his wife was already up preparing breakfast. Forlesen remembered nothing, knew nothing but his name, for an instant did not remember his wife, or that she was his wife, or that she was a human being, or what human beings were supposed to look like.

At the time he woke he knew only his own name; the rest came later and is therefore suspect, colored by rationalization and the expectations of the woman herself and the other people. He moaned, and his wife said: "Oh, you're awake. Better read the orientation."

He said, "What orientation?"

"You don't remember where you work, do you? Or what you're supposed to do."

He said, "I don't remember a damn thing."

"Well, read the orientation."

He pushed aside the gingham spread and got out of bed looking

at himself, noticing first the oddly deformed hands at the ends of his legs, then remembering the name for them: *shoes*. He was naked, and his wife turned her back to him politely while she prepared food. "Where the hell am I?" he asked.

"In our house." She gave him the address. "In our bedroom."

"We cook in the bedroom?"

"We sure do," his wife said. "There isn't any kitchen. There's a parlor, the children's bedroom, this room and a bath. I've got an electric fry pan, a tabletop electric oven and a coffeepot here; we'll be all right."

The confidence in her voice heartened him. He said, "I suppose this used to be a one-bedroom house, and we made the kitchen into a place for the kids."

"Maybe it's an old house, and they made the kitchen into the bathroom when they got inside plumbing."

He was dressing himself, having seen that she wore clothing, and that there was clothing too large for her piled on a chair near the bed. He said, "Don't you know?"

"It wasn't in the orientation."

At first he did not understand what she had said. He repeated, "Don't you know?"

"I told you, it wasn't in there. There's just a diagram of the house, and there's this room, the children's room, the parlor and the bath. It said that door there"—she gestured with the spatula—"was the bath, and that's right, because I went in there to get the water for the coffee. I stay here and look after things and you go out and work, that's what it said. There was some stuff about what you do, but I skipped that and read about what *I* do."

"You didn't know anything when you woke up either," he said.

"Just my name."

"What's your name?"

"Edna Forlesen. I'm your wife—that's what it said."

He walked around the small table on which she had arranged the cooking appliances, wanting to look at her. "You're sort of pretty," he said.

"You are sort of handsome," his wife said. "Anyway, you look tough and strong."

This made him walk over to the mirror on the dresser and try to look at himself. He did not know what he looked like, but the man in the mirror was not he. The image was older, fatter, meaner, more cunning, and stupider than he knew himself to be, and he raised his hands (the man in the mirror did likewise) to touch his features; they were what they should have been and he turned away. "That mirror's no good," he said.

"Can't you see yourself? That means you're a vampire."

He laughed, and decided that that was the way he always laughed when his wife's jokes weren't funny. She said, "Want some coffee?" and he sat down.

She put a cup in front of him, and a pile of books. "This is the orientation," she said. "You better read it—you don't have much time."

On top of the pile was a mimeographed sheet, and he picked that up first. It said:

Welcome to the planet Planet.

You have awakened completely ignorant of everything. Do not be disturbed by this. It is NORMAL. *Under no circumstances ever allow yourself to become excited, confused, angry, or* FEARFUL. *While you possess these capacities, they are to be regarded as incapacities.*

Anything you may have remembered upon awakening is false. The orientation books provided you contain information of inestimable value. Master it as soon as possible, BUT DO NOT BE LATE FOR WORK. *If there are no orientation books where you are, go to the house on your right (from the street).* DO NOT GO TO THE HOUSE ON YOUR LEFT.

If you cannot find any books, live like everyone else.

The white paper under this paper is your JOB ASSIGNMENT. *The yellow paper is your* TABLE OF COMMONLY USED WAITS AND MEASURES. *Read these first; they are more important than the books.*

"Eat your egg," his wife said. He tasted the egg. It was good but slightly oily, as though a drop of motor oil had found its way into the grease in which she had fried it. His *Job Assignment* read:

Forlosen, E.

To his wife he said, "They got our name wrong."

Forlosen, E. You work at Model Pattern Products, 19000370 Plant Prkwy, Highland Industrial Park. Your duties are supervisory and managerial. When you arrive punch in on the S&M clock (beige) NOT the Labor clock (brown). The union is particular about this. Go to the Reconstruction and Advanced Research section. To arrive on time leave before 060. 30.00.

The yellow paper was illegible save for the title and first line: *There are 240 ours in each day.*

"What time is it?" he asked his wife.

She glanced at her wrist. "Oh six oh ours. Didn't they give you a watch?"

He looked at his own wrist—it was bare, of course. For a few moments Edna helped him search for one; but it seemed that none had been provided, and in the end he took hers, she saying that he would need it more than she. It was big for a woman's watch, he thought, but very small for a man's. "Try it," she said, and he obediently studied the tiny screen. The words "The Time Is" were cast in the metal at its top; below them, glimmering and changing even as he looked: "060.07.43." He took a sip of coffee and found the oily taste was there too.

The book at the top of the pile was a booklet really, about seven inches by four with the pages stapled in the middle. The title, printed in black on a blue cover of slightly heavier paper, was *How to Drive.*

Remember that your car is a gift. Although it belongs to you and you are absolutely responsible for its acts (whether driven by yourself or others, or not driven) and maintenance (pg 15), do not:

1. *Deface its surface.*
2. *Interfere with the operation of its engine, or with the operation of any other part.*

3. *Alter it in such a way as to increase or diminish the noise of operation.*

4. *Drive it at speeds in excess of 40 miles/our.*

5. *Pick up hitchhikers.*

6. *Deposit a hitchhiker at any point other than a Highway Patrol Station.*

7. *Operate it while you are in an unfit condition. (To be determined by a duly constituted medical board.)*

8. *Fail to halt and render medical assistance to persons injured by you, your car, or others (provided third parties are not already providing such assistance).*

9. *Stop at any time or for any reason at any point not designated as a stopping position.*

10. *Wave or shout at other drivers.*

11. *Invade the privacy of other drivers—as by noticing or pretending to notice them or the occupants of their vehicles.*

12. *Fail to return it on demand.*

13. *Drive it to improper destinations.*

He turned the page. On the new page was a diagram of the control panel of an automobile, and he noted the positions of Windshield, Steering Wheel, Accelerator, Brake, Reversing Switch, Communicator, Beverage Dispenser, Urinal, Defecator, and Map Compartment. He asked Edna if they had a car, and she said she thought they did, and that it would be outside.

"You know," he said, "I've just noticed that this place has windows."

Edna said, "You're always jumping up from the table. Finish your breakast."

Ignoring her, he parted the curtains. She said, "Two walls have windows and two don't. I haven't looked out of them." Outside he

saw sunshine on concrete; a small, yellow, somehow hunched-looking automobile; and a house.

"Yeah, we've got a car," he said. "It's parked right under the window."

"Well, I wish you'd finish breakfast and get to work."

"I want to look out of the other window."

If the first window had been, as it appeared to be, at the side of the house, then the other should be at either the back or the front. He opened the curtains and saw a narrow, asthmatic brick courtyard. On the bricks stood three dead plants in terra-cotta jars; the opposite side of the court, no more than fifteen feet off, was the wall of another house. There were two widely spaced windows in this wall, both closed with curtains; and as he watched (though his face was only at the window for an instant) a man pushed aside the curtains at the nearer window and looked at him. Forlesen stepped back and said to Edna, "I saw a man; he looked afraid. A bald man with a wide, fat face, and a gold tooth in front, and a mole over one eyebrow." He went to the mirror again and studied himself.

"You don't look like that," his wife said.

"No, I don't—that's what bothers me. That was the first thing I thought of—that it would be myself, perhaps the way I'm going to look when I'm older. I've lost a lot of my hair now and I could lose the rest of it, in fact, I suppose I will. And I could break a tooth in front and get a gold one—"

"Maybe it wasn't really a mole," Edna said. "It could have been just a spot of dirt or something."

"It could have been." He had seated himself again, and as he spoke he speared a bite of egg with his fork. "I suppose it's even possible that I could grow a mole I don't have now, and I could put on weight. But that wasn't me; those weren't my features, not at any age."

"Well, why should it be you?"

"I just felt it should, somehow."

"You've been reading that red book." Edna's voice was accusing.

"No, I haven't even looked at it." Curious, he pushed aside brown and purple pamphlets, fished the red book out of the pile, and looked at it. The cover was of leather and had been blind-tooled in a pattern of thin lines. Holding it at a slant to the light from the window, he decided he could discern in the intricacies of the pattern a group of men surrounding a winged being. "What is it?" he said.

"It's supposed to tell you how to be good, and how to live—everything like that."

He riffled the pages, and noted that the left side of the book—the back of each leaf—was printed in scarlet in a language he did not understand. The right side, printed in black, seemed by its arrangement on the page to be a translation.

Of the nature of Death and the Dead we may enumerate twelve kinds. First there are those who become new gods, for whom new universes are born. Second those who praise. Third those who fight as soldiers in the unending war with evil. Fourth those who amuse themselves among flowers and sweet streams with sports. Fifth those who dwell in gardens of bliss, or are tortured. Sixth those who continue as in life. Seventh those who turn the wheel of the Universe. Eighth those who find in their graves their mothers' wombs and in one life circle forever. Ninth ghosts. Tenth those born again as men in their grandsons' time. Eleventh those who return as beasts or trees. And last those who sleep.

"Look at this," he said, "this can't be right."

"I wish you'd hurry. You're going to be late."

He looked at the watch she had given him. It read 060.26.13, and he said, "I still have time. But look here—the black is supposed to say the same thing as the red, but look at how different they are: where it says 'And last those who sleep,' there's a whole paragraph opposite it; and across from 'Fourth those who amuse themselves,' there are only two words."

"You don't want any more coffee, do you?"

He shook his head, laid down the red book, and picked up another; its title was *Food Preparation in the Home*. "That's for me," his wife said. "You wouldn't be interested in that."

Contents

Introduction—Three Meals a Day
Preparing Breakfast
Preparing Luncheon
Preparing Supper
Helpful Hints for Homemakers

He set the book down again, and as he did so its cheap plastic cover popped open to the last page. At the bottom of the Hints for Homemakers he read: *Remember that if he does not go you and your children will starve.* He closed it and put the sugar bowl on top of it.

"I wish you'd get going," his wife said.

He stood up. "I was just leaving. How do I get out?"

She pointed to one of the doors. "That's the parlor. You go straight through that, and there's another door that goes outside."

"And the car," Forlesen said (more than half to himself), "will be around there under the window." He slipped the blue *How to Drive* booklet into one of his pockets.

The parlor was smaller than the bedroom, but because it had no furniture as large as the bed or the table it seemed nearly empty. There was an uncomfortable-looking sofa against one wall, two bowlegged chairs in corners, an umbrella stand, and a dusty potted palm. The floor was covered by a dark patterned rug, and the walls by flowered paper. Four strides took him across the room; he opened another, larger and heavier door and stepped outside. A moment after he had closed the door he heard the bolt snick behind him; he tried to open it again and found, as he had expected, that he was locked out.

The house in which he seemed to have been born stood on a narrow street paved with asphalt. Only a two-foot concrete walkway separated it from the curb; there was no porch, and the doorway was at the same level as the walk, which had been stenciled at intervals of six feet or so with the words GO TO YOUR RIGHT—NOT TO YOUR LEFT. They were positioned in such a way as to be upside

down to a person who had gone to the left. Forlesen went around the corner of his house instead and got into the yellow car—the instrument panel differed in several details from the one in the blue book. For a moment he considered rolling down the right window of the car to rap on the house window, but he felt sure that Edna would not come. He threw the reversing switch instead, wondering if he should not do something to bring the car to life first. It began to roll slowly backward at once; he guided it with the steering wheel, craning his neck to look over his shoulder.

The narrow street seemed deserted. He switched into Front and touched the accelerator pedal with his foot; the car inched forward, picking up speed only slowly even when he pushed the pedal to the floor. The street was lined with small brick houses much like the one he had left; their curtains were drawn, and small cars like his own, but of various colors, were parked beside the houses. Signs stood on metal poles cast into the asphalt of the road, spaced just sufficiently far apart that each was out of sight of the next. They were diamond-shaped, with black letters on an orange ground, and each read HIDDEN DRIVES.

His communicator said: "If you do not know how to reach your destination, press the button and ask."

He pressed the button and said, "I think I'm supposed to go to a place called Model Pattern Products."

"Correct. Your destination is 19000370 Plant Parkway, Highland Industrial Park. Turn right at the next light."

He was about to ask what was meant by the word *light* in this connection, when he saw that he was approaching an intersection and that over it, like a ceiling fixture unaccompanied by any ceiling, was suspended a rapidly blinking light which emitted at intervals of perhaps a quarter-second alternating flashes of red and green. He turned to the right; the changing colors gave an illusion of jerky motion, belied by the smooth hum of the tires. The flickering brought a sensation of nausea, and for a moment he shut his eyes against it; then he felt the car nosing up, tilting under him. He opened his eyes and saw that the new street onto which he had

turned was lifting beneath him, becoming, ahead, an airborne ribbon of pavement that traced a thin streak through the sky. Already he was higher than the tops of the trees. The roofs of the houses—little tarpaper things like the lids of boxes—were dwindling below. He thought of Edna in one of those boxes (he found he could not tell which one) cooking a meal for herself, perhaps smoothing the bed in which the two of them had slept, and knew, with that painful insight that stands in relation to reason as reason itself does to instinct, that she would spend ours, most of whatever day there was to be, in looking out the parlor window at the empty street; he found that he both pitied and envied her.

The speaker said: "Do not stop in route. You are still one and one half aisles from Model Pattern Products, your place of employment."

Forlesen nodded and looked at the watch Edna had given him. It was 069.50.

"You are to park your car," the speaker continued, "in the Model Pattern Products parking lot. You are not to occupy any position marked 'Visitors,' or any position marked with a name not your own."

"Do they know I'm coming?" Forlesen asked.

"An employee service folder has already been made out for you," the speaker told him. "All that need be done is to fill in your name."

The Model Pattern Products parking lot was enclosed by a high fence, but the gates were open, and the hinges so rusted that Forlesen, who stopped in the gateway for a moment thinking some guard or watchman might wish to challenge him, wondered if they had ever been closed; the ground itself, covered with loose gravel the color of ash, sloped steeply; he was forced to drive carefully to keep his car from skidding among the concrete stops of brilliant orange provided to prevent the parked cars from rolling down the grade; most of these were marked either with some name not his or with the word *Visitor,* but he eventually discovered an unmarked position (unattractive, apparently, because smoke from a stubby flue

projecting from the back of an outbuilding would blow across it) and left his car. His legs ached.

He was thirty or forty feet from his car when he realized he no longer had the speaker to advise him. Several people were walking toward the grey metal building that was Model Pattern Products, but all were too distant for him to talk to them without shouting, and something in their appearance suggested that they would not wait for him to overtake them in any case. He followed them through a small door and found himself alone.

An anteroom held two time clocks, one beige, the other brown. Remembering the instruction sheet, he took a blank timecard from the rack and wrote his name at the top, then pushed it into the beige machine and depressed the lever. A gong sounded. He withdrew the card and checked the stamped time: 069.56. A thin, youngish woman with large glasses and a sharp nose looked over his shoulder. "You're late," she said. (He was aware for an instant of the effort she was making to read his name at the top of the card.) "Mr. Forlesen."

He said, "I'm afraid I don't know the starting time."

"Oh seventy ours sharp, Mr. Forlesen. Start oh seventy ours sharp, coffee for your subdivision one hundred ours to one hundred and one. Lunch one hundred and twenty to one hundred and forty-one. Coffee, your subdivision, one fifty to one fifty-one p.m. Quit one seventy ours at the whistle."

"Then I'm not late," Forlesen said. He showed her his card.

"Mr. Frick likes everyone to be at least twenty minutes early, especially supervisory and management people. The real go-getters —that's what he calls them, the real go-getters—try to be early. I mean, earlier than the regular early. Oh sixty-nine twenty-five, something like that. They unlock their desks and go upstairs for early coffee, and sometimes they play cards; it's fun."

"I'm sorry I missed it," Forlesen said. "Can you tell me where I'm supposed to go now?"

"To your desk," the woman said, nodding. "Unlock it."

"I don't know where it is."

"Well, of course you don't, but I can't assign you to your desk—that's up to Mr. Fields, your supervisor." After a moment she added, "I know where you're going to go, but he has the keys."

Forlesen said, "I thought I was a supervisor."

"You are," the woman told him, "but Mr. Fields is—you know—a real supervisor. Anyway, nearly. Do you want to talk to him now?"

Forlesen nodded.

"I'll see if he'll see you now. You have Creativity Group today, and Leadership Training. And Company Orientation, and Bet-Your-Life—that's the management-managing real-life pseudo-game—and one interdepartmental training-transfer."

"I'll be glad of the orientation, anyway," Forlesen said. He followed the woman, who had started to walk away. "But am I going to have time for all that?"

"You don't get it," she told him over her shoulder, "you give it. And you'll have lots of time for work besides—don't worry. I've been here a long time already. I'm Miss Fawn. Are you married?"

"Yes," Forlesen said, "and I think we have children."

"Oh. Well, you look it. Here's Mr. Fields' office, and I nearly forgot to tell you you're on the Planning and Evaluation Committee. Don't forget to knock."

Forlesen knocked on the door to which the woman had led him. It was of metal painted to resemble wood, and had riveted to its front a small brass plaque which read "Mr. D'Andrea."

"Come in!" someone called from inside the office.

Forlesen entered and saw a short, thickset, youngish man with close-cropped hair sitting at a metal desk. The office was extremely small and had no windows, but there was a large, brightly colored picture on each wall—two photographs in color (a beach with rocks and waves, and a snow-clad mountain) and two realistic landscapes (both of rolling green countryside dotted with cows and trees).

"Come in," the youngish man said again. "Sit down. Listen, I want to tell you something—you don't have to knock to come in

this office. Not ever. My door—like they say—is always open. What I mean is, I may keep it shut to keep out the noise and so forth out in the hall, but it's always open to you."

"I think I understand," Forlesen said. "Are you Mr. Fields?" The plaque had somewhat shaken his faith in the young woman with glasses.

"Right. Ed Fields at your service."

"Then I'm going to be working for you. I'm Emanuel Forlesen." Forlesen leaned forward and offered his hand, which Fields walked around the desk to take.

"Glad to meet you, Manny. Always happy to welcome a new face to the subdivision." For an instant, as their eyes met, Forlesen felt himself weighed in invisible scales and, he thought, found slightly wanting. Then the moment passed, and a few seconds later he had difficulty believing it had ever been. "Remember what I told you when you came in—my door is always open," Fields said. "Sit down." Forlesen sat, and Fields resumed his place behind the desk.

"We're a small outfit," Fields said, "but we're sharp." He held up a clenched fist. "And I intend to make us the sharpest in the division. I need men who'll back my play all the way, and maybe even run in front a little. Sharpies. That's what I call 'em—sharpies. And you work with me, not for me."

Forlesen nodded.

"We're a team," Fields continued, "and we're going to function as a team. That doesn't mean there isn't a quarterback, and a coach"—he pointed toward the ceiling—"up there. It does mean that I expect every man to bat two-fifty or better, and the ones that don't make three hundred had better be damn good field. See what I mean?"

Forlesen nodded again and asked, "What does our subdivision do? What's our function?"

"We make money for the company," Fields told him. "We do what needs to be done. You see this office? This desk, this chair?"

Forlesen nodded.

"There's two kinds of guys that sit here—I mean all through the

company. There's the old has-been guys they stick in here because they've been through it all and seen everything, and there's the young guys like me that get put here to get an education—you get me? Sometimes the young guys just never move out, then they turn into the old ones. That isn't going to happen to me, and I want you to remember that the easiest way for you to move up yourself is to move into this spot right here. Someday this will all be yours—that's the way to think of it. That's what I tell every guy in the subdivision—someday this'll all be yours." Fields reached over his head to tap one of the realistic landscapes. "You get what I mean?"

"I think so."

"Okay, then let me show you your desk and where you're gonna work."

As they dodged along windowless, brightly lit corridors it struck Forlesen that though the building was certainly ventilated—some of the corridors, in fact, were actually windy—the system could not be working very well. A hundred odors, mostly foul, but some of a sickening sweetness, thronged the air; and though most of the hallways they traveled were so cold as to be uncomfortable, a few were as stuffy as tents left closed all day beneath a summer sun.

"What's that noise?" Forlesen asked.

"That's a jackhammer busting concrete. You're going to be in the new wing." Fields opened a green steel door and led the way down a narrow, low-ceilinged passage pungent with the burnt-metal smell of arc welding; the tiled floor was gritty with cement dust, and Forlesen wondered, looking at the unpainted walls, how they could have gotten so dirty when they were clearly so new. "In here," Fields said.

It was a big room, and had been divided into cubicles with rippled glass partitions five feet high. The effect was one of privacy, but the cubicles had been laid out in such a way as to allow anyone looking through the glass panel in the office door to see into them all. The room's windows were covered with splintering boards, and the floor was sufficiently uneven that it was possible to imagine it a petrified sea, though its streaked black and grey pattern was more

suggestive of charred wood. "You're in luck," Fields said. "I'd forgotten, or I would have told you back in the office. You get a window desk. Right here. Sitting by the window makes it kind of dark, but you only got the one other guy on the side of you over there, that's nice, and you know there's always a certain prestige goes with the desk that's next to the window."

Forlesen asked, "Wouldn't it be possible to take some of the glass out of these partitions and use it in the windows?"

"Hell, no. This stuff is partition glass—what you need for a window is window glass. I thought you were supposed to have a lot of science."

"My duties are supposed to be supervisory and managerial," Forlesen said.

"Don't ever let anybody tell you management isn't a science." Fields thumped Forlesen's new desk for emphasis and got a smudge of dust on his fist. "It's an art, sure, but it's a science too."

Forlesen, who could not see how anything could be both, nodded.

Fields glanced at his watch. "Nearly oh seventy-one already, and I got an appointment. Listen, I'm gonna leave you to find your way around."

Forlesen seated himself at his desk. "I was hoping you'd tell me what I'm supposed to do here before you left."

Fields was already outside the cubicle. "You mean your responsibilities; there's a list around somewhere."

Forlesen had intended to protest further, but as he started to speak he noticed an optical illusion so astonishing that for the brief period it was visible he could only stare. As Fields passed behind one of the rippled glass partitions on his way to the door, the distortions in the glass caused his image to change from that of the somewhat dumpy and rumpled man with whom Forlesen was now slightly familiar; behind the glass he was taller, exceedingly neat, and blank-faced. And he wore glasses.

When he was gone Forlesen got up and examined the partitions carefully; they seemed ordinary enough, one surface rippled, the other smooth, the tops slightly dusty. He looked at his empty desk

through the glass; it was a blur. He sat down again, and the telephone rang. "Cappy?"

"This is Emanuel Forlesen." At the last moment it occurred to Forlesen that it might have been better to call himself "Manny" as Fields had—that it might seem more friendly and less fomal, particularly to someone who was looking for someone he addressed so casually; but, as the thought entered his mind, something else, not a thought but one of those deeper feelings from which our thoughts have perhaps evolved, contradicted it, so he repeated his name, bearing down on the first syllable: *"Ee-manuel Forlesen."*

"Isn't Cappy Dillingham there?"

"He may be in this office," Forlesen said, "that is, his desk may be here, but he's not here himself, and this is my telephone—I just moved into the office."

"Take a message for him, will you? Tell him the Creativity Group meeting is moved up to oh seventy-eight sharp. I'm sorry it had to be so early, but Gene Fine has got a bunch of other stuff and we couldn't figure out anything else to do short of canceling. And we couldn't get a room, so we're meeting in the hall outside the drilling and boring shop. There's definitely going to be a film. Have you got that?"

"I think so," Forlesen said. "Oh seventy-eight, hall outside the drill room, movie." He heard someone behind him and turned to look. It was Miss Fawn, so he said, "Do you know where Mr. Dillingham is? I'm taking a call for him."

"He died," Miss Fawn said. "Let me talk to them." She took the receiver. "Who's calling please? . . . Mr. Franklin, Mr. Dillingham died. . . . Last night. . . . Yes, it is. Mr. Forlesen is taking his place in your group—you should have gotten a memo on it . . . On Mr. Dillingham's old number; you were just talking to him. He's right here. Wait a moment." She turned back to Forlesen: "It's for you."

He took the telephone and a voice in the earpiece said, "Are you Forlesen? Listen, this is Ned Franklin. You may not have been notified yet, but you're in our creativity group, and we're meeting—

wait a minute, I've got a memo on it under all this crap somewhere."

"Oh seventy-eight," Forlesen said.

"Right. I realize that's pretty early—"

"We wouldn't want to try to get along without Gene Fine," Forlesen said.

"Right. Try to be there."

Miss Fawn seemed to be leaving. Forlesen turned to see how she would appear in the rippled glass as he said, "What are we going to try and create?"

"Creativity. We create creativity itself—we learn to be creative."

"I see," Forlesen said. He watched Miss Fawn become pretty while remaining sexless, like a mannequin. He said, "I thought we'd just take some clay or something and start in."

"Not that sort of creativity, for crap's sake!"

"All right," Forlesen said.

"Just show up, okay? Mr. Frick is solidly behind this and he gets upset when we have less than full attendance."

"Maybe he could get us a meeting room then," Forlesen suggested. He had no idea who Mr. Frick was, but he was obviously important.

"Hell, I couldn't ask Mr. Frick that. Anyway, he never asks where we had the meeting—just how many came and what we discussed, and whether we feel we're making progress."

"He could be saving it."

"Yeah, I guess he could. Listen, Cappy, if I can get us a room I'll call you, okay?"

"Right," said Forlesen. He hung up, wondered vaguely why Miss Fawn had come, then saw that she had left a stack of papers on a corner of his desk. "Well, the hell with you," he said, and pushed them toward the wall. "I haven't even looked at this desk yet."

It was a metal desk, and somewhat smaller, older, and shabbier than the one in Fields' office. It seemed odd to Forlesen that he should find old furniture in a part of the building which was still—judging from the sounds that occasionally drifted through the walls

and window boards—under construction; but the desk, and his chair as well, were unquestionably nearing the end of their useful lives. The center desk drawer contained a dead insect, a penknife with yellowed imitation-ivory sides and a broken blade, a drawing of a bracket (very neatly lettered, Forlesen noticed) on crumpled tracing paper, and a dirty stomach mint. He threw this last away (his wastebasket was new, made of plastic, and did not seem to fit in with the other furnishings of the office) and opened the top right-hand drawer. It contained an assortment of pencils (all more or less chewed), a cube of art gum with the corners worn off, and some sheets of blank paper with one corner folded. The next drawer down yielded a wrinkled brown paper bag that disgorged a wad of wax paper, a stale half cookie, and the sharp smell of apples. The last two drawers proved to be a single file drawer in masquerade; there were five empty file folders in it, including one with a column of twenty-seven figures written on it in pencil, the first and lowest being 8,750 and the last and highest 12,500; they were not totaled. On the left side of the desk what looked like four more drawers proved to be a device for concealing a typewriter; it was empty.

Forlesen closed it and leaned back in his chair, aware that inventorying the desk had depressed him. After a moment he remembered Fields saying that he would find a list of his responsibilities in the office, and discovered it on top of the stack of papers Miss Fawn had left with him. It read:

MANAGEMENT PERSONNEL

Make M.P.P. Co. profitable and keep it profitable.

Assist in carrying out corporate goals.

Maintain employee discipline by reporting violators' names to their superiors.

Help keep costs down.

If any problems come up help to deal with them in accord with company policy.

Training, production, sales, and public relations are all supervised by management personnel.

Forlesen threw the paper in the wastebasket.

The second paper in the stack was headed SAMPLE LEADERSHIP PROBLEM #105, and read:

A young woman named Enid Fenton was hired recently as clerical help. Her work has not been satisfactory, but because clerical help has been in short supply she has not been told this. Recently a reduction in the work load in her department made it possible to transfer three girls to another department. Miss Fenton asked for one of the transfers and when told that they had already been assigned to others behaved in such a manner as to suggest (though nothing was actually said) that she was considering resignation. Her work consists of keypunching, typing, and filing. Should her supervisor:

- ☐ Discharge her.
- ☐ Indicate to her that her work has been satisfactory but hint that she may be laid off.
- ☐ Offer her a six-week leave of absence (without pay) during which she may obtain further training.
- ☐ Threaten her with a disciplinary fine.
- ☐ Assign her to assist one of the older women.
- ☐ Ask the advice of the other members of his Leadership group, following it only if he agrees the group has reached a correct decision in this case.
- ☐ Reassign her to small-parts assembly.

NOTE: QUESTIONS CONCERNING THIS SAMPLE LEADERSHIP PROBLEM SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO ERIC FAIRCHILD—EX 8173.

After reading the problem through twice Forlesen picked up his telephone and dialed the number. A female voice said, "Mr. Fairchild's office."

Forlesen identified himself, and a moment later a male voice announced, "Eric Fairchild."

"It's about the leadership problem—number one oh five?"

"Oh, yes." Fairchild's voice was hearty; Forlesen imagined him slapping backs and challenging people to Indian wrestle at parties.

"I've had quite a few calls about that one. You can check as many answers as you like if they're not mutually exclusive—okay?"

"That wasn't what I was going to ask," Forlesen said. "This girl's work—"

"Wait a minute," Fairchild said. And then, much more faintly, "Get me the Leadership file, Miss Fenton."

"What did you say?" Forlesen asked.

"Wait a minute," Fairchild said again. "If we're going to dig into this thing in depth I want to have a copy of the problem in front of me. Thank you. Okay, you can shoot now. What did you say your name was?"

"Forlesen. I meant after you said 'Wait a minute' the first time. I thought I heard you call your secretary Miss Fenton."

"Ha ha ha."

"Didn't you?"

"My secretary's name is Mrs. Fairchild, Mr. Forlesen. No, she's not my wife, if that's what you're thinking, Mr. Frick doesn't approve of nepotism. She's just a nice lady who happens to be named Mrs. Fairchild, and I was addressing Miss Fetton, who is filling in for her today."

"Sorry," Forlesen said.

"You wanted to ask about problem one hundred and five?"

"Yes, I wanted to ask—well, for one thing, in what way is the young woman's work unsatisfactory?"

"Just what it says on the sheet, whatever that is. Wait a minute, here it is—*Her work has not been satisfactory, but because clerical help has been in short supply she has not been told this.*"

"Yes," Forlesen said, "but in what way has it been unsatisfactory?"

"I see what you're getting at now, but I can't very well answer that, can I? After all, the whole essence of Leadership Training involves presenting the participants with structured problems—you see what I mean? This is a structured problem. Miss Fenton, could I trouble you to go down to the canteen and get me some coffee?

Take it out of petty cash. Now if I explained something like that to you, and not to the others, then it would have a different structuring for you than for them. You see?"

"Well, it seemed to me," Forlesen said, "that one of the first things to do would be to take Miss Fenton aside and explain to her that her work *was* unsatisfactory, and perhaps hear what she had to say."

"Miss who?"

"Fetton, the girl in the problem."

"Right, and I see what you mean. However, since it specifically says what I read to you, and nothing else more than that, then if I was to tell you something else it would be structured different for you than for the other fellows. See what I mean?"

After thinking for a moment Forlesen said, "I don't see how I can check any of the boxes knowing no more than I do now. Is it all right if I write my own solution?"

"You mean, draw a little box for yourself?"

"Yes, and write what I said after it—I mean, what I outlined to you a minute ago. That I'd talk to her."

"I don't think there's room on the paper for all that, fella. I mean, you said quite a bit."

Forlesen said, "I think I can boil it down."

"Well, we can't allow it anyway. These things are scored by a computer and we have to give it an answer—what I'm driving at is, the number of your answer. Like, the girl codes in the ID number of each participant and then the problem number, and then the answer number, like *one* or *two* or *three*. Or then if she puts like *twenty-three* it knows you answered *two* AND *three*. That would be *indicate to her that her work has been satisfactory but hint that she may be laid off,* and *offer her a six-week leave of absence without pay during which she may obtain further training.* You get it?"

"You're telling me that that's the right answer," Forlesen said. "Twenty-three."

"Listen, hell no! *I* don't know what the right answer is, only the machine does; maybe there isn't any right answer at all. I was just

trying to give you a kind of a hint—what I'd do if I was in your shoes. You want to get a good grade, don't you?"

"Is it important?"

"I would say that it's important. I think it's important to any man to know he did something like this and he did good—wouldn't you say so? But like we said at the start of the course, your grade is your personal thing. We're going to give grades, sure, on a scale of seven hundred and fifty-seven—that's the top—to forty-nine, but nobody knows your grade but you. You're told your own grade and your class standing and your standing among everybody here who's ever taken the course—naturally that doesn't mean much, the problems change all the time—but what you do with that information is up to you. You evaluate yourself. I know there have been these rumors about Mr. Frick coming in and asking the computer questions, but it's not true—frankly, I don't think Mr. Frick even knows how to program. It doesn't just talk to you, you know."

"I didn't get to attend the first part of the course," Forlesen said. "I'm filling in for Cappy Dillingham. He died."

"Sorry to hear that. Old age, I guess."

"I don't know."

"Probably that was it. Hell, it seems like it was only yesterday I was talking to him about his grade after class—he had some question about one oh four, I don't even remember what it was now. Old Cappy. Wow."

"How was he doing?" Forlesen asked.

"Not too hot. I had him figured for about a five-fifty, give or take twenty—but listen, if you had seen the earlier stuff you wouldn't be asking these questions now. You'd of been guided into it—see what I mean?"

Forlesen said: "I just don't see how I can mark this. I'm going to return the unmarked sheet under protest."

"I told you, we can't score something like that."

Forlesen said, "Well, that's what I'm going to do," and hung up.

His desk said, "You're a sharp one, aren't you? He's going to call you back."

Forlesen looked for the speaker but could not find it.

"I heard you talking to Franklin too; and I saw you throw away the Management Responsibilities list. Do you know that in a lot of the offices here you find that framed and hung on the wall? Some of them hang it where they can see it, and some of them hang it where their visitors can see it."

"Which kind get promoted?" Forlesen asked. He had decided the speaker was under the center desk drawer, and was on his hands and knees looking for it.

"The kind that fit in," the desk said.

Forlesen said, "What kind of an answer is that?" The telephone rang and he answered it.

"Mr. Forlesen, please." It was Fairchild.

"Speaking."

"I was wondering about number one oh five—have you sent it back yet?"

"I just put it in my out box," Forlesen said. "They haven't picked it up yet." Vaguely he wondered if Miss Fawn was supposed to empty the out box, or if anyone was; perhaps he was supposed to do it himself.

"Good, good. Listen, I've been thinking about what you said—do you think that if I told you what was wrong with this girl you'd be able to size her up better? The thing is, she just doesn't fit in; you know what I mean?"

"No," Forlesen said.

"Let me give you an example. Guys come in the office all the time, either to talk to me or just because they haven't anything better to do. They kid around with the girls, you know? Okay, this girl, you never know how she's going to take it. Sometimes she gets mad. Sometimes she thinks the guy really wants to get romantic, and she wants to go along with it."

"I'd think they'd learn to leave her alone," Forlesen said.

"Believe me, they have. And the other girls don't like her—they come in to me and say they want to be moved away from her desk."

"Do they say why?"

"Oh, hell, no. Listen, if you'd ever bossed a bunch of women you'd know better than that; the way they always put it is the light isn't good there, or it's too close to the keypunch—too noisy—or it's too *far* from the keypunch and they don't wanna have to walk that far, or they want to be closer to somebody they *do* like. But you know how it is—I've moved her all around the damn office and everybody wants to get away; she's Typhoid Mary."

"Make her your permanent secretary," Forlesen said.

"What?"

"Just for a while. Give your mother a special assignment. That way you can find out what's wrong with this girl, if anything is, which I doubt."

"You're crazy, Forlesen," Fairchild said, and hung up.

The telephone rang again almost as soon as Forlesen set the receiver down. "This is Miss Fawn. Mr. Freeling wants to see you, Mr. Forlesen."

"Mr. Freeling?"

"Mr. Freeling is Mr. Fields' chief, Mr. Forlesen; and Mr. Fields is your chief. Mr. Freeling reports to Mr. Flint, and Mr. Flint reports directly to Mr. Frick. I am Mr. Freeling's secretary."

"Thank you," Forlesen said, "I was beginning to wonder where you fit in."

"Right out of your office, down the hall to the *T*, left, up the stairs and along the front of the building. Mr. Freeling's name is on the door."

"Thank you," Forlesen said again.

Mr. Freeling's name was on the door, in the form of a bronzelike plaque. Forlesen, remembering D'Andrea's brass one, saw at once that Mr. Freeling's was more modern and up to date, and realized that Mr. Freeling was more important than D'Andrea had been; but he also realized that D'Andrea's plaque had been real brass and that Mr. Freeling's was plastic. He knocked, and Miss Fawn's voice called, "Come in." He went in and Miss Fawn threw a switch on her desk and said, "Mr. Forlesen to see you, Mr. Freeling."

And then to Forlesen: "Go right in."

Mr. Freeling's office was large and had two windows, both overlooking the highway. Forlesen found that he was somewhat surprised to see the highway again, though it looked just as it had before. The pictures on the walls were landscapes much like Fields', but Mr. Freeling's desk, which was quite large, was covered by a sheet of glass with photographs under it; and these were all of sailboats, and of groups of men in shorts and striped knit shirts and peaked caps.

"Sit down," Mr. Freeling said. "Be with you in a minute." He was a large, sunburned, squinting man, beginning to go grey. The chair in front of his desk had wooden arms and a vinyl seat made to look like ostrich hide. Forlesen sat down, wondering what Mr. Freeling wanted; and after a time it came to him that what Mr. Freeling wanted was for him to wonder this, and that Mr. Freeling would have been wiser to speak to him sooner. Mr. Freeling had a pen in his hand and was reading a letter—the same letter—over and over; at last he signed it with a scribble and laid it and the pen flat on his desk. "I should have called you in earlier to say welcome aboard," he said, "but maybe it was better to give you a chance to drop your hook and get your jib in first. Are you finding em pee pee a snug harbor?"

"I think I would like it better," Forlesen said, "if I knew what it was I'm supposed to be doing here."

Freeling laughed. "Well, that's easily fixed—Bert Fields is standing watch with you, isn't he? Ask him for a list of your responsibilities."

"It's Ed Fields," Forlesen said, "and I already have the list. What I would like to know is what I'm supposed to be doing."

"I see what you mean," Freeling said, "but I'm afraid I can't tell you. If you were a lathe operator I'd say *make that part,* but you're a part of management, and you can't treat managerial people that way."

"Go ahead," Forlesen told him, "I won't mind."

Freeling cleared his throat. "That isn't what I meant, and, quite

frankly, if you think anyone here is going to feel any compulsion to be polite to you, you're in for squalls. What I meant was that if I knew what you ought to be doing I'd hire a clerk to do it. You're where you are because we feel—rightly or wrongly—that you can find your own work, recognize it when you see it, and do it or get somebody else to. Just make damn sure you don't step on anybody's toes while you're doing it, and don't make more trouble than you fix. Don't rock the boat."

"I see," Forlesen said.

"Just make damn sure before you do anything that it's in line with policy, and remember that if you get the unions down on us we're going to throw you overboard quick."

Forlesen nodded.

"And keep your hand off the tiller. Look at it this way—your job is fixing leaks. Only the sailor who's spent most of his life down there in the hold with the oakum and . . . uh . . . fastpatch has the experience necessary to recognize the landmarks and weather signs. But don't you patch a leak somebody else is already patching, or has been told to patch, or is getting ready to patch. Understand? Don't come running to me with complaints, and don't let me get any complaints about you. Now what was it you wanted to see me about?"

"I don't," Forlesen said. "You said you wanted to see me."

"Oh. Well, I'm through."

Outside Forlesen asked Miss Fawn how he was supposed to know what company policy was. "It's in the air," Miss Fawn said tartly, "you breathe it." Forlesen suggested that it might be useful if it were written down someplace, and she said, "You've been here long enough to know better than that, Mr. Forlesen; you're no kid anymore." As he left the office she called, "Don't forget your creativity group."

He found the drilling room only after a great deal of difficulty. It was full of drill presses and jig bores—perhaps thirty or more—of which only two were being used. At one a white-haired man was

making a hole in a steel plate; he worked slowly, lifting the drill from time to time to fill the cavity with oil from a squirt can beside the machine. At the other a much younger man sang as he worked, an obscene parody of a popular song. Forlesen was about to ask if he knew where the creativity group was meeting when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned and saw Fields, who said, "Looks like you found it. Come on, I'm going to make this one, come hell or high water. Right through the door on the other side there."

They threaded their way among the drill presses, most of which seemed to be out of order in some way, and were about to go through the door Fields had indicated when Forlesen heard a yell behind them. The younger man had burned his hand in trying to change the smoking drill in his machine. "That's a good operator," Fields said. "He pushed everything right along—you know what I mean?" Forlesen said he did.

The creativity meeting, as Franklin had told him, was in the corridor. Folding metal chairs had been set up in groupings that looked intentionally disorganized, and a small motion-picture screen stood on an easel. Franklin was wrestling with a projector placed (pretty precariously, Forlesen thought) on the seat of the rearmost chair; he had the look of not being as young as he seemed, and after he had introduced himself they sat down and watched him. From time to time others joined them, and people passing up and down the hall, mostly men in grey work clothing, ignored them all, threading their way among the tin chairs without seeming to see them and stepping skillfully around the screen, on which, from time to time, flashed the faint numerals, *1, 2,* and *3,* or the legend CREATIVITY MEANS JOBS.

After a while Fields said, "I think we ought to get started."

"You go ahead," Franklin told him. "I'll have this going in a minute."

Fields walked to the front of the group, beside the screen, and said, "Creativity group twenty-one is now in session. I'm going to ask the man in front to write his name on a piece of paper and pass

it back. Everybody sign, and do it so we can read it, please. We're going to have a movie on creativity—"

"*Creativity Means Jobs,*" Franklin put in.

"Yeah, *Creativity Means Jobs,* then a free-form critique of the movie. Then what, Ned?"

"Open discussion on creativity in problem study."

"You got the movie yet?"

"Just a minute."

Forlesen looked at his watch. It was 078:45.

Someone at the front of the group, close to where Fields was now standing, said, "While we have a minute I'd like to get an objection on record to this phrase *creativity in problem study.* It seems to me that what it implies is that creativity is automatically going to point you toward some solution you didn't see before, and I feel that anyone who believes that's going to happen—anyway, in most cases—doesn't know what the hell they're talking about."

Fields said, "Everybody knows creativity isn't going to solve your problems for you."

"I said point the way," the man objected.

Someone else said, "What creativity is going to do for you in the way of problem study is point the way to new ways of seeing your problem."

"Not necessarily successful," the first man said.

"Not necessarily successful," the second man said, "if by successful what you mean is permitting you to make a non-trivial elaboration of the problem definition."

Someone else said, "Personally I feel problem definitions don't limit creativity."

Fields said, "I think we're all agreed on that when they're *creative* problem definitions. Right, Ned?"

"Of creative problems."

"Right, of creative problems. You know, Ned told me one time when he was talking to somebody about what we do at these meetings this fellow said he thought we'd just each take a lump of clay or something and, you know, start trying to make some kind of

shape." There was laughter, and Fields held up a hand good-naturedly. "Okay, it's funny, but I think we can all learn something from that. What we can learn is, most people when we talk about our creativity group are thinking the same way this guy was, and that's why, when we talk about it we got to make certain points, like for one thing creativity isn't ever what you do alone, right? It's your creative *group* that gets things going—hey, Ned, what's the word I want?"

"Synergy."

"Yeah, and teamwork. And second, creativity isn't about making new things—like some statue or something nobody wants. What creativity is about is solving company problems—"

Franklin called, "Hey, I've got this ready now."

"Just a minute. Like you take the problem this company had when Adam Bean that founded it died. The problem was—should we go on making what we used to when he was alive, or should we make something different? That problem was solved by Mr. Dudley, as I guess everybody knows, but he wouldn't have been able to do it without a lot of good men to help him. I personally feel that a football team is about the most creative thing there is."

Someone brushed Forlesen's sleeve; it was Miss Fawn, and as Fields paused she said in her rather shrill voice, "Mr. Fields! Mr. Fields, you're wanted on the telephone. It's quite important." There was something stilted in the way she delivered her lines, like a poor actress, and after a moment Forlesen realized that there was no telephone call, that she had been instructed by Fields to provide this interruption and thus give him an excuse for escaping the meeting while increasing the other participants' estimate of his importance. After a moment more he understood that Franklin and the others knew this as well as he, and that the admiration they felt for Fields—and admiration was certainly there, surrounding the stocky man as he followed Miss Fawn out—had its root in the daring Fields had shown, and in the power implied by his securing the cooperation of Miss Fawn, Mr. Freeling's secretary.

Someone had dimmed the lights. *Creativity Means Jobs* flashed on the screen, then a group of men and women in what might have been a classroom in a very exclusive school. One waved his hand, stood up, and spoke. There was no sound, but his eyes flashed with enthusiasm. When he sat down an impressive-looking woman in tweeds rose, and Forlesen felt that whatever she was saying must be unanswerable, the final word on the subject under discussion; she was polite and restrained and as firm as iron, and she clearly had every fact at her fingertips.

"I can't get this damn sound working," Franklin said. "Just a minute."

"What are they talking about?" Forlesen asked.

"Huh?"

"In the picture. What are they discussing?"

"Oh, I got you," Franklin said. "Wait a minute. They're talking about promoting creativity in the educational system."

"Are they teachers?"

"No, they're actors—let me alone for a minute, will you? I want to get this sound going."

The sound came on, almost coinciding with the end of the picture. While Franklin was rewinding the film Forlesen said, "I suppose actors would have a better understanding of creativity than teachers would, at that."

"It's a re-creation of an actual meeting of real teachers," Franklin explained. "They photographed it and taped it, then had the actors reproduce the debate."

Forlesen decided to go home for lunch. Lunch ours were one hundred twenty to one hundred forty-one—twenty-one ours should be enough, he thought, for him to drive there and return, and to eat. He kept the pedal down all the way, and discovered that the signs with HIDDEN DRIVES on their faces had SLOW CHILDREN on their backs.

The brick house was just as he remembered it. He parked the

car on the spot where he had first seen it (there was a black oil stain there) and knocked at the door. Edna answered it, looking not quite as he remembered her. "What do you want?" she said.

"Lunch."

"Are you crazy? If you're selling something we don't want it."

Forlesen said, "Don't you know who I am?"

She looked at him more closely. He said, "I'm your husband Emanuel."

She seemed uncertain, then smiled, kissed him, and said, "Yes, you are, aren't you. You look different. Tired."

"I am tired," he said, and realized that it was true.

"Is it lunchtime already? I don't have a watch, you know. I haven't been able to keep track. I thought it was only the middle of the morning."

"It seemed long enough to me," Forlesen said. He wondered where the children were, thinking that he would have liked to see them.

"What do you want for lunch?"

"Whatever you have."

In the bedroom she got out bread and sliced meat, and plugged in the coffeepot. "How was work?"

"All right. Fine."

"Did you get promoted? Or get a raise?"

He shook his head.

"After lunch," she said. "You'll get promoted after lunch."

He laughed, thinking that she was joking.

"A woman knows."

"Where are the kids?"

"At school. They eat their lunch at school. There's a beautiful cafeteria—everything is stainless steel—and they have a dietician who thinks about the best possible lunch for each child and makes them eat it."

"Did you see it?" he asked.

"No, I read about it. In here." She tapped *Food Preparation in the Home.*

"Oh."

"They'll be home at one hundred and thirty—that's what the book says. Here's your sandwich." She poured him a cup of coffee. "What time is it now?"

He looked at the watch she had given him. "A hundred and twenty-nine thirty."

"Eat. You ought to be going back soon."

He said, "I was hoping we might have time for more than this."

"Tonight, maybe. You don't want to be late."

"All right." The coffee was good, but tasted slightly oily; the sandwich meat was salty and dry and flavorless. He unstrapped the watch from his wrist and handed it to her. "You keep this," he said. "I've felt badly about wearing it all morning—it really belongs to you."

"You need it more than I do," she said.

"No, I don't; they have clocks all over, there. All I have to do is look at them."

"You'll be late getting back to work."

"I'm going to drive as fast as I can, anyway—I can't go any faster than that no matter what a watch says. Besides, there's a speaker that tells me things, and I'm sure it will tell me if I'm late."

Reluctantly she accepted the watch. He chewed the last of his sandwich. "You'll have to tell me when to go now," he said, thinking that this would somehow cheer her.

"It's time to go already," she said.

"Wait a minute—I want to finish my coffee."

"How was work?"

"Fine," he said.

"You have a lot to do there?"

"Oh, God, yes." He remembered the crowded desk that had been waiting for him when he returned from the creativity meeting, the supervision of workers for whom he had been given responsibility without authority, the hours spent with Fields drawing up the plan which, just before he left, had been vetoed by Mr. Freeling. "I don't

think there's any purpose in most of it," he said, "but there's plenty to do."

"You shouldn't talk like that," his wife said, "you'll lose your job."

"I don't, when I'm there."

"I've got nothing to do," she said. It was as though the words themselves had forced their way between her lips.

He said, "That can't be true."

"I made the beds, and I dusted and swept, and it was all finished a couple of hours after you had gone. There's nothing."

"You could read," he said.

"I can't—I'm too nervous."

"Well, you could have prepared a better lunch than this."

"That's *nothing,*" she said. "Just *nothing.*" She was suddenly angry, and it struck him, as he looked at her, that she was a stranger, that he knew Fields and Miss Fawn and even Mr. Freeling better than he knew her.

"The morning's over," he said. "I'm sorry I can't give it back to you, but I can't; what I did—that was nothing too."

"Please," she said, "won't you go? Having you here makes me so nervous."

He said, "Try and find something to do."

"All right."

He wiped his mouth on the paper napkin she had given him and took a step toward the parlor. To his surprise she walked with him, not detaining him, but seeming to savor his company now that she had deprived herself of it. "Do you remember when we woke up?" she said. "You didn't know at first that you were supposed to dress yourself."

"I'm still not sure of it."

"Oh, you know what I mean."

"Yes," he said, and knew that he did, but that she did not.

The parking lot was more rutted than he had remembered; he drove slowly and carefully. The outbuilding had been torn down,

and another car, startlingly shiny (Forlesen did not believe his own had ever been that well polished, not even when he had first looked out the window at it), had his old place; he was forced to take another, farther from the plant. Several other people, he noticed, seemed to have gone home for lunch as he had—some he knew, having shared meeting rooms with them. He had never punched out on the beige clock, and did not punch in.

There was a boy seated at his desk, piling new schoolbooks on it from a cardboard box on the floor. Forlesen said hello, and the boy said that his name was George Howe, and that he worked in Mr. Forlesen's section.

Forlesen nodded, feeling that he understood. "Miss Fawn showed you to your desk?"

The boy shook his head in bewilderment. "A lady named Mrs. Frost—she said she was Mr. Freeling's secretary; she had glasses."

"And a sharp nose."

George Howe nodded.

Forlesen nodded in reply, and made his way to Fields' old office. As he had expected, Fields was gone, and most of the items from his own desk had made their way to Fields'—he wondered if Fields' desk sometimes talked too, but before he could ask it Miss Fawn came in.

She wore two new rings and touched her hair often with her left hand to show them. Forlesen tried to imagine her pregnant or giving suck and found that he could not, but knew that this was a weakness in himself and not in her. "Ready for orientation?" Miss Fawn asked.

Forlesen ignored the question and asked what had happened to Fields.

"He passed on," Miss Fawn said.

"You mean he died? He seemed too young for it; not much older than I am myself—certainly not as old as Mr. Freeling."

"He was stout," Miss Fawn said with a touch of righteous disdain. "He didn't get much exercise and he smoked a great deal."

"He worked very hard," Forlesen said. "I don't think he could have had much energy left for exercise."

"I suppose not," Miss Fawn conceded. She was leaning against the door, her left hand toying with the gold pencil she wore on a chain, and seemed to be signaling by her attitude that they were old friends, entitled to relax occasionally from the formality of business. "There was a thing—at one time—between Mr. Fields and myself. I don't suppose you ever knew it."

"No, I didn't," Forlesen said, and Miss Fawn looked pleased.

"Eddie and I—I called him Eddie, privately—were quite discreet. Or so I flatter myself now. I don't mean, of course, that there was ever anything improper between us."

"Naturally not."

"A look and a few words. Elmer knows; I told him everything. You are ready to give that orientation, aren't you?"

"I think I am now," Forlesen said. "George Howe?"

Miss Fawn studied a slip of paper. "No, Gordie Hilbert."

As she was leaving, Forlesen asked impulsively where Fields was.

"Where he's buried, you mean? Right behind you."

He looked at her blankly.

"There." She gestured toward the picture behind Forlesen's desk. "There's a vault behind there—didn't you know? Just a small one, of course; they're cremated first."

"Burned out."

"Yes, burned up, and then they put them behind the pictures—that's what they're for. The pictures, I mean. In a beautiful little cruet. It's a company benefit, and you'd know if you'd read your own orientation material—of course, you can be buried at home if you like."

"I think I'd prefer that," Forlesen said.

"I thought so," Miss Fawn told him. "You look the type. Anyway, Eddie bought the farm—that's an expression the men have."

Forlesen went past row upon row of office doors looking for Hilbert's, and climbed two flights of stairs before he found someone

who looked as though she could direct him, a sharp-nosed woman who wore glasses.

"You're looking at me funny," the sharp-nosed woman said. She smiled like a blindfolded schoolteacher who has been made to bite a lemon at a Halloween party.

"You remind me a great deal of someone I know," Forlesen said. "Mrs. Frost." As a matter of fact the woman looked exactly like Miss Fawn.

The woman's smile grew somewhat warmer. "Everyone says that. Actually we're cousins—I'm Miss Fedd."

"Say something else."

"Do I talk like her too?"

"No, I think I recognize your voice. This is going to sound rather silly, but when I came here—in the morning, I mean—my car talked to me. I hadn't thought of it as a female voice, but it sounded just like you."

"It's quite possible," Miss Fedd said. "I used to be in Traffic, and I still fill in there at times."

"I never thought I'd meet you. I was the one who stopped and got out of his car."

"A lot of them do, but usually only once. What's that you're carrying?"

"This?" Forlesen held up the brown orientation booklet he had received from Miss Fawn. "A book. I'm afraid to read the ending."

"It's the red book you're supposed to be afraid to read the end of," Miss Fedd told him. "It's the opposite of a mystery—everyone stops before the revelations."

"I haven't even read the beginning of that one," Forlesen said. "Come to think of it, I haven't read the beginning of this one either."

"We're not supposed to talk about books here, not even when we haven't anything to do. What was it you wanted?"

"I've just been transferred into the division, and I was hoping you'd help me find my desk."

"What's your name?"

"Forlesen. Emanuel Forlesen."

"Good. I was looking for you—you weren't at your desk."

"No, I wasn't," Forlesen said. "I was in the Bet-Your-Life room —well, not recently."

"I know. I looked there too. Mr. Frick wants to see you."

"Mr. Frick?"

"Yes. He said to tell you he was planning to do this a bit later today, but he's got to leave the office a little early. Come on."

Miss Fedd walked with short, mincing steps, but so rapidly that Forlesen was forced to trot to keep up. "Why does Mr. Frick want to see me?"

"I'm not supposed to tell," Miss Fedd said. "This is Mr. Frick's door."

"I know," Forlesen told her. It was a large door—larger than the other doors in the building, and not painted to resemble wood. Mr. Frick's plaque was of silver (or perhaps platinum), and had the single word *Frick* engraved in an almost too tasteful script. A man Forlesen did not know walked past them as they stood before Mr. Frick's plaque; the man wore a hat and carried a briefcase, and had a coat slung over his arm.

"We're emptying out a little already," Miss Fedd said. "I'd go right in now if I were you—I think he wants to play golf before he goes home."

"Aren't you going in with me?"

"Of course not—he's got a group in there already, and I have things to do. Don't knock, just go in."

Forlesen opened the door. The room was very large and crowded; men in expensive suits stood smoking, holding drinks, knocking out their pipes in bronze ashtrays. The tables and the desk—yes, he told himself, there is a desk, a very large desk next to the window at one end, a desk shaped like the lid of a grand piano—the tables and the desk all of dark heavy tropical wood, the tables and the desk all littered with bronze trophies so that the whole room seemed of bronze and black wood and red wool. Several of the men looked at him, then toward the opposite end of the room, and he knew at

once who Mr. Frick was: a bald man standing with his back to the room, rather heavy, Forlesen thought, and somewhat below average height. He made his way through the smokers and drink holders. "I'm Emanuel Forlesen."

"Oh, there you are." Mr. Frick turned around. "Ernie Frick." Mr. Frick had a wide, plump face, a mole over one eyebrow, and a gold tooth. Forlesen felt that he had seen him before.

"We went to grade school together," Mr. Frick said. "I bet you don't remember me, do you?"

Forlesen shook his head.

"Well, I'll be honest—I don't think I would have remembered you, but I looked up your file while we were getting set for the ceremony. And now that I see you, by gosh, I do remember—I played prisoner's base with you one day; you used to be able to run like anything."

"I wonder where I lost it," Forlesen said. Mr. Frick and several of the men standing around him laughed, but Forlesen was thinking that he could not possibly be as old as Mr. Frick.

"Say, that's pretty good. You know, we must have started at about the same time. Well, some of us go up and some don't, and I suppose you envy me, but let me tell you, I envy you. It's lonely at the top, the work is hard, and you can never set down the responsibility for a minute. You won't believe it, but you've had the best of it."

"I don't," Forlesen said.

"Well, anyway, I'm tired—we're all tired. Let's get this over with so we can all go home." Mr. Frick raised his voice to address the room at large. "Gentlemen, I asked you to come here because you have all been associated at one time or another, in one way or another, with this gentleman here, Mr. Forlesen, to whom I am very happy to present this token of his colleagues' regard."

Someone handed Mr. Frick a box, and he handed it to Forlesen, who opened it while everyone clapped. It was a watch. "I didn't know it was so late," Forlesen said.

Several people laughed; they were already filing out.

"You've been playing Bet-Your-Life, haven't you?" Mr. Frick said. "A fellow can spend more time at that than he thinks."

Forlesen nodded.

"Say, why don't you take the rest of the day off? There's not much of it left anyhow."

Outside, others who presumably had not been given the remainder of the day off by Mr. Frick were straggling toward their cars. As Forlesen walked toward his, feeling as he did so the stiffness and pain in his legs, a bright new car pulled onto the lot and a couple got out, the man a fresh-faced boy, really; the girl a working-class girl, meticulously made up and dressed, cheaply attractive and forlorn, like the models in the advertisements of third-rate dress shops. They went up the sidewalk hand in hand to kiss, Forlesen felt sure, in the time-clock room, and separate, she going up the steps, he down. They would meet for coffee later, both uncomfortable, out of a sense of duty; meet for lunch in the cafeteria, he charging her meal to the paycheck he had not yet received.

The yellow signs that lined the street read YIELD; orange-and-black machines were eating the houses just beyond the light. Forlesen pulled his car into his driveway, over the oil spot. A small man in a dark suit was sitting on a wood-and-canvas folding stool beside his door, a black bag at his feet; Forlesen spoke to him but he did not answer. Forlesen shrugged and stepped inside.

A tall young man stood beside a long, angular object that rested on a sort of trestle in the center of the parlor. "Look what we've got for you," he said.

Forlesen looked. It was exactly like the box his watch had come in, save that it was much larger: of red-brown wood that seemed almost black, lined with pinkish-white silk.

"Want to try her out?" the young man said.

"No, I don't." Forlesen had already guessed who the young man must be, and after a moment he added a question: "Where's your mother?"

"Busy," the young man said. "You know how women are . . .

Well, to tell the truth, she doesn't want to come in until it's over. This lid is neat—watch." He folded down half the lid. "Like a Dutch door." He folded it up again. "Don't you want to try it for size? I'm afraid it's going to be tight around the shoulders, but it's got a hell of a good engine."

"No," Forlesen said, "I don't want to try it out." Something about the pinkish silk disgusted him. He bent over it to examine it more closely, and the young man took him by the hips and lifted him in as though he were a child, closing the lower half of the lid; it reached to his shirt pockets and effectively pinioned his arms. "Ha, ha," Forlesen said.

The young man sniffed. "You don't think we'd bury you before you're dead, do you? I just wanted you to try it out, and that was the easiest way. How do you like it?"

"Get me out of this thing."

"In a minute. Is it comfortable? Is it a good fit? It's costing us quite a bit, you know."

"Actually," Forlesen said, "it's more comfortable than I had foreseen. The bottom is only thinly padded, but I find the firmness helps my back."

"Good, that's great. Now have you decided about the Explainer?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Didn't you read your orientation? Everyone's entitled to an Explainer—in whatever form he chooses—at the end of his life. He—"

"It seems to me," Forlesen interrupted, "that it would be more useful at the beginning."

"—may be a novelist, aged loremaster, national hero, warlock, or actor."

"None of those sounds quite right for me," Forlesen said.

"Or a theologian, philosopher, priest, or doctor."

"I don't think I like those either."

"Well, that's the end of the menu as far as I know," his son said. "I'll tell you what—I'll send him in and you can talk to him yourself; he's right outside."

"That little fellow in the dark suit?" Forlesen asked. His son, whose head was thrust out the door already, paid no attention.

After a moment the small man came in carrying his bag, and Forlesen's son placed a chair close to the coffin for him and went into the bedroom. "Well, what's it going to be," the small man asked, "or is it going to be nothing?"

"I don't know," Forlesen said. He was looking at the weave of the small man's suit, the intertwining of the innumerable threads, and realizing that they constituted the universe in themselves, that they were serpents and worms and roots, the black tracks of forgotten rockets across a dark sky, the sine waves of the radiation of the cosmos. "I wish I could talk to my wife."

"Your wife is dead," the small man said. "The kid didn't want to tell you. We got her laid out in the next room. What'll it be? Doctor, priest, philosopher, theologian, actor, warlock, national hero, aged loremaster, or novelist?"

"I don't know," Forlesen said again. "I want to feel, you know, that this box is a bed—and yet a ship, a ship that will set me free. And yet . . . It's been a strange life."

"You may have been oppressed by demons," the small man said. "Or revived by unseen aliens who, landing on the Earth eons after the death of the last man, have sought to re-create the life of the twentieth century. Or it may be that there is a small pressure, exerted by a tumor in your brain."

"Those are the explanations?" Forlesen asked.

"Those are some of them."

"I want to know if it's meant anything," Forlesen said. "If what I suffered—if it's been worth it."

"No," the little man said. "Yes. No. Yes. Yes. No. Yes. Yes. Maybe."

The Memory Machine

Together we must rise to ever higher and higher platitudes.

—Mayor Daley

Say No More

Then several miles to the southeast, an entire section of the country literally blew up, in a fiery eruption that shot a mile into the air. The conclusion, when it reached me, was terrific.

—*Armageddon 2419 A.D.*
by Philip Francis Nowlan

I Was a Phosphorescent Stringer for the East Village Other

Once he had awakened, at the sound of great batlike creatures flying overhead; he had seen them swooping low, coming in flat trajectories across the wasteland toward his pit in the earth. But they seemed unaware that he—and the shadow thing—lay in the hole. They defecated thin, phosphorescent stringers that fell glowing through the night and were lost on the plains . . .

—"The Deathbird" by Harlan Ellison,
Fantasy & Science Fiction,
March 1973

Sitzmarks in the Sands of Time

If voyages were to be made from the earth to any of the planets, or even to the moon, the distances are so great that starting from

rest as the travelers would do, they would have to attain a high velocity in a very short space of time. . . . In interplanetary travel, where the travelers start from the earth at a velocity of zero, that is to say from rest, the acceleration must start and must be very rapid, so that the travelers will press, not with weight alone, but with a combination of weight and the force of positive acceleration against the base of the chamber in the projectile, or "ship," as it may be termed. Now this pressure will be so enormous that, in order to reach a planet, or even to reach the moon in any reasonable time, it would probably be sufficient to kill the person, just as he would be killed by a fall—let us say, for instance, from the Washington Monument. On striking the earth, he would be killed by negative acceleration. . . . So since our readers like interplanetary stories, since they unceasingly ask for them in letters to us, and since there is any amount of science, mechanical, astronomical and other to be gleaned therefrom, we certainly shall be glad to continue to give them, even in face of the fact that we are inclined to think that interplanetary travel may never be attained.

—"Acceleration in Interplanetary
Travel" by T. O'Conor Sloane, Ph.D.,
Amazing Stories, November 1929

Radio receivers today are used largely for three types of entertainment—from the receiver owner's viewpoint. It is used to pick up certain programs which the listener wants to hear. Such programs as dramatic and comedy and news reports; to a lesser extent symphony programs. Second, it is used by housewives, evidently, as a sort of anaesthetic gadget while doing the routine, boring household tasks. The listener's mind isn't made so conscious of the dull job. The soap-opera programs are designed to catch that audience. Third, and by far the greatest use for radio, is as background music for some other occupation. Is your set on at the moment, for such a purpose? It may be a bridge game, a magazine or book, or the monthly bills that is in the forefront of your consciousness; the music is a very pleasant and unobtrusive background.

Of those three functions, television can supply only one. It can't be unobtrusive; you have to watch it. But you can't watch it, if you're doing housework, bills, playing bridge, or reading. And dialogue cast for television use is unintelligible unless you *do* watch; try following the sense of a motion picture sometime by closing your eyes and listening only to the sound accompaniment. Even the music sounds bad; it was paced to point up and emphasize the action, not to be listened to for itself alone.

My own hunch is that too few people will buy the expensive, four hundred dollar television receivers to support the commercial advertiser's very expensive show.

—"Communication and Noncommunication" by John W. Campbell, Jr., *Astounding Science Fiction,* June 1945

Hazardous Offplanet Duty Department (Hubba! Hubba! Division)

". . . Besides, you can see that the ladies hurried to answer the call. Miss McBride's blond hair is somewhat uncombed and she is not completely dressed. She's not wearing her . . ."

"A gentleman wouldn't notice," Arthur bandied. "A sneaky gentleman would notice and never tell."

". . . wearing her boots," Dan finished, smugly.

—"Earthquake" by William E. Cochrane, *Analog,* April 1973, p. 25

. . . Julie came up with another display printout.

"I've got smudges all over, but there are two high points you ought to look at," she said.

Arthur choked and began rolling instrument paper frantically.

—*Ibid.,* p. 36

"Aren't you cheerful," Julie said. "Well, me for breakfast. If I'm

going to do any shaking around here I want to do it on a full stomach."

Arthur exploded into his coffee.

—*Ibid.*, p. 38

"Signal for Captain Henery," he managed. "It's all over."

"And I missed it," Julie said. "Somehow I never seem to get the big tremors. Someday, I'd like to feel a big one."

Arthur got the hiccups.

—*Ibid.*, p. 67

Yank Spoken Here (American Places and People, as Seen by British Novelists)

The gas-pipe withdrew to its hook. A cash-drawer shot out of the side of the pump within easy reach of him. But he was so intent on the patrolman that at first he didn't notice, and the attendant had to parp on his hooter.

—*The Wrong End of Time*
by John Brunner, p. 11

"To the pigs?" Danty said with a cynical grin. "Man, I should die laughing the day the pigs do anything for me! More like, they'd give Josh a medal."

—*Ibid.*, p. 137

Having collected coffee and food from the counter, they sat down around a table isolated in the centre of the room and Danty produced a stack of paper serviettes.

—*Ibid.*, p. 193

Make him president of some university and fix him a medal, that should be enough.

"Well, Mr. President, have you fixed an activation date?"

"Yes. It has got to be handled right. Played properly, it'll fix the cold war as well as any variety of hot."

—*Colossus* by D. F. Jones, p. 17

"Johnson, please fix a meeting of Group A for 1530, here—OK?"

—*Ibid.*, p. 22

"Angela, I've called a Group A meeting for 1530—Johnson is fixing it."

Forty was a good age to get fixed . . .

—*Ibid.*, p. 23

It showed a man sitting on a lavatory, clearly much concerned with his own affairs. The caption said, "The only man in Washington who knows what he is doing."

—*Ibid.*, p. 56

"OK, Forbin. But if that's so, how come I have just had a blast from the Chairman of the USSR, accusing me—us—of attempting to seduce Guardian with phony maths?"

—*Ibid.*, p. 100

"Yes, I know, both running high-grade maths without repeats, you want help."

—*Ibid.*, p. 104

"We have six top-class maths men in the Group; they should be able to hold it down."

—*Ibid.*, p. 105

"OK, Forbin, I know how you feel, but the old man did not mean to hurt your pride, the way he was fixed—"

"What in tarnation has pride to do with it?" Forbin looked genuinely puzzled. "Really, you people here are so far from reality."

—*Ibid.*, p. 120

It stiffened the aide wonderfully, and brought the Chief of Staff

back from a deep contemplation of the unspeakable that not even his professional Red Indian face could entirely conceal.

—*Ibid.*, p. 148

Forbin thought of the bottle of rye he knew Blake kept in his desk drawer, in open defiance of the Admin Standing Orders. He got it out, found a couple of plastic mugs, and poured two fair-sized tots.

—*Ibid.*, p. 200

"Yes," agreed Forbin, "we talk in English, but there are differences. I naturally assumed you would have an American accent."

"It was an unreasonable assumption," Colossus said. "It is proper to speak a language with the accent of its native users."

—*Ibid.*, p. 228

JOAN D. VINGE ("Tin Soldier") is twenty-five. She is part Erie Indian, although she has blond hair and green eyes. In college she went through five changes of major until she found out she liked anthropology best. Later she worked for a while as a salvage archeologist. "Archeology is the anthropology of the past, and, to me, science fiction is the anthropology of possible futures." She is married to Vernor Vinge ("The Science Fair," *Orbit 9*); they live in San Diego with various plants, two white mice rescued from an overpopulation experiment, and a cat. This is Mrs. Vinge's first published story.

A correspondent gave us his version of the celebrated Leslie Fiedler speech at the New York SFWA banquet in September 1972: "It was surprising for a high-toned scholar, [Fiedler] explained, to appear in our supposedly humble midst? Nonsense, the only people really keeping literature alive today were the science fiction producers and the pornographers because there was a close relationship between the forms. Behind me I heard several tsk-tsks and mild clucks of disapproval while Fiedler tried to *épater* us with items about the family that blows together stays together and how mainstream, upstream, out of stream and every other stream was so much of a piece today that, though he loved that Proust, the thing now sending him was some of the art on TV (he always tried to avoid scheduling classes at the time *Edge of Tomorrow* showed).

The sounds of anguish behind me rose to full-blown oy-oys and I had to take a peek at the sufferer. It was an elderly man I did not know. . . . [At dinner] I ended up at a table with the same man who had been so appalled at Fiedler. It turned out to be Donald Woolheim and his wife was with him. I didn't know anybody at the table so I was pleased at the opportunity to prove I had vocal cords when someone who had not been at the earlier gathering said he understood some guy named Fiedler had made a strange talk at that session. Had anybody heard it? Yes, I said, and it had been strange. Strange? Donald Woolheim came in, it was downright *mishugah*. Crazy? his wife came in. The man had said we were turning out pornography! In all the years they had given to science fiction she had never heard— Not important, her husband calmly told her, not worth getting bothered by such nonsense. Yes, maybe not important but somebody ought to answer back. Look, Ida, it's not worth bothering about his argument, the man digs his own grave with his mouth. That was the end of the literary discussion for the evening."

JOANNA RUSS ("Reasonable People") teaches science fiction, creative writing, and women's studies at Harpur College, State University of New York at Binghamton. Her story "When It Changed" (*Again, Dangerous Visions*) won a Nebula Award in 1972. She has recently had her front teeth capped because they broke off, having been dead for years: "But I go around now with vast, dazzling, fat front teeth which I find disconcerting. Nobody else seems to notice any change."

MICHAEL BISHOP, whose story "In the Lilliputian Asylum" is forthcoming, wrote to say that we had put him in Georgia State University rather than in the University of Georgia, where he actually teaches; and EDWARD BRYANT, a frequent contributor, complained of our adding five years to his age.

R. A. LAFFERTY ("Royal Licorice") reported to his agent that as a result of his experimentation for this story, he had five smart

pills and nine dung balls left over; he offered them to her, but she declined.

We heard from ALFRED BESTER that his wife, Rolly, "turns out to be a marvelous shot with a shotgun. We've been plagued by a goddam Mockingbird who does nightclub imitations all day and all night. She let him have it between the TV antenna and the chimney, and there's peace at last. Now she's stalking a goddam woodchuck who's raiding our veg. garden. I had three shots at him with the pistol and missed at fifteen feet. Shame on me!"

URSULA K. LE GUIN ("The Stars Below") writes as follows: "I guess all I can tell you is that I have been living on a planet called Anarres for two years and, due perhaps to the time-dilation effect, my recollections of Earth are rather hazy."

To a contributor who was fretting about libel we wrote: "I don't think you have to worry. . . . A—— R—— will never see this story, in the first place, & would not care if she did. Don't know if you are immune as a juvenile or not; interesting question. (They might throw you in the tank as a JD.) Anyway, you are more likely to be hit by a meteorite. Glance up from time to time."

KATE WILHELM ("A Brother to Dragons, a Companion of Owls") stands five feet three and a half inches tall and has a Florida tan. Not long ago, when Little, Brown accepted her novel *City of Cain* (having already published a previous novel, *Margaret and I*), she realized for the first time that she is a Little, Brown author.

MURRAY YACO ("The Winning of the Great American Greening Revolution") is president of a company called Creative Concepts, Inc., which does freelance work for corporations such as General Motors.

DORIS PISERCHIA wrote in April, "This is really happening but I'm having trouble believing it. I love the money. I love it all, but some misty part of it is more lovely than the rest, and I can't pin that part down."

GARY K. WOLF ("The Bridge Builder") is now product promotion manager for the ad agency for which he was formerly a senior copywriter. His wife, Bonnie, is an airline stewardess and he flies her everywhere. He writes, "I've taken up Transcendental Meditation with the result that my short stories have become far more incisive and easier to write (the same is true for the novel I'm at work on now, a book which has all the potential sweep and grandeur of that little known classic by Anon., 'Ratman Meets the Walking Weenies')."

We heard from Olive Hupp Maynard in Muncie, Ind., who stated that she has been in constant communication with the World Beyond since 1929. "If my cassette recordings of Glossolalia can be interpreted, they may reveal something of importance."

To a young writer in Oakland we wrote: "I used to have a rubber stamp for telling correspondents what you were tempted to tell me; only used it once, and then not seriously, though."

GENE WOLFE ("Forlesen") was for sixteen years a project engineer in the employ of Procter & Gamble, an experience which is reflected in this story. Late in 1972, after he had left P&G to join the staff of *Plant Engineering,* he wrote: "I had a call from a writer today & suddenly realized that I am an editor. Weird—like waking up and finding that you are a woman: you are still in the familiar arrangement, but on the wrong side."