

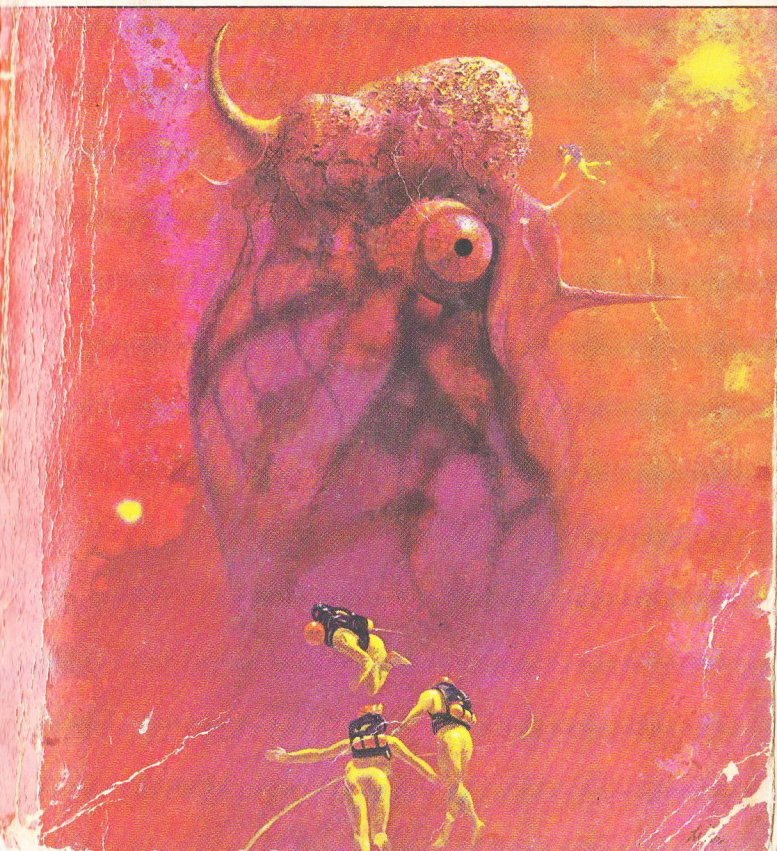


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ORBIT 2

**BRIAN W. ALDISS, TED THOMAS, R. A. LAFFERTY,
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RICHARD MCKENNA, KIT REED, KATE WILHELM**
EDITED BY **DAMON KNIGHT**



ORBIT 2 is the paperback edition of the second in G. P. Putnam's annual series of SF anthologies, that keeps ahead of this exciting field by publishing the best new science fiction stories *before* they have appeared anywhere else in the world.

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Damon Knight is founder and first president of Science Fiction Writers of America, author of five SF novels, four collections of short stories and has edited fourteen SF anthologies.

Damon Knight's

ORBIT 2

*The Best New Science Fiction
of the Year*



A BERKLEY MEDALLION BOOK

Published by G. P. Putnam's Sons

Distributed by Berkley Publishing Corporation

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BERKLEY MEDALLION EDITION,
SEPTEMBER, 1967

BERKLEY MEDALLION BOOKS are published by
Berkley Publishing Corporation
15 East 26th Street, New York, N. Y. 10016

BERKLEY MEDALLION BOOKS ® TM 757,375

Printed in the United States of America

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Ted Thomas is a big man (six three, two hundred pounds) who moves with kindly caution around less massive people. In World War II he trained with the ski troops of the Mountain Artillery, and wound up a 1st Lieutenant of Infantry in occupied Japan. He took a degree in chemical engineering at M.I.T., then a law degree at Georgetown University Law Center; now he is a patent attorney for the Armstrong Cork Company. That would be career enough for most people, but Thomas is also an expert scuba diver, a mean squash player, and a dedicated writer.

All fiction is a lie, by definition; the hardest thing for a writer is to make his fiction true. Here is a story about the courage of a man lost in time. It is unforgettable, because it tells the truth.

THE DOCTOR

By Ted Thomas

When Gant first opened his eyes he thought for an instant he was back in his home in Pennsylvania. He sat up suddenly and looked wildly around in the dark of the cave, and then he remembered where he was. The noise he made frightened his wife and his son, Dun, and they rolled to their feet, crouched, ready to leap. Gant grunted reassuringly at them and climbed off the moss-packed platform he had built for a bed. The barest glimmerings of dawn filtered into the cave, and the remnants of the fire glowed at the mouth. Gant went to the fire and poked it and put some chips on it and blew on them. It had been a long time since he had had such a vivid memory of his old life half a million years away. He looked at the wall of the cave, at the place where he kept his calendar, painfully scratched into the rock. It had been ten years ago today when he had stepped into that molybdenum-steel cylinder in the Bancroft Building at Pennsylvania State University. What was it he had said? "Sure, I'll try it. You ought to have a medical doctor in it on the first trial run. You physicists could not learn anything about the physiological effects of time travel. Besides, this will make history, and I want to be in on it."

Gant stepped over the fire and listened carefully at the mouth of the cave, near the log barrier. Outside he heard the sound of rustling brush and heavy breathing, and he

knew he could not leave now. He drank some water from a gourd and ate some dried bison with his wife and son. They all ate quietly.

Dawn came, and he stepped to the mouth of the cave and listened. The great animal had left. He waved to his wife and Dun, dragged aside the barrier, and went out.

He went along the face of the cliff, staying away from the heavy underbrush at its foot. He would go into it when he returned, and he would look for food.

In the marsh that lay beyond the underbrush was one of the many monuments to his failures. In the rocks and tree stumps there, he had tried to grow penicillium molds on the sweet juices of some of the berries that abounded in the region. He had crushed the berries and placed the juices in a hundred different kinds of receptacles. For three years he had tried to raise the green mold, but all he ever produced was a slimy gray mass that quickly rotted when the sun struck it.

He hefted the heavy stone axe in his right hand. As he approached the cave he was looking for, he grunted loudly and then went in. The people inside held their weapons in their hands, and he was glad he had called ahead. He ignored them and went to a back corner to see the little girl.

She sat on the bare stone, leaning against the rock with her mouth open, staring dully at him as he came up to her, her eyes black against the thick blonde hair that grew on her face. Gant whirled at the others and snarled at them, and snatched a bearhide from the bed of the man and carried it to the girl. He wrapped her in it and then felt the part of her forehead where there was no hair. It was burning hot, must be about 105 degrees, possibly a little more. He put her down on the rock and thumped her chest and heard the solid, hard sound of filled lungs. It was full-blown pneumonia, no longer any doubt. She gasped for breath, and there was no breath. Gant picked

her up again and held her. He sat with her for over an hour, changing her position frequently in his arms, trying to make her comfortable as she gasped. He held a handful of wet leaves to her forehead to try to cool her burning face, but it did not seem to help. She went into convulsions at the end.

He laid the body on a rock ledge and pulled the mother over to see it. The mother bent and touched the girl gently on the face and then straightened and looked at Gant helplessly. He picked up the body and walked out of the cave and down into the woods. It took several hours to dig a hole deep enough with a stick.

He hunted on the way back to the caves, and he killed a short, heavy-bodied animal that hung upside down from the lower branches of a tree. It emitted a foul odor as he killed it, but it would make a good meal. He found a large rock outcropping with a tiny spring coming out from under it. A mass of newly sprouted shoots grew in the soggy ground. He picked them all, and headed back to his cave. His wife and Dun were there and their faces brightened when they saw what he brought. His wife immediately laid out the animal and skinned it with a fragment of sharp, shiny rock. Dun watched her intently, leaning over while it cooked to smell the fragrant smoke. Gant looked at the short, thick, hairy woman tending the cooking, and he looked at the boy. He could easily see himself in the thin-limbed boy. Both his wife and his son had the heavy brows and the jutting jaw of the cave people. But Dun's body was lean and his eyes were blue and sparkling, and he often sat close to Gant and tried to go with him when he went out of the cave. And once, when the lightning blazed and the thunder roared, Gant had seen the boy standing at the mouth of the cave staring at the sky in puzzlement, not fear, and Gant had put a hand on his shoulder and tried to find the words that told of electrical discharges and the roar of air rushing into a void, but there were no words.

The meat was done and the shoots were softened, and the three of them squatted at the fire and reached for the food. Outside the cave they heard the sound of movement in the gravel, and Gant leaped for his club while his wife and Dun retreated to the rear of the cave. Two men appeared, one supporting the other, both empty-handed. Gant waited until he could see that one of them was injured; he could not place his right foot on the ground. Then Gant came forward and helped the injured man to a sitting position at the mouth of the cave. He leaned over to inspect the foot. The region just above the ankle was discolored and badly swollen, and the foot was at a slight angle to the rest of the leg. Both the fibula and the tibia seemed to be broken, and Gant stood up and looked around for splints. The man would probably die; there was no one to take care of him during the weeks needed for his leg to heal, no one to hunt for him and give him food and put up with his almost complete inactivity.

Gant found two chips from logs and two short branches and some strips from a cured hide. He knelt in front of the man and carefully held his hands near the swollen leg so the man could see he was going to touch it.

The man's great muscles were knotted in pain and his face was gray beneath the hair. Gant waved the second man around to one side where he could keep an eye on him, and then he took the broken leg and began to apply tension. The injured man stood it for a moment and then roared in pain and instinctively lashed out with his good leg. Gant ducked the kick, but he could not duck the blow from the second man. It hit him on the side of the head and knocked him out of the mouth of the cave. He rolled to his feet and came back in. The second man stood protectively in front of the injured man, but Gant pushed him aside and knelt down again. The foot was straight, so Gant placed the chips and branches on the leg and bound them in place with the leather

thongs. Weak and helpless, the injured man did not resist. Gant stood up and showed the second man how to carry the injured man. He helped them on their way.

When they left, Gant returned to his food. It was cold, but he was content. For the first time they had come to him. They were learning. He hurt his teeth on the hard meat and he gagged on the spongy shoots, but he squatted in his cave and he smiled. There had been a time long ago when he had thought that these people would be grateful to him for his work, that he would become known by some such name as The Healer. Yet here he was, years later, happy that at last one of them had come to him with an injury. Yet Gant knew them too well by now to be misled. These people did not have even the concept of medical treatment, and the day would probably come when one of them would kill him as he worked.

He sighed, picked up his club and went out of the cave. A mile away was a man with a long gash in the calf of his left leg. Gant had cleaned it and packed it with moss and tied it tight with a hide strip. It was time to check the wound, so he walked the mile carefully, on the lookout for the large creatures that roamed the forests. The man was chipping rock in front of his cave, and he nodded his head and waved and showed his teeth in a friendly gesture when he saw Gant. Gant showed his teeth in turn and looked at the leg. He saw that the man had removed the moss and bandage, and had rubbed the great wound with dung. Gant bent to inspect the wound and immediately smelled the foul smell of corruption. Near the top of the wound, just beneath the knee, was a mass of black, wet tissues. Gangrene. Gant straightened and looked around at some of the others near the cave. He went to them and tried to make them understand what he wanted to do, but they did not pay much attention. Gant returned and looked down on the wounded man, noting that his movements were still quick and coordinated, and

that he was as powerfully built as the rest of them. Gant shook his head; he could not perform the amputation unaided, and there was no help to be had. He tried again to show them that the man would die unless they helped him, but it was no use. He left.

He walked along the foot of the cliffs, looking in on the caves. In one he found a woman with a swollen jaw, in pain. She let him look in her mouth, and he saw a rotted molar. He sat down with her and with gestures tried to explain that it would be painful at first if he removed the tooth, but that it would soon be better. The woman seemed to understand. Gant took up a fresh branch and scraped a rounded point on one end. He picked up a rock twice the size of his fist, and placed the woman in a sitting position with her head resting on his thigh. He placed the end of the stick low on the gum to make sure he got the root. Carefully he raised the rock, knowing he would have but one try. He smashed the rock down and felt the tooth give way and saw the blood spout from her mouth. She screamed and leaped to her feet and turned on Gant, but he jumped away. Then something struck him from behind and he found himself pinned to the ground with two men sitting on him. They growled at him and one picked up a rock and the stick and smashed a front tooth from Gant's mouth. Then they threw him out of the cave. He rolled down through the gravel and came up short against a bush. He leaped to his feet and charged back into the cave. One of the men swung a club at him, but he ducked and slammed the rock against the side of the man's head. The other ran. Gant went over to the woman, picking as he went a half handful of moss from the wall of the cave. He stood in front of her and packed some of the moss in the wound in his front jaw, and leaned over to show her the bleeding had stopped. He held out the moss to her, and she quickly took some and put it in the proper place in her jaw. She nodded to him and patted his arm and rubbed the blood out of

the hair on her chin. He left the cave, without looking at the unconscious man.

Some day they would kill him. His jaw throbbed as he walked along the gravel shelf and headed for home. There would be no more stops today, and so he threaded his way along the foot of the cliff. He heard sounds of activity in several of the caves, and in one of the largest of them he heard excited voices yelling. He stopped, but his jaw hurt too much to go in. The noise increased and Gant thought they might be carving up a large kill. He was always on the lookout for meat, so he changed his mind and went in. Inside was a boy about the age of Dun, lying on his back, gasping for air. His face had a bluish tinge, and at each intake of air his muscles tensed and his back arched with the effort to breathe. Gant pushed to his side and forced his mouth open. The throat and uvula were greatly swollen, the air passage almost shut. He quickly examined the boy, but there was no sign of injury or disease. Gant was puzzled, but then he concluded the boy must have chewed or eaten a substance to which he was sensitive. He looked at the throat again. The swelling was continuing. The boy's jutting jaws made mouth-to-mouth resuscitation impossible. A tracheotomy was indicated. He went over to the fire and smashed one piece of flint chopping stone on another, and quickly picked over the pieces. He chose a short, sharp fragment and stooped over the boy. He touched the point of the fragment against the skin just beneath the larynx, squeezed his thumb and forefinger on the fragment to measure a distance a little over half an inch from the point, and then thrust down and into the boy's throat until his thumb and forefinger just touched the skin. Behind him he heard a struggle, and he looked up in time to see several people restrain a woman with an axe. He watched to see that they kept her out of the cave and away from him before he turned back to the boy. By gently turning the piece of flint he made an opening in the windpipe. He

turned the boy on his side to prevent the tiny trickle of blood from running into the opening. The result was dramatic. The boy's struggles stopped, and the rush of air around the piece of flint sounded loud in the still of the cave. The boy lay back and relaxed and breathed deeply, and even the people in the cave could tell he was now much better. They gathered around and watched silently, and Gant could see the interest in their faces. The boy's mother had not come back.

For half an hour Gant sat holding the flint in the necessary position. The boy stirred restlessly a time or two, but Gant quieted him. The people drifted back to their activities in the cave, and Gant sat and tended his patient.

He leaned over the boy. He could hear the air beginning to pass through his throat once again. In another fifteen minutes the boy's throat was open enough, and Gant withdrew the flint in one swift movement. The boy began to sit up, but Gant held him down and pressed the wound closed. It stayed closed, and Gant got up. No one paid any attention when he left.

He went along the gravel shelf, ignoring the sounds of life that came out of the caves as he went by. He rounded a boulder and saw his own cave ahead.

The log barrier was displaced and he could hear snarls and grunts as he ran into the semidarkness inside. Two bodies writhed on the floor of the cave. He ran closer and saw that his wife and another woman were struggling there, raking each other's skin with thick, sharp nails, groping for each other's jugular vein with long, yellow teeth. Gant drove his heel into the side of the woman's body, just above the kidney. The air exploded from her lungs and she went limp. He twisted a hand in her hair and yanked her limp body away from his wife's teeth and ran for the entrance of the cave, dragging her after him. Outside, he threw the limp body down the slope. He turned and caught his wife as she came charging out.

She fought him, trying to get to the woman down the slope, and it was only because she was no longer trying to kill that he was able to force her back into the cave.

Inside, she quickly stopped fighting him. She went and knelt over something lying at the foot of his bed. He rubbed his sore jaw and went over to see what it was. He stared down in the dim light of the cave. It was Dun, and he was dead. His head had been crushed. Gant cried out and leaned against the wall. He knelt and hugged Dun's warm body to him, pushing his wife aside. He pressed his face into the boy's neck and thought of the years that he had planned to spend in teaching Dun the healing arts. He felt a heavy pat on his shoulder and looked up. His wife was there, awkwardly patting him on the shoulder, trying to comfort him. Then he remembered the woman who had killed his son.

He ran out of the cave and looked down the slope. She was not there, but he caught a flash of movement down the gravel shelf and he could see her staggering toward her cave. He began to run after her, but stopped. His anger was gone, and he felt no emotion save a terrible emptiness. He turned and went back into the cave for Dun's body. In the forest he slowly dug a deep hole. He felt numb as he dug, but when it was done and he had rolled a large stone on top of the grave, he kneeled down near it, held his face in his hands and cried. Afterward, he followed the stream bed to a flat table of solid rock. At the edge of the rock table, where the wall of rock began to rise to the cliffs above, half hidden in the shrub pine, was a mass of twisted metal wreckage. He looked down on it and thought again of that day ten years ago. Here, on the site of Pennsylvania State University, at College Park, Pennsylvania, was where he started and where he ended. But a difference of half a million years lay between the start and the end.

Once tears had come to his eyes when he looked at the wreckage, but no longer. There was work to do here

and he was the only one who could do it. He nodded and turned to climb to his cave. There were cold meat and shoots there, and a wife, and perhaps there could be another son. And this day, for the first time, an injured man had come to see him.

Kate Wilhelm is a small, slender, feminine woman who does not look capable of writing the things she writes. In two recent novels, The Killer Thing and The Nevermore Affair (Doubleday), she has discomfoting things to say about female sexuality, power politics and American militarism. She is the co-author (with Ted Thomas) of The Clone, published by Berkley in 1965—about a green mass that comes up out of the Chicago drains and eats housewives.

The Wilhelm story in ORBIT 1, "Staras Flonderans," was a quiet and charming little thing. Readers who remember it are warned to watch out for this one: it is strong meat.

BABY, YOU WERE GREAT

By Kate Wilhelm

John Lewisohn thought that if one more door slammed, or one more bell rang, or one more voice asked if he was all right, his head would explode. Leaving his laboratories, he walked through the carpeted hall to the elevator that slid wide to admit him noiselessly, was lowered, gently, two floors, where there were more carpeted halls. The door he shoved open bore a neat sign, AUDITIONING STUDIO. Inside, he was waved on through the reception room by three girls who knew better than to speak to him unless he spoke first. They were surprised to see him; it was his first visit there in seven or eight months. The inner room where he stopped was darkened, at first glance appearing empty, revealing another occupant only after his eyes had time to adjust to the dim lighting.

John sat in the chair next to Herb Javits, still without speaking. Herb was wearing the helmet and gazing at a wide screen that was actually a one-way glass panel permitting him to view the audition going on in the next room. John lowered a second helmet to his head. It fit snugly and immediately made contact with the eight prepared spots on his skull. As soon as he turned it on, the helmet itself was forgotten.

A girl had entered the other room. She was breathtakingly lovely, a long-legged honey blonde with slanting green eyes and apricot skin. The room was furnished as

a sitting room with two couches, some chairs, end tables and a coffee table, all tasteful and lifeless, like an ad in a furniture trade publication. The girl stopped at the doorway and John felt her indecision, heavily tempered with nervousness and fear. Outwardly she appeared poised and expectant, her smooth face betraying none of her emotions. She took a hesitant step toward the couch, and a wire showed trailing behind her. It was attached to her head. At the same time a second door opened. A young man ran inside, slamming the door behind him; he looked wild and frantic. The girl registered surprise, mounting nervousness; she felt behind her for the door handle, found it and tried to open the door again. It was locked. John could hear nothing that was being said in the room; he only felt the girl's reaction to the unexpected interruption. The wild-eyed man was approaching her, his hands slashing through the air, his eyes darting glances all about them constantly. Suddenly he pounced on her and pulled her to him, kissing her face and neck roughly. She seemed paralyzed with fear for several seconds, then there was something else, a bland nothing kind of feeling that accompanied boredom sometimes, or too-complete self-assurance. As the man's hands fastened on her blouse in the back and ripped it, she threw her arms about him, her face showing passion that was not felt anywhere in her mind or in her blood.

"Cut!" Herb Javits said quietly.

The man stepped back from the girl and left her without a word. She looked about blankly, her torn blouse hanging about her hips, one shoulder strap gone. She was very beautiful. The audition manager entered, followed by a dresser with a gown that he threw about her shoulders. She looked startled; waves of anger mounted to fury as she was drawn from the room, leaving it empty. The two watching men removed their helmets.

"Fourth one so far," Herb grunted. "Sixteen yesterday; twenty the day before . . . All nothing." He gave John a

curious look. "What's got you stirred out of your lab?"

"Anne's had it this time," John said. "She's been on the phone all night and all morning."

"What now?"

"Those damn sharks! I told you that was too much on top of the airplane crash last week. She can't take much more of it."

"Hold it a minute, Johnny," Herb said. "Let's finish off the next three girls and then talk." He pressed a button on the arm of his chair and the room beyond the screen took their attention again.

This time the girl was slightly less beautiful, shorter, a dimply sort of brunette with laughing blue eyes and an upturned nose. John liked her. He adjusted his helmet and felt with her.

She was excited; the audition always excited them. There was some fear and nervousness, not too much. Curious about how the audition would go, probably. The wild young man ran into the room, and her face paled. Nothing else changed. Her nervousness increased, not uncomfortably. When he grabbed her, the only emotion she registered was the nervousness.

"Cut," Herb said.

The next girl was also brunette, with gorgeously elongated legs. She was very cool, a real professional. Her mobile face reflected the range of emotions to be expected as the scene played through again, but nothing inside her was touched. She was a million miles away from it all.

The next one caught John with a slam. She entered the room slowly, looking about with curiosity, nervous, as they all were. She was younger than the other girls, less poised. She had pale gold hair piled in an elaborate mound of waves on top of her head. Her eyes were brown, her skin nicely tanned. When the man entered, her emotion changed quickly to fear, then to terror. John didn't

know when he closed his eyes. He was the girl, filled with unspeakable terror; his heart pounded, adrenalin pumped into his system; he wanted to scream but could not. From the dim unreachable depths of his psyche there came something else, in waves, so mixed with terror that the two merged and became one emotion that pulsed and throbbed and demanded. With a jerk he opened his eyes and stared at the window. The girl had been thrown down to one of the couches, and the man was kneeling on the floor beside her, his hands playing over her bare body, his face pressed against her skin.

"Cut!" Herb said. His voice was shaken. "Hire her," he said. The man rose, glanced at the girl, sobbing now, and then quickly bent over and kissed her cheek. Her sobs increased. Her golden hair was down, framing her face; she looked like a child. John tore off the helmet. He was perspiring.

Herb got up, turned on the lights in the room, and the window blanked out, blending with the wall. He didn't look at John. When he wiped his face, his hand was shaking. He rammed it in his pocket.

"When did you start auditions like that?" John asked, after a few moments of silence.

"Couple of months ago. I told you about it. Hell, we had to, Johnny. That's the six hundred nineteenth girl we've tried out! Six hundred nineteen! All phonies but one! Dead from the neck up. Do you have any idea how long it was taking us to find that out? Hours for each one. Now it's a matter of minutes."

John Lewisohn sighed. He knew. He had suggested it, actually, when he had said, "Find a basic anxiety situation for the test." He hadn't wanted to know what Herb had come up with.

He said, "Okay, but she's only a kid. What about her parents, legal rights, all that?"

"We'll fix it. Don't worry. What about Anne?"

"She's called me five times since yesterday. The sharks

were too much. She wants to see us, both of us, this afternoon."

"You're kidding! I can't leave here now!"

"Nope. Kidding I'm not. She says no plug-up if we don't show. She'll take pills and sleep until we get there."

"Good Lord! She wouldn't dare!"

"I've booked seats. We take off at twelve-thirty-five. They stared at one another silently for another moment, then Herb shrugged. He was a short man, not heavy but solid. John was over six feet, muscular, with a temper that he knew he had to control. Others suspected that when he did let it go, there would be bodies lying around afterward, but he controlled it.

Once it had been a physical act, an effort of body and will to master that temper; now it was done so automatically that he couldn't recall occasions when it even threatened to flare anymore.

"Look, Johnny, when we see Anne, let me handle it. Right? I'll make it short."

"What are you going to do?"

"Give her an earful. If she's going to start pulling temperament on me, I'll slap her down so hard she'll bounce a week." He grinned. "She's had it all her way up to now. She knew there wasn't a replacement if she got bitchy. Let her try it now. Just let her try." Herb was pacing back and forth with quick, jerky steps.

John realized with a shock that he hated the stocky, red-faced man. The feeling was new; it was almost as if he could taste the hatred he felt, and the taste was unfamiliar and pleasant.

Herb stopped pacing and stared at him for a moment. "Why'd she call you? Why does she want you down, too? She knows you're not mixed up with this end of it."

"She knows I'm a full partner, anyway," John said.

"Yeah, but that's not it." Herb's face twisted in a grin. "She thinks you're still hot for her, doesn't she? She knows you tumbled once, in the beginning, when you were

working on her, getting the gimmick working right." The grin reflected no humor then. "Is she right, Johnny, baby? Is that it?"

"We made a deal," John said. "You run your end, I run mine. She wants me along because she doesn't trust you, or believe anything you tell her anymore. She wants a witness."

"Yeah, Johnny. But you be sure you remember our agreement." Suddenly Herb laughed. "You know what it was like, Johnny, seeing you and her? Like a flame trying to snuggle up to an icicle."

At three-thirty they were in Anne's suite in the Skyline Hotel in Grand Bahama. Herb had a reservation to fly back to New York on the 6 P.M. flight. Anne would not be off until four, so they made themselves comfortable in her rooms and waited. Herb turned her screen on, offered a helmet to John, who shook his head, and they both seated themselves. John watched the screen for several minutes; then he, too, put on a helmet.

Anne was looking at the waves far out at sea where they were long, green, undulating; then she brought her gaze in closer, to the blue-green and quick seas, and finally in to where they stumbled on the sandbars, breaking into foam that looked solid enough to walk on. She was peaceful, swaying with the motion of the boat, the sun hot on her back, the fishing rod heavy in her hands. It was like being an indolent animal at peace with its world, at home in the world, being one with it. After a few seconds she put down the rod and turned, looking at a tall smiling man in swimming trunks. He held out his hand and she took it. They entered the cabin of the boat where drinks were waiting. Her mood of serenity and happiness ended abruptly, to be replaced by shocked disbelief, and a start of fear.

"What the hell . . . ?" John muttered, adjusting the audio. You seldom needed audio when Anne was on.

". . . Captain Brothers had to let them go. After all,

they've done nothing yet—" the man was saying soberly.

"But why do you think they'll try to rob me?"

"Who else is here with a million dollars' worth of jewels?"

John turned it off and said, "You're a fool! You can't get away with something like that!"

Herb stood up and crossed to the window wall that was open to the stretch of glistening blue ocean beyond the brilliant white beaches. "You know what every woman wants? To own something worth stealing." He chuckled, a sound without mirth. "Among other things, that is. They want to be roughed up once or twice, and forced to kneel. . . . Our new psychologist is pretty good, you know? Hasn't steered us wrong yet. Anne might kick some, but it'll go over great."

"She won't stand for an actual robbery." Louder, emphatically, he added, "I won't stand for that."

"We can dub it," Herb said. "That's all we need, Johnny, plant the idea, and then dub the rest."

John stared at his back. He wanted to believe that. He needed to believe it. His voice was calm when he said, "It didn't start like this, Herb. What happened?"

Herb turned then. His face was dark against the glare of light behind him. "Okay, Johnny, it didn't start like this. Things accelerate, that's all. You thought of a gimmick, and the way we planned it, it sounded great, but it didn't last. We gave them the feeling of gambling, or learning to ski, of automobile racing, everything we could dream up, and it wasn't enough. How many times can you take the first ski jump of your life? After a while you want new thrills, you know? For you it's been great, hasn't it? You bought yourself a shiny new lab and closed the door. You bought yourself time and equipment and when things didn't go right, you could toss it out and start over, and nobody gave a damn. Think of what it's been like for me, kid! I gotta keep coming up with something

new, something that'll give Anne a jolt and through her all those nice little people who aren't even alive unless they're plugged in. You think it's been easy? Anne was a green kid. For her everything was new and exciting, but it isn't like that now, boy. You better believe it is *not* like that now. You know what she told me last month? She's sick and tired of men. Our little hot-box Annie! Tired of men!"

John crossed to him and pulled him around toward the light. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why, Johnny? What would you have done that I didn't do? *I* looked harder for the right guy. What would you do for a new thrill for her? I worked for them, kid. Right from the start you said for me to leave you alone. Okay. I left you alone. You ever read any of the memos I sent? You initialed them, kiddo. Everything that's been done, we both signed. Don't give me any of that why didn't I tell you stuff. It won't work!" His face was ugly red and a vein bulged in his neck. John wondered if he had high blood pressure, if he would die of a stroke during one of his flash rages.

John left him at the window. He had read the memos. Herb was right; all he had wanted was to be left alone. It had been his idea; after twelve years of work in a laboratory on prototypes he had shown his—gimmick—to Herb Javits. Herb had been one of the biggest producers on television then; now he was the biggest producer in the world.

The gimmick was simple enough. A person fitted with electrodes in his brain could transmit his emotions, which in turn could be broadcast and picked up by the helmets to be felt by the audience. No words, or thoughts went out, only basic emotions—fear, love, anger, hatred. . . That, tied in with a camera showing what the person saw, with a voice dubbed in, and you were the person having the experience, with one important difference—you could turn it off if it got to be too much. The "actor" couldn't.

A simple gimmick. You didn't really need the camera and the sound track; many users never turned them on at all, but let their own imaginations fill in the emotional broadcast.

The helmets were not sold, only leased or rented after a short, easy fitting session. A year's lease cost fifty dollars, and there were over thirty-seven million subscribers. Herb had created his own network when the demand for more hours squeezed him out of regular television. From a one-hour weekly show, it had gone to one hour nightly, and now it was on the air eight hours a day live, with another eight hours of taped programming.

What had started out as A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ANNE BEAUMONT was now a life in the life of Anne Beaumont, and the audience was insatiable.

Anne came in then, surrounded by the throng of hangers-on that mobbed her daily—hairstylists, masseurs, fitters, script men. . . She looked tired. She waved the crowd out when she saw John and Herb were there. "Hello, John," she said, "Herb."

"Anne, baby, you're looking great!" Herb said. He took her in his arms and kissed her solidly. She stood still, her hands at her sides.

She was tall, very slender, with wheat-colored hair and gray eyes. Her cheekbones were wide and high, her mouth firm and almost too large. Against her deep red-gold suntan her teeth looked whiter than John remembered. Although too firm and strong ever to be thought of as pretty, she was a very beautiful woman. After Herb released her, she turned to John, hesitated only a moment, then extended a slim, sun-browned hand. It was cool and dry in his.

"How have you been, John? It's been a long time."

He was very glad she didn't kiss him, or call him darling. She smiled only slightly and gently removed her hand from his. He moved to the bar as she turned to Herb.

"I'm through, Herb." Her voice was too quiet. She accepted a whiskey sour from John, but kept her gaze on Herb.

"What's the matter, honey? I was just watching you, baby. You were great today, like always. You've still got it, kid. It's coming through like always."

"What about this robbery? You must be out of your mind. . ."

"Yeah, that. Listen, Anne baby, I swear to you I don't know a thing about it. Laughton must have been giving you the straight goods on that. You know we agreed that the rest of this week you just have a good time, remember? That comes over too, baby. When you have a good time and relax, thirty-seven million people are enjoying life and relaxing. That's good. They can't be stimulated all the time. They like the variety." Wordlessly John held out a glass, scotch and water. Herb took it without looking.

Anne was watching him coldly. Suddenly she laughed. It was a cynical, bitter sound. "You're not a damn fool, Herb. Don't try to act like one." She sipped her drink again, staring at him over the rim of the glass. "I'm warning you, if anyone shows up here to rob me, I'm going to treat him like a real burglar. I bought a gun after today's broadcast, and I learned how to shoot when I was ten. I still know how. I'll kill him, Herb, whoever it is."

"Baby," Herb started, but she cut him short.

"And this is my last week. As of Saturday, I'm through."

"You can't do that, Anne," Herb said. John watched him closely, searching for a sign of weakness; he saw nothing. Herb exuded confidence. "Look around, Anne, at this room, your clothes, everything. . . . You are the richest woman in the world, having the time of your life, able to go anywhere, do anything. . ."

"While the whole world watches—"

"So what? It doesn't stop you, does it?" Herb started to pace, his steps jerky and quick. "You knew that when

you signed the contract. You're a rare girl, Anne, beautiful, emotional, intelligent. Think of all those women who've got nothing but you. If you quit them, what do they do? Die? They might, you know. For the first time in their lives they're able to feel like they're living. You're giving them what no one ever did before, what was only hinted at in books and films in the old days. Suddenly they know what it feels like to face excitement, to experience love, to feel contented and peaceful. Think of them, Anne, empty, with nothing in their lives but you, what you're able to give them. Thirty-seven million drabs, Anne, who never felt anything but boredom and frustration until you gave them life. What do they have? Work, kids, bills. You've given them the world, baby! Without you they wouldn't even want to live anymore."

She wasn't listening. Almost dreamily she said, "I talked to my lawyers, Herb, and the contract is meaningless. You've already broken it over and over. I agreed to learn a lot of new things. I did. My God! I've climbed mountains, hunted lions, learned to ski and water-ski, but now you want me to die a little bit each week. . . That airplane crash, not bad, just enough to terrify me. Then the sharks. I really do think it was having sharks brought in when I was skiing that did it, Herb. You see, you will kill me. It will happen, and you won't be able to top it, Herb. Not ever."

There was a hard, waiting silence following her words. No! John shouted soundlessly. He was looking at Herb. He had stopped pacing when she started to talk. Something flicked across his face—surprise, fear, something not readily identifiable. Then his face went blank and he raised his glass and finished the scotch and water, replacing the glass on the bar. When he turned again, he was smiling with disbelief.

"What's really bugging you, Anne? There have been plants before. You knew about them. Those lions didn't just happen by, you know. And the avalanche needed a

nudge from someone. You know that. What else is bugging you?"

"I'm in love, Herb."

Herb waved that aside impatiently. "Have you ever watched your own show, Anne?" She shook her head. "I thought not. So you wouldn't know about the expansion that took place last month, after we planted that new transmitter in your head. Johnny boy's been busy, Anne. You know these scientist types, never satisfied, always improving, changing. Where's the camera, Anne? Do you ever know where it is anymore? Have you even seen a camera in the past couple of weeks, or a recorder of any sort? You have not, and you won't again. You're on now, honey." His voice was quite low, amused almost. "In fact the only time you aren't on is when you're sleeping. I know you're in love. I know who he is. I know how he makes you feel. I even know how much money he makes a week. I should know, Anne baby. I pay him." He had come closer to her with each word, finishing with his face only inches from hers. He didn't have a chance to duck the flashing slap that jerked his head around, and before either of them realized it, he had hit her back, knocking her into a chair.

The silence grew, became something ugly and heavy, as if words were being born and dying without utterance because they were too brutal for the human spirit to bear. There was a spot of blood on Herb's mouth where Anne's diamond ring had cut him. He touched it and looked at his finger. "It's all being taped now, honey, even this," he said. He turned his back on her and went to the bar.

There was a large red print on her cheek. Her gray eyes had turned black with rage.

"Honey, relax," Herb said after a moment. "It won't make any difference to you, in what you do, or anything like that. You know we can't use most of the stuff, but it gives the editors a bigger variety to pick from. It was getting to the point where most of the interesting stuff was

going on after you were off. Like buying the gun. That's great stuff there, baby. You weren't blanketing a single thing, and it'll all come through like pure gold." He finished mixing his drink, tasted it, and then swallowed half of it. "How many women have to go out and buy a gun to protect themselves? Think of them all, feeling that gun, feeling the things you felt when you picked it up, looked at it. . ."

"How long have you been tuning in all the time?" she asked. John felt a stirring along his spine, a tingle of excitement. He knew what was going out over the miniature transmitter, the rising crests of emotion she was feeling. Only a trace of them showed on her smooth face, but the raging interior torment was being recorded faithfully. Her quiet voice and quiet body were lies; the tapes never lied.

Herb felt it too. He put his glass down and went to her, kneeling by the chair, taking her hand in both of his. "Anne, please, don't be that angry with me. I was desperate for new material. When Johnny got this last wrinkle out, and we knew we could record around the clock, we had to try it, and it wouldn't have been any good if you'd known. That's no way to test anything. You knew we were planting the transmitter. . ."

"How long?"

"Not quite a month."

"And Stuart? He's one of your men? He is transmitting also? You hired him to . . . to make love to me? Is that right?"

Herb nodded. She pulled her hand free and averted her face. He got up then and went to the window. "But what difference does it make?" he shouted. "If I introduced the two of you at a party, you wouldn't think anything of it. What difference if I did it this way? I knew you'd like each other. He's bright, like you, likes the same sort of things you do. Comes from a poor family, like yours. . . Everything said you'd get along."

"Oh, yes," she said almost absently. "We get along." She was feeling in her hair, her fingers searching for the scars.

"It's all healed by now," John said. She looked at him as if she had forgotten he was there.

"I'll find a surgeon," she said, standing up, her fingers white on her glass. "A brain surgeon—"

"It's a new process," John said slowly. "It would be dangerous to go in after them."

She looked at him for a long time. "Dangerous?"

He nodded.

"You could take it back out."

He remembered the beginning, how he had quieted her fear of the electrodes and the wires. Her fear was that of a child for the unknown and the unknowable. Time and again he had proved to her that she could trust him, that he wouldn't lie to her. He hadn't lied to her, then. There was the same trust in her eyes, the same unshakable faith. She would believe him. She would accept without question whatever he said. Herb had called him an icicle, but that was wrong. An icicle would have melted in her fires. More like a stalactite, shaped by centuries of civilization, layer by layer he had been formed until he had forgotten how to bend, forgotten how to find release for the stirrings he felt somewhere in the hollow, rigid core of himself. She had tried and, frustrated, she had turned from him, hurt, but unable not to trust one she had loved. Now she waited. He could free her, and lose her again, this time irrevocably. Or he could hold her as long as she lived.

Her lovely gray eyes were shadowed with fear, and the trust that he had given to her. Slowly he shook his head.

"I can't," he said. "No one can."

"I see," she murmured, the black filling her eyes. "I'd die, wouldn't I? Then you'd have a lovely sequence, wouldn't you, Herb?" She swung around, away from John. "You'd have to fake the story line, of course, but you

are so good at that. An accident, emergency brain surgery needed, everything I feel going out to the poor little drabs who never will have brain surgery done. It's very good," she said admiringly. Her eyes were black. "In fact, anything I do from now on, you'll use, won't you? If I kill you, that will simply be material for your editors to pick over. Trial, prison, very dramatic. . . On the other hand, if I kill myself. . ."

John felt chilled; a cold, hard weight seemed to be filling him. Herb laughed. "The story line will be something like this," he said. "Anne has fallen in love with a stranger, deeply, sincerely in love with him. Everyone knows how deep that love is, they've all felt it, too, you know. She finds him raping a child, a lovely little girl in her early teens. Stuart tells her they're through. He loves the little nymphet. In a passion she kills herself. You are broadcasting a real storm of passion, right now, aren't you, honey? Never mind, when I run through this scene, I'll find out." She hurled her glass at him, ice cubes and orange slices flying across the room. Herb ducked, grinning.

"That's awfully good, baby. Corny, but after all, they can't get too much corn, can they? They'll love it, after they get over the shock of losing you. And they will get over it, you know. They always do. Wonder if it's true about what happens to someone experiencing a violent death?" Anne's teeth bit down on her lip, and slowly she sat down again, her eyes closed tight. Herb watched her for a moment, then said, even more cheerfully, "We've got the kid already. If you give them a death, you've got to give them a new life. Finish one with a bang. Start one with a bang. We'll name the kid Cindy, a real Cinderella story after that. They'll love her, too."

Anne opened her eyes, black, dulled now; she was so full of tension that John felt his own muscles contract. He wondered if he would be able to stand the tape she was transmitting. A wave of excitement swept him and he

knew he would play it all, feel it all, the incredibly contained rage, fear, the horror of giving a death to them to gloat over, and finally, anguish. He would know it all. Watching Anne, he wished she would break now. She didn't. She stood up stiffly, her back rigid, a muscle hard and ridged in her jaw. Her voice was flat when she said, "Stuart is due in half an hour. I have to dress." She left them without looking back.

Herb winked at John and motioned toward the door. "Want to take me to the plane, kid?" In the cab he said, "Stick close to her for a couple of days, Johnny. There might be an even bigger reaction later when she really understands just how hooked she is." He chuckled again. "By God! It's a good thing she trusts you, Johnny boy!"

As they waited in the chrome and marble terminal for the liner to unload its passengers, John said, "Do you think she'll be any good after this?"

"She can't help herself. She's too life-oriented to deliberately choose to die. She's like a jungle inside, raw, wild, untouched by that smooth layer of civilization she shows on the outside. It's a thin layer, kid, real thin. She'll fight to stay alive. She'll become more wary, more alert to danger, more excited and exciting. . . She'll really go to pieces when he touches her tonight. She's primed real good. Might even have to do some editing, tone it down a little." His voice was very happy. "He touches her where she lives, and she reacts. A real wild one. She's one; the new kid's one; Stuart. . . They're few and far between, Johnny. It's up to us to find them. God knows we're going to need all of them we can get." His expression became thoughtful and withdrawn. "You know, that really wasn't such a bad idea of mine about rape and the kid. Who ever dreamed we'd get that kind of a reaction from her? With the right sort of buildup. . ." He had to run to catch his plane.

John hurried back to the hotel, to be near Anne if she needed him. But he hoped she would leave him alone. His

fingers shook as he turned on his screen; suddenly he had a clear memory of the child who had wept, and he hoped Stuart would hurt Anne just a little. The tremor in his fingers increased; Stuart was on from six until twelve, and he already had missed almost an hour of the show. He adjusted the helmet and sank back into a deep chair. He left the audio off, letting his own words form, letting his own thoughts fill in the spaces.

Anne was leaning toward him, sparkling champagne raised to her lips, her eyes large and soft. She was speaking, talking to him, John, calling him by name. He felt a tingle start somewhere deep inside him, and his glance was lowered to rest on her tanned hand in his, sending electricity through him. Her hand trembled when he ran his fingers up her palm, to her wrist where a blue vein throbbed. The slight throb became a pounding that grew, and when he looked again into her eyes, they were dark and very deep. They danced and he felt her body against his, yielding, pleading. The room darkened and she was an outline against the window, her gown floating down about her. The darkness grew denser, or he closed his eyes, and this time when her body pressed against his, there was nothing between them, and the pounding was everywhere.

In the deep chair, with the helmet on his head, John's hands clenched, opened, clenched, again and again.

Here is one more of the handful of unpublished stories Richard McKenna left behind when he died in 1964. Like his "The Secret Place," in a way, it is about the longing that most of us have felt for Somewhere Else—some other world, better, simpler and more private than this one.

Many writers have dealt with the theme since H.G. Wells wrote "The Door in the Wall" before the turn of the century; but rarely has it been developed with such persuasiveness and power as McKenna gives it here.

If indeed there is another place beyond this too-solid reality—call it Avalon, Cockaigne, Fiddler's Green—then eight desperate men, dying of thirst in an open boat, might find a way to enter it: for "God is spread pretty thin at 18 south 82 east."

FIDDLER'S GREEN .

By Richard McKenna

On the morning of the fifth day Kinross woke knowing that before the sun went down one of them would be eaten. He wondered what it would be like.

All yesterday the eight dungaree- and khaki-clad seamen had wrangled about it in thirst-cracked voices. Eight chance-spared survivors adrift without food or water in a disabled launch, riding the Indian Ocean swells to a sea anchor. The S.S. *Ixion*, 6,000-ton tramp sneaking contraband explosives to the Reds in Sumatra, had blown up and sunk in ten minutes the night of December 23, 1959. Fat John Kruger, the radioman, had not gotten off a distress signal. Four days under the vertical sun of Capricorn, off the steamer lanes and a thousand miles from land, no rain and little hope of any, reason enough and time, for dark thinking.

Kinross, lean and wiry in the faded dungarees of an engineer, looked at the others and wondered how it would go. They were in the same general positions as yesterday, still sleeping or pretending to sleep. He looked at the stubbled faces, cracked lips and sunken eyes and he knew how they felt. Skin tight and wooden, tongue stuck to teeth and palate, the dry throat a horror of whistling breath and every cell in the body clamoring.

Thirst was worse than pain, he thought. Weber's law for pain. Pain increased as the logarithm of what caused it;

a man could keep pace. But thirst was exponential. It went up and up and never stopped. Yesterday they had turned the corner and today something had to give.

Little Fay, of the rat face and bulging forehead, had begun it yesterday. Human flesh boiled in seawater, he had said, took up most of the salt and left a nourishing broth fresh enough to drink. Kinross remembered that false bit of sea lore being whispered among the apprentices on his first cruise long years ago, but now it was no tidbit for the morbid curiosity of youth. It shouldered into the boat like a ninth passenger sitting between him and all the others.

"No leedle sticks, Fay," the giant Swede Kerbeck had growled. "If we haf to eat somebody we yoost eat you."

Kinross looked at Kerbeck now, sitting just to the left on the stern grating with one huge, bronzed arm draped over the useless tiller. He wore a white singlet and khaki pants and Kinross wondered if he was awake. There was no telling about Kruger just across from him either. The radioman had slept that way, with puffy, hairless hands clasped across the ample stomach under the white sweat-shirt, for most of the four days. He had not joined in the restless moving about and talking of the others, stirring only to remoisten the handkerchief he kept on top of his almost hairless head.

"You won't eat me!" Fay had squalled. "Nor draw lots, neither. Let's have a volunteer, somebody that's to blame for this fix."

Fay had blamed Kerbeck because the boat was not provisioned. The Swede retorted angrily that he knew it had been so when they had left Mossamedes. Fay blamed Kinross because the launch engine was disabled. Kinross, skin crawling, pointed out mildly enough that the battery had been up and the diesel okay two days before the sinking. Then Fay turned on Kruger for failing to send out a distress signal. Kruger had insisted that the blast had cut him off from the radio shack and that if

he had not started at once to swing out the launch possibly none of them would have survived.

Kinross looked forward now at Fay sleeping beside the engine. On the opposite side, also asleep, was Bo Bo, the huge Senegalese stoker, clad only in dungaree shorts. It had seemed to Kinross yesterday that Fay had some sort of understanding with the powerful Negro. Bo Bo had rumbled assent to Fay's accusations and so had the three men in the forward compartment.

Kruger, surprisingly, had resolved the threat. Speaking without heat in his high-pitched, penetrating voice, he told them: touch one of us aft here and all three will fight. Kerbeck had nodded and unshipped the heavy brass tiller.

While they wavered, Kruger went over to the attack. "Single out one only man, why don't you, Fay? Who's had the most life already? Take the oldest."

Silva, the wizened, popeyed Portygee in the bow, creaked an outraged protest. Beside him the thick-set Mexican Garcia laughed harshly.

"Okay, then who's going to die soonest? Take the weakest," said Kruger. "Take Whelan."

The kid Whelan, also in the bow, found strength to whimper an agonized plea. Kinross, remembering yesterday, looked at the two men sprawled in the bow. He half thought the Mexican was looking back at him. His stocky, dungaree-clad body seemed braced against the pitch of the boat as it rode the swells, unlike the flaccidity of the old Portygee.

It was Garcia who had said finally, "You lose, Fay. You'll have to take your chance on drawing lots with the rest of us. I'll line up with Kruger."

The three men aft had voted against drawing lots but agreed to go along with the majority. Then Kruger found fault with every method suggested, pointing out how fraud could enter. The day wore out in wrangling. Kinross thought back to the curiously unstrained, liquid quality of Kruger's light voice as contrasted with the harsh croak-

ing of the others. He had seemed in better shape than the rest and somehow in control of things.

Just before sunset, when they had put it off until next day and while Silva was fingering his rosary and praying for rain, the kid Whelan had seen green fields off to port. He shouted his discovery, flailed his body across the gunwale and sank like a stone.

"There you go, Kruger!" Fay had husked bitterly. "Up to now that fat carcass of yours had one chance in eight." Kinross remembered his own twinge of regret.

Kinross felt the rising sun sucking at his dry eyeballs and thirst flamed three-dimensionally through him, consuming sense and reason. He knew that today would be the day and that he wanted it so. He glanced forward again and the Mexican was really looking at him out of red-rimmed eyes.

"I know what you're thinking, Kinross," he called aft. His voice roused the others. They began sitting up.

Little Fay led off, head bobbing and jerking, red eyes demanding agreement. "Draw lots," he said. "No more palaver. Right now or none of us will see sunset."

Kruger agreed. He clinked several shillings in his hand and passed them around to be looked at. Only one was a George V. Blindfold Bo Bo, the stupidest one, he proposed, and let him pick coins out of the bailing bucket one by one. Fay would sit back to back with him and as soon as Bo Bo had a coin up, but before anyone had seen it, Fay would call the name of the man who was to get it. Whoever got the beard would be the victim.

It was agreed. Silva asked for time to pray and Fay mocked at him. The little man perched on the engine housing, his back against Bo Bo, and looked around calculatingly. Kinross could feel the malice in his glance.

"Law of averages," Kinross was thinking. "In the middle of the series. Number three or four. Nonsense, of course."

Apparently Fay thought so too. When the Negro fumbled up the first coin and asked, "Who get this one?" Fay answered "I'll take it." It was a queen, and Kinross hated Fay.

The next one Fay awarded to Bo Bo and the giant black was safe. For the next, while Kinross held his breath, Fay named Kerbeck. Also safe. Each time a sigh went through the boat.

Then the fourth trial and Fay called out "Kinross." The engineer blinked his dry eyes and strained to see the coin in the thick black fingers. He knew first from the relief on Silva's face, and then he saw it plainly himself. It was the beard.

No one would meet his eyes but Fay and Bo Bo. Kinross hardly knew what he felt. The thought came "an end of torment" and then "I'll die clean." But he still dully resented Fay's nasty air of triumph.

Fay opened his clasp knife and slid the bailing bucket next to the engine. "Hold him across the engine housing, Bo Bo," he ordered. "We can't afford to lose any of the blood."

"Damn you, Fay, I'm still alive," Kinross said. His gaunt features worked painfully and his Adam's apple twitched in a futile attempt at swallowing.

"Knock me in the head first, mates," he pleaded. "You, Kerbeck, use the tiller."

"Yah," said the Swede, still not returning his glance. "Now yoost you wait a leedle, Fay."

"All of you listen to me," Kruger said. "I know a way we can get as much fresh water as we can drink, in just a few minutes, and nobody has to die." His light voice was effortless, liquid, trickling the words into their startled ears.

All hands looked at Kruger, suspicious, half hating him for his cool voice and lack of obvious suffering. Kinross felt a thrill of hope.

"I mean it," Kruger said earnestly. "Cold, fresh water is all around us, waiting for us, if we only knew one little thing that we can't quite remember. You felt it all day yesterday. You feel it now."

They stared. Fay ran his thumb back and forth along the edge of the clasp knife. Then Garcia said angrily, "You're nuts, Kruger. Your gyro's tumbled."

"No, Garcia," Kruger said, "I was never saner. I knew this all the time, before the ship blew even, but I had to wait for the right moment. Sleep, not talk, not move, nothing to waste body water, so I could talk when the time came. Now it's here. Now is the time. You feel it, don't you? Listen to me now." Kruger's clear, light voice babbled like water running over stones. He stepped up on the stern grating and looked down at the six men frozen into a tableau around the engine. Kinross noted that his sparse white hair lay smooth and saw a hint of set muscles under the fat face.

"I'll tell you a true story so you can understand easy," Kruger continued. "Long time ago, long ago, in the Tibesti highlands of Africa, some soldiers were lost and dying of thirst, like us now. They went up a valley, a dry wash with bones on the ground, to two big rocks like pillars side by side. They did something there, and when they went between the two big rocks they were in a different world with green trees and running water. All of them lived and afterward some of them came back."

"I heard that story before, somewhere," Kinross said.

Fay jerked toward him. "A lie, Kinross! You're welshing! Kruger, it's a stall!"

"I didn't believe the story," Kinross said mildly. "I don't believe it now."

"I do believe it," Kruger said sharply. "I *know* it's true. I've been there. I've looked into that world. We can do just what those soldiers did."

"Bilge, Kruger!" Garcia growled. "How could there be such a world? How could you get in it?"

"I didn't get in, Garcia. I could see and hear, but when I walked into it everything faded around me."

"Then what good—"

"Wait. Let me finish. I lacked something we have here. I was alone, not half dead with thirst, and I couldn't all the way believe what I saw and heard."

"So what does—"

"Wait. Hear me out. Believe me, Garcia, all of you. There are seven of us here and no other humans in a thousand miles. Our need is more than we can stand. We can believe. We must believe or die. Trust me. I know."

The Mexican scratched the black stubble along his heavy jaw. "Kruger, I think you're crazy as Whelan," he said slowly.

"Whelan wasn't crazy," Kruger said. "He was just a kid and couldn't wait. He saw a green meadow. Believe me now, all of you, if we all had seen that meadow *at the same time Whelan saw it* we would be walking in it right this minute!"

"Yah, like Whelan now is walking," Kerbeck put in.

"We *killed* Whelan, do you understand? We killed him because we couldn't believe what he saw and so it wasn't true." The light, bubbling voice splashed with vehemence.

"I think I get you, Kruger," Garcia said slowly.

"I don't," Kinross said, "unless you want us all to die in a mass hallucination."

"I want us to *live* in a mass hallucination. We can. We must or die. Believe me. I *know* this."

"Then you mean go out in a happy dream, not knowing when the end comes?"

"Damn you, Kinross, you've got a little education. That's why it's so hard for you to understand. But let me tell you, this world, this Indian Ocean, is a hallucination too. The whole human race has been a million years building it up, training itself to see and believe, making the world strong enough to stand any kind of shock. It's like a dream we can't wake up from. But believe me, Kinross,

you *can* wake up from this nightmare. Trust me. I know the way."

Kinross thought, "I'm a fool to argue. It's a delay for me, in any case. But maybe . . . maybe . . ." Aloud he said, "What you say. . . Yes, I know the thought . . . but all anyone can do is talk about it. There's no way to *act* on it."

"The more word-juggling the less action, *that's* why! But we can act, like the soldiers of Tibesti."

"A myth. A romantic legend."

"A true story. I've been there, seen, heard. I know. It was long ago, before the Romans, when the web of the world was not so closely woven as now. There were fewer men like you in the world then, Kinross."

"Kruger," Kerbeck broke in, "I hear that story one time myself. You been *sure* now, Kruger?"

"Yes, sure, sure, sure. Kerbeck, I *know* this."

"I go along, Kruger," the big Swede said firmly. Garcia said, "I'm trying, Kruger. Keep talking."

The clear, light voice resumed its liquid cadence. "You, Kinross, you're the obstacle. You're the brain, the engineer with a slide rule on the log desk. You're a symbol and you hold back the rest of us. You've got to believe or we'll cut your throat and try with six men. I mean it, Kinross!"

"I want to believe, Kruger. Something in me knows better, but I can feel it slipping. Talk it up. Help me."

"All right. You know all this already. You're not learning something new but remembering something you were trained to forget. But listen. Reality cracks open sometimes. Indians on vision quest, saints in the Theban desert, martyrs in the flame. Always deprivation, pain long drawn out, like us here, like Whelan yesterday. But always the world heals itself, clanks back together, with the power of the people who will not see, will not believe, because they think they can't believe. Like you helped to kill Whelan yesterday.

"You know something about electricity. Well, it's like a field, strongest where the most people are. No miracles in cities. People hold the world together. They're trained from the cradle up to hold it together. Our language is the skeleton of the world. The words we talk with are bricks and mortar to build a prison in which we turn cannibal and die of thirst. Kinross, do you follow me?"

"Yes, I follow you, but—"

"No buts. Listen. Here we are, 18 south 82 east, seven men in ten million square miles of emptiness. The reality field is weak here. It's a *thin spot* in the world, Kinross, don't you understand? We're at the limit of endurance. We don't care if the public world comes apart in a thousand places if only we can break out of it here, save our lives, drink cool, fresh water. . ."

Kinross felt a shiver of dread run over him. "Hold on," he said. "I think I do care about the public world coming apart. . ."

"Hah! You begin to believe!" The clear, smooth voice fountained in triumph. "It soaks in, under the words and behind the thinking. It scares you. All right. Believe me now, Kinross. I've studied this for half my life. We will not harm the public world when we steal ourselves from it. We will leave a little opening, as in the Tibesti, but who will ever find it?"

The old Portygee waved his skinny arms and croaked. Then he found his voice and said, "I know the story of Tibesti, Kruger. My fathers have lived in Mogador for six hundred years. It is a Berber story and it is unholy."

"But true, Silva," Kruger said softly. "That's all we care about. We all know it's true."

"You want a black miracle, Kruger. God will not let you do it. We will lose our souls."

"We will take personal possession of our souls, Silva. That's what I've been telling Kinross. God is spread pretty thin at 18 south 82 east."

"No, no," the old man wailed. "It is better we pray for a white miracle, a ship, rain to fall. . ."

"Whatever lets me live is a white miracle," Garcia said explosively. "Kruger's right, Silva. I been sabotaging every prayer you made the last four days just by being here. It's the only way for us, Silva."

"You hear, Kinross?" Kruger asked. "They believe. They're ready. They can't wait on you much longer."

"I believe," Kinross said, swallowing painfully, "but I have to know *how*. Okay, black magic, but what words, what thoughts, what acts?"

"No words. No thoughts. They are walls to break through. One only act. An unnameable, unthinkable act. I know what bothers you, Kinross. Listen now. I mean group hypnosis, a shared hallucination, something done every day somewhere in the world. But here there is a thin spot. Here there is no mass of people to keep the public world intact. Our hallucination will become the public world to us, with water and fruit and grass. We've been feeling it for days, all around us, waiting for us. . ."

The men around Kinross murmured and snuffled. An enormous excitement began to stir in him.

"I believe, Kruger. I feel it now. But how do you know what kind of world. . . ?"

"Damn it, Kinross, it's not a preexistent world. It's only there potentially. We'll make it up as we go along, put in what we want . . . a Fiddler's Green."

"Yah," said Kerbeck. "Fiddler's Green. I hear about that too. Hurry up, Kinross."

"I'm ready," Kinross said. "For sure, I'm ready."

"All right," Kruger said. "Now we cross over, to our own world and the fresh, cold water. All of you lie down, stretch out best way you can, like you wanted to rest."

Kinross lay flat in the after compartment, beside Kerbeck. Kruger looked down at them with his moon face that now seemed hewn of granite. He swayed against the taffrail to the regular pitch and dip of the boat.

"Rest," he said. "Don't try, don't strain, or you'll miss it. You, Kinross, don't try to watch yourself. Rest. Don't think. Let your bellies sag and your fingers come apart. . .

"Your bodies are heavy, too heavy for you. You are sinking flat against the soft wood. You are letting go, sagging down. . ."

Kinross felt the languor and the heaviness. Kruger's voice sounded more distant but still clear, liquid, never-stopping.

". . . resting now. Pain is going. Fear is going . . . further away . . . happy . . . sure of things . . . you believe me because I know . . . you trust me because I know. . ."

Kinross felt a mouth twitch and it was his own. The inert, heavy body was somehow his own also. There was a singsong rise and fall, like the swells, in Kruger's patterning, babbling voice.

". . . resting . . . so-o-o relaxed . . . can't blink your eyes . . . try . . . no matter how hard you try. . ."

Kinross felt a tingling in the hands and feet of the body that could not blink its eyes. But of course. . .

". . . jaws are stuck . . . try hard as you can . . . can't open . . . hand coming up . . . up and up and up . . . as a feather . . . up and up . . . try . . . hard as you can . . . KINROSS, try to put your hand down!"

The hand floated in Kinross' field of view. It had something to do with him. He willed it to drop but it would not obey. His vision was pulsating to the rhythm of the swells and the fading in and out of Kruger's voice. First he saw Kruger far off but clear and distinct, like through the wrong way of a telescope, and the voice was clear, burbling, like water falling down rocks. Then the fat man rushed closer and closer, looming larger and larger, becoming more hazy and indistinct as he filled the sky, and the voice faded out. Then the back swing. . .

". . . hands going down . . . relaxed on the soft, restful wood . . . all relaxed . . . almost ready now . . . stay relaxed until I give you the signal . . . HEAR THIS NOW:

for the signal I will clap my hands twice and say, 'Act.' You will know what do and all together you will do it . . . take me with you . . . each one, reach out a hand and take me along . . . blind where you see, deaf where you hear . . . must not fail to take me . . . REMEMBER THAT.

". . . sea is gone, sky is gone, nothing here but the boat and a gray mist. KINROSS, what do you see?"

Gray mist swirling, black boat, no color, no detail, a sketch in a dream . . . no motion . . . no more pulsation of things . . . the endless splash and murmur of the voice, and then another voice, "I see gray mist all around."

"Gray mist all around, and in the mist now one thing. One thing you see. Silva, what do you see?"

"A face. I see a face."

"Fay, you see the face. Describe the face."

"A giant's face. Bigger than the boat. It is worried and stern."

"Kerbeck, you see the face. How is it shaped?"

"Round and fat. A leedle fuzz of beard there is."

"Garcia, you see the face. Tell us the colors."

"Eyes blue. Hair almost white. Skin smooth and white. Lips thin and red."

"KINROSS, you see the face. Describe it in detail."

"Thin eyebrows, high arched, white against white. Broad forehead. Bulging cheeks. Flat nose, large, flaring nostrils. Wide mouth, thin lips."

"Bo Bo, you see the face. Who is it, Bo Bo? Tell us who it is."

"It is you, Boss Kruger."

"Yes," said the Face, the great lips moving. "Now you are ready. Now you are close. Remember the signal. You have let go of yourselves by giving me control. Now I will do for you what no man can do for himself: I will set you free. Remember the signal. Remember your orders."

"You are thirsty. Thirst claws in your throats, tears at your guts. You have to drink. You don't care, don't think."

You would drink the blood of your children and of your fathers and not care. Water, cold, wet, splashing water, rivers of water, all around you, waiting for you, green trees and grass and water.

"You already know how to get to it. You always knew, from before time you knew, and now you remember and you are ready for the signal. All together and take me with you. You know what to do. Not in words, not in thoughts, not in pictures, deeper, older, far underneath those, you know. Before the word, before the thought, there was the act."

The great mouth gaped on the final word and green light flashed in its inner darkness. The mists swirled closer and Kinross floated there on an intolerable needle point of thirst. Great eyes blue-blazing, with dreadful intensity, the Face spoke again:

"IN THE BEGINNING IS THE ACT!"

It shouted the last word tremendously. There was a sharp double clap of thunder and green lightnings played in the cavernous mouth which yawned wide on the word until it filled the field of vision. The green lightnings firmed into trees, mossy rocks, a brawling stream . . . Kinross tugged the heavy body after him by one arm, splash, splash, in the cold, clear water.

Kinross drank greedily. The coolness flowed into him and out along his arteries and the fire died. He could see the others kneeling in or beside the clear stream running smoothly over rounded pebbles and white sand. Then a great weariness came over him. He drank again briefly, lay down on the smooth turf beside the stream and slept.

When he awoke, Garcia was sitting beside him eating bananas and offered him some. Kinross looked around while he was eating. Level ground extended perhaps ten yards on either side of the little stream; then convexly curved banks rose abruptly for a hundred feet. In the diffuse, watery light the land was green with grass and the

darker green of trees and bushes. The colors were flat and homogeneous. There were no random irregularities on the land such as gullies or rock outcrops. The trees were blurred masses never quite in direct view. The grass was blurred and vague. It was like the time he had had his eyes dilated for refraction. But he could see Garcia plainly enough.

Kinross shook his head and blinked. Garcia chuckled.

"Don't let it bother you," he said. "Why be curious?"

"Can't help it, I guess," Kinross replied. Then he spied Kruger's supine form to his left and said, "Let's wake Kruger."

"Tried it already," the Mexican said. "He ain't dead and he ain't alive. Go see what you think."

Kinross felt a pang of alarm. Kruger was needed here. He rose, walked over and examined the body. It was warm and pliant but unresponsive. He shook his head again.

Curses broke out behind the indefinite shrubbery on the bank across the stream. Fay's voice. Then the little man came into view beside the huge Negro. They had papayas and guavas.

"Kruger still asleep?" Fay asked. "Damn him and his world. Everything I pick in it is full of worm-holes and rotten spots."

"Try some of my bananas here," Garcia said. Fay ate one and muttered reluctant gratification.

"We've got to do something about Kruger," Kinross said. "Let's have a conference."

"Silva! Kerbeck! Come in!" the Mexican shouted.

The two came down the bank. Kerbeck was eating a large turnip with the aid of his belt knife. Silva fingered his rosary.

"Kruger's in a kind of trance, I think," Kinross said. "We'll have to build a shelter for him."

"There won't be any weather here," Silva said. "No day, no night, no shadows. This place is unholy. It isn't real."

"Nonsense," Kinross objected. "It's real enough." He kicked at the turf, without leaving any mark on it.

"No!" Silva cried. "Nothing's really here. I can't get close to a tree trunk. They slide away from me." Kerbeck and Fay mumbled in agreement.

"Let's catch Silva a tree," Garcia said with a laugh. "That little one over there. Spread out in a circle around it and keep looking at it so it can't get away."

Kinross suspected from their expressions that the others shared his own fearful excitement, his sense of the forbidden. All but the mocking Garcia. They surrounded the tree and Kinross could see Kerbeck beyond it well enough, but the smooth, green trunk did seem to slide out of the way of a focused glance.

"We got it for you, Silva," Garcia said. "Go in now. Take hold of it and smell it."

Silva approached the tree gingerly. His wrinkled old face had a wary look and his lips were moving. "You're not me, tree," he said softly. "You've got to be yourself by yourself. You're too smooth and too green."

Suddenly the old man embraced the trunk and held his face a foot away, peering intently. His voice rose higher. "Show me spots and cracks and dents and rough places and bumps. . ."

Fear thrilled Kinross. He heard a far-off roaring noise and the luminous overcast descended in gray swirls. The light dimmed and the flat greens of the landscape turned grayish.

"Silva, stop it!" he shouted.

"Knock it off, Silva!" cried the Mexican.

". . . show me whiskers and spines and wrinkles and lines and pits. . ." Silva's voice, unheeding, rose higher in pitch.

The mists swirled closer. There came a light, slapping, rustling sound. Then a voice spoke, clear and silvery, out of the air above them.

"Silva! Stop that, Silva, or I'll blind you!"

"Unholy!" Silva shrieked. "I will look *through* you!"

"Silva! Be blind!" commanded the silvery voice. It seemed almost to sing the words.

Silva choked off and stood erect. Then he clapped his hands to his eyes and screamed, "I'm blind. Shipmates, it's dark! Isn't it dark? The sun went out. . ."

Kinross, trembling, walked over to Silva as the mists dispersed again.

"Easy, Silva. You'll be all right soon," he comforted the sobbing old man.

"That voice," Garcia said softly. "I know that voice."

"Yes," said Bo Bo. "It was Boss Kruger."

Okay, Kinross and Garcia agreed, no looking closely at anything. The awareness of the others seemed already so naturally unfocused that they could hardly understand the meaning of the taboo. Kinross did not try to explain. Fay proposed that he stay to look after Silva and Kruger, provided that the others would bring food, since all that he picked for himself was inedible.

"Kinross, let's go for a walk," Garcia said. "You haven't looked around yet."

They walked downstream. "What happened just now?" Garcia asked.

"I don't know," Kinross said. "It was Kruger's voice, all right. Maybe we're really still back in that boat and Kruger is making us dream this."

"If that's so, I don't want to come out of it," the Mexican said feelingly, "but I don't think so. *I'm* real, if this world isn't. When I pinch myself it hurts. My insides work."

"Me too. But I could sure smell saltwater and diesel oil for a few seconds there. Silva almost made us slip back."

"Kruger was right, I guess," the Mexican said slowly, "but it's tough on poor old Silva."

They walked on in silence beside the rippling stream.

Then Kinross said, "I've got a hankering for apples. Wonder if there are any here?"

"Sure," said Garcia, "just over here." He crossed the stream and pointed out apples on a low-hanging bough. They were large, bright red and without blemish. Kinross ate several with relish before he noticed that they had no seeds and remarked on it to the Mexican.

"Watch it," warned Garcia. "No looking close."

"Well, they taste good," Kinross said.

"I'll tell you something," the Mexican said abruptly. "There's only one tree here. You find it wherever you look for it and it's always got what you want growing on it. I found that out while you were asleep. I experimented."

Kinross felt the strange dread run over him gently. "That might be dangerous," he warned.

"I didn't try to make it be two trees," the Mexican assured him. "Something already told me I shouldn't look too close."

"There's something else, too," Garcia said, when Kinross did not answer. "I'll let you find it out for yourself. Let's climb this bank and see what's on top."

"Good idea," Kinross agreed, leading off.

The bank was steeply convex, smooth and regular. Kinross climbed at an angle in order to have a gentler grade and suddenly realized that he was nearly down to the stream again. He swore mildly at his inattention and turned back up the slope, more directly this time. After a few minutes he looked back to see how far down the stream was and realized with a shock that he was really looking up the bank. He looked in front of him again and the floodplain of the little stream was almost at his feet. He could not remember which way he had been going and panic fingered at him.

"Give up," Garcia said. "Do you feel it now?"

"I feel something, but what it is. . ."

"Feel *lost*, maybe?" the Mexican asked.

"No, not lost. Camp, or anyway Kruger, is that way." Kinross pointed upstream.

"Sure it isn't downstream?"

"Sure as sure," Kinross insisted.

"Well, go on back and I'll meet you there," the Mexican said, starting off downstream. "Look for landmarks on the way," he called over his shoulder.

Kinross didn't see any landmarks. Nothing stood out in any large, general way. As he approached the group around Kruger's body he saw Garcia coming along the bank from the opposite direction.

"Garcia, does this damn creek run in a circle?" he called in surprise.

"No," said the Mexican. "You feel it now, don't you? This world is all one place and you can't cut it any finer. Every time you go up the bank it leads you down to the stream bed. Whichever way you walk along the stream, you come to Kruger."

Kinross woke up to see Kerbeck splashing water over his head in the stream. Garcia was sleeping nearby and Kinross woke him.

"What'll we eat this morning?" he asked. "Papayas, d'ye think?"

"Bacon and eggs," the Mexican yawned. "Let's find a bacon and egg tree."

"Don't joke," Kinross said. "Kruger won't like it."

"Oh well, papayas," Garcia said. He walked down to the stream and splashed water in his face. Then the two men walked up the little valley.

"What do you mean, 'this morning'," Garcia asked suddenly. "I don't remember any night."

The night was pitch black. "Kinross," Garcia called out of the blackness.

"Yes?"

"Remember how it got suddenly dark just now?"

"Yes, but it was a long while back."

"Bet you won't remember it in the morning."

"Will there be a morning?" Kinross asked. "I've been awake forever." Sleep was a defense.

"Wake up, Kinross," Garcia said, shaking him. "It's a fine morning to gather papayas."

"Is it a morning?" Kinross asked. "I don't remember any night."

"We gotta talk," the Mexican grunted. "Unless we want to sing to ourselves like Kerbeck or moan and cry like Silva over there."

"Silva? I thought that was the wind."

"No wind in this world, Kinross."

Kinross bit into papaya pulp. "How long have we been here, do you think?" he asked Garcia.

"It's been a while."

"I can't remember any whole day. Silva was blinded. Was that yesterday? Kerbeck stopped talking and started singing. Was that yesterday?"

"I don't know," the Mexican said. "It seems like everything happened yesterday. My beard grew half an inch yesterday."

Kinross rubbed his own jaw. The brown whiskers were long enough to lie flat and springy.

He was walking alone when a whisper came from just behind his head. "Kinross, this is Kruger. Come and talk to me."

Kinross whirled to face nothing. "Where?" he whispered.

"Just start walking," came the reply, still from behind.

Kinross started up the bank. He climbed steadily, remembering vaguely a previous attempt at doing so, and suddenly looked back. The stream was far below, lost under the convex curve of the bank that was really a val-

ley wall. Miles across the valley was the other wall, curving up in countersymmetry to the slope he was climbing. He pressed on, wondering, to come out on a height of land like a continental divide. Smooth, sweeping curves fell off enormously on either hand into hazy obscurity.

He walked along it to the right. It had the same terrain of vague grass and indefinite shrubs and trees, flat shades of green with nothing standing out. After a while he saw a gently rounded height rising to his left, but the whisper directed him down a long gentle slope to his right and then up a shorter, steeper slope to a high plain. There was a vast curve to it, almost too great to sense, but the horizon on the left seemed lower than that on the right. He walked on steadily.

Kinross seemed tireless to himself. He did not know how long he had been walking. He climbed another abrupt slope and a series of shallow but enormous transverse swales replaced the rounded plain. The land still curved downward to the left. Far ahead was a clear mountain shape.

It, too, was green. He started up a concave slope which turned steeply convex so that he seemed to be defying gravity as he climbed it. Then the slope leveled off considerably and he was approaching a wall of dark forest beyond which a reddish-black rock pinnacle soared into the sky.

He pushed into the forest, to find it only a half-mile belt of woods which gave way to a desert. This was a dull red, gently rising plain over which were scattered huge reddish boulders many times higher than his head. He picked his way between them over ground which seemed hot and vibrating until he came to the base of the rock pinnacle. As he neared it a pattern of intersecting curves on top indicated that it was cratered.

It was a vertical climb, but Kinross made it with the same inexplicable ease as the earlier ones. He descended a little way into the crater and said, "Here I am, Kruger."

Kruger's natural voice spoke out of the air from a point directly ahead. "Sit down, Kinross. Tell me what you think."

Kinross sat crosslegged on the rough rock surface. "I think you're running this show, Kruger," he said. "I think maybe you saved my life. Past that, I don't know what to think."

"You're curious about me, aren't you? Well, so am I. Partly I make up the rules and partly I discover them. This is a very primitive world, Kinross."

"It's prehuman," Kinross said. "You took us deep."

"Had to, for people like us."

"You're just a voice in the air to me," Kinross said. "How do you experience yourself?"

"I have a body, but I suppose it's a private hallucination. I can't animate my real body. It must be some result of my not having been in deep trance when we crossed over."

"Is that good or bad, for you?"

"Depends. I have unique powers but also special responsibilities. For instance, I am forced to animate this world and my capacity is limited. That's the reason for the taboo on looking closely or trying to use things."

"Oh. Silva then . . . can you restore his sight?"

"Yes, his blindness is purely functional. But I won't. He'd destroy us all. He'd look and look until our world fell apart. He gave me a bad time, Kinross."

"I was scared too. Tell me, what would have happened if—?"

"Back in the boat, perhaps. Or some kind of limbo."

"Is your existence purely mental now, Kruger?"

"No. I told you, I have an hallucinated body which seems perfectly real to me. But it cannot use the substance of this world the way you and the others do. Kinross, I still have the same thirst I had when we came over. It is like—what you remember. I can't quench it

and I can't endure it. This world is a kind of hell to me. . . ."

"Holy Moses, Kruger! That's too bad. Can we do anything?"

"I have one hope. It's why I brought you here."

"Tell me."

"I want to put you into still deeper hypnosis, deep as man can go. I want to set up such a deep rapport between us that I will share with you the animation of your body and you will share with me the animation of this world. Then I will be able to eat and drink."

"Granting it's possible, how would that seem to me?"

"You mean animating the world? I can't describe it to you. A joy beyond words."

"No, I mean you in my body. How do you know I won't have your thirst then? Which of us would be dominant?"

"We could quench the thirst, that's the point. I would grant you dominance in the body and retain my dominance in the world."

Kinross tugged at his shaggy brown hair. "I don't know," he said slowly. "You scare me, Kruger. Why *me*?"

"Because of your mind, Kinross. You're an engineer. We must build natural law into this world if I am ever to have rest. I need intimate access to your world-picture so that it can inform this world."

"Why can't I help you just as I am?"

"You can, but not enough. I need to superimpose your world-picture on mine in complete interaction."

Decision welled up in Kinross. "No," he said. "Take one of the others. Except for Garcia and maybe Silva they hardly seem to know they're alive, but they eat and drink."

"I've taken a large part of them into the world already, and something of you and Garcia too. But I want you intact, as a unity."

"No."

"Think of the power and the joy. It is indescribable, Kinross."

"No."

"Think of what you can lose. I can blind you, paralyze you."

"I'll grant that. But you won't. In a way I can't explain I know you need us, Kruger. You need our eyes and ears and our understanding minds in order to see and appreciate this world of yours. Your sight dimmed when you blinded Silva."

"That isn't wholly true. I needed you absolutely in order to get across, in order to form this world, but not now."

"I'll gamble you're lying, Kruger. You don't have a large enough population to afford playing tyrant."

"Don't underestimate me, Kinross. You don't know me and you never can. I have a fierce will in this matter that must not be denied. From childhood on I have worked toward this culmination with absolute ruthlessness. I deliberately did not send a distress message from the *Ixion* because I wanted the chance I got. Does that impress you?"

"Not in your favor, Kruger. So little Ratface was right. . ."

"I don't want your favor or your pity, Kinross. I want your conviction that you cannot stand out against me. I'll tell you more. I planted the bomb in the *Ixion's* cargo hold. I dumped the food and water out of the launch. I ran down the battery and jammed the fuel pump. I timed the explosion so that you would be just coming off watch. That convinces you. Now you know that you cannot stand out against such a will as mine."

Kinross stood up and squinted his brown eyes into the emptiness before him. "I'm convinced that you made your own world but now you can't get all the way into it. I'm convinced that you should not. Kruger, to hell with you."

"It is my world and I'll come all the way into it in spite of you," Kruger said. "Look at me!" On the command the voice rang out strong and silvery, a great singing.

"You're not there," Kinross said, standing up.

"Yes I am here. Look at me."

The air before Kinross became half visible, a ghostly streaming upward.

"Look at me!" the chiming, silvery voice repeated.

There came a sound like tearing silk. The hair stood up on Kinross' neck and a coldness raced over his skin. The streaming air thickened and eddied, became a surface whorled and contoured in a third dimension, became vibrantly alive, became the shape of a great face.

"Kinross, look at me!" the Face commanded in a voice like great bells.

Kinross took a deep breath. "I learn my lessons well, Kruger," he said in a trembling voice. "You're not there. I don't see you."

He walked directly into the Face and through it, feeling an electric thrill in his cringing flesh as he did so. Then he was clambering down the sheer face of the pinnacle.

As Kinross crossed the high plain on his way back, rain began to fall from the overcast. Gusts of wind buffeted him. There was no surface runoff of the rain and no clear effect of the wind in the indefinite trees and shrubbery. "Kruger's learning," Kinross said to himself. Then darkness came suddenly and he lay down and slept. When he awoke he was back beside the little stream and Garcia told him he had been gone four days.

"Four days?" Kinross asked in surprise. "Doesn't everything still happen yesterday?"

"Not anymore," the Mexican said. "Where in hell have you been?"

"Outside somehow, arguing with Kruger," Kinross said,

looking around. "Damn it, this place feels different. And where's Kruger's body and the others?"

"It is different," Garcia said. "I'll tell you. First, Fay found a cave. . ."

The cave was the source of the stream, which now ran out of it, Garcia explained. Fay and Bo Bo had carried Kruger's body into it and now spent most of their time in there. Fay claimed that Kruger awoke at intervals to eat and drink and that he had made Fay his spokesman. Fay and Bo Bo had piled up a cairn of rocks before the cave mouth and had commanded Kerbeck and Garcia to bring fruit and place it there every morning. Silva now sat beside the cairn, rocking and wailing as before.

"I couldn't make Kerbeck understand," Garcia added. "He roams the hillsides now like a wild man. So I've been supplying them by myself."

"The place is bigger," Kinross commented. The valley floor extended now for several hundred yards on either side of the little stream and the walls rose hundreds of feet. The oppressive regularity of outline was relieved by a hint of weather sculpturing and meaningful groupings of plant life.

"Space is nailed down better too," Garcia said. "There are all kinds of trees now that stay put and can be looked at." He slapped at a fly buzzing around his head.

"Hello!" Kinross exclaimed. "Insects!"

"Yes," Garcia agreed sourly. "Little animals in the brush, too. Rats and lizards, I think. And I got rained on once. It ain't all good, Kinross."

"Let's go see that cave," Kinross proposed. "I'll tell you what happened to me on the way."

They walked half a mile upstream. The valley narrowed and its walls became more vertical. A tangled growth of dark timber trees filled it. The diffuse light from the permanently overcast sky scarcely penetrated its gloom. Then they came into a clearing perhaps a hundred yards across

and Kinross could see the darkly wooded slopes rising steeply on three sides. Directly ahead was the cave.

Two relatively narrow basaltic dikes slanted up the slope for more than a hundred feet, coming together at the top to form an inverted V. The stream ran out of the cavernous darkness at its base, bisected the clearing and lost itself in the dark wood. Near where the stream emerged, Kinross could see the cairn like a low stone platform about ten feet across and he could see and hear Silva, who sat wailing beside it.

"I can't talk to Silva no more than Kerbeck," Garcia said. "Silva thinks I'm a devil."

They walked across the clearing. The giant Bo Bo came out of the cave to meet them.

"You have not brought fruit," he said, in words that Kinross knew were never his own. "Go away and return with fruit."

"Okay, Kruger," Kinross said. "That much I'll do for you."

Days passed. To Kinross they seemed interminable, yet curiously void of remembered activity. He and Garcia tried marking off time with stones from the creek, but overnight the stones disappeared. So did banana peels and papaya rinds. The land would not hold a mark. The two men wrangled over what had happened in the preceding days and at last Kinross said, "It's just like before, only now everything happened last week."

"Then my beard grew an inch last week," said Garcia, stroking its blue-blackness. Kinross' beard was crinkled and reddish and more than an inch long.

"What's the end of this?" the Mexican asked once. "Do we just go on in this two-mile-across world forever?"

"I expect we'll get old and die," Kinross said.

"I ain't so sure even of that," Garcia said. "I feel like I'm getting younger. I want a steak and a bottle of beer and a woman."

"So do I," Kinross agreed, "but this is still better than the boat."

"Yes," Garcia said feelingly. "Give Kruger that much, even if he did set the whole thing up."

"I think Kruger is a lot less happy than we are," Kinross said.

"Nobody's happy but Kerbeck," Garcia growled.

They saw Kerbeck often as they gathered fruit or tramped the confines of the little valley seeking relief of boredom. The giant Swede ranged through the land like an elemental spirit. He wore the remnants of his khaki trousers and singlet and his yellow hair and red beard were long and tangled. He seemed to recognize Garcia and Kinross, but made only humming noises in response to their words.

Kinross often felt that it was the unrelieved blackness of the nights which oppressed him most. He wanted stars and a moon. One night he awoke feeling uneasy and saw a scattering of stars in the sky, strangely constellated. He moved to wake Garcia but sleep overcame him again and he dreamed for the first time he could remember in that world. He was back on the rock pinnacle in the desert talking to Kruger. Kruger was wearing Fay's body and he was worried.

"Something's happened, Kinross," he said. "There are stars and I didn't shape them; I couldn't. This world has suddenly received a great increase in animation and not all of it is under my control."

"What can I do about it? Or care?"

"You care, all right. We're in this world together, like in a lifeboat, Kinross. And I'm scared now. There's an alien presence, perhaps a number of them, seeking our world. They may be hostile."

"I doubt it, if they bring stars," Kinross said. "Where are they?"

"I don't know. Wandering outside of our space here,

looking for us, I suppose. I want you and Garcia to go and find them."

"Why can't you do that?"

"Your guess was partly right, Kinross. I have my limits and my need for men like you and Garcia. I'm asking, not commanding. We're still in the same boat, remember."

"Yes. Okay, I'll go. But how. . ."

"Just start walking. I'll let you through the re-entry barrier again."

Kinross awoke with a start. The stars were still in the sky and a crescent moon hung above the horizon across the little stream. Garcia snored nearby.

"Wake up!" Kinross said, shaking him. The Mexican snorted and sat up.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he gasped. "Stars and a moon! Kinross, are we back. . . ?"

"No," Kinross said. "Let's go hunting. I've just been talking to Kruger."

"Hunting? At night? Hunting what?"

"Maybe what made the stars. How do I know? Come on, Garcia, my feet are burning."

Kinross strode off, leaping the creek and heading directly toward the crescent moon. The Mexican stumbled after him muttering in Spanish.

Once more Kinross reached the height of land, and the moon, fuller now, hung above the horizon on the right, in the same direction he had gone before. He walked briskly, the Mexican following in silence. Once Garcia exclaimed and pointed down to the right. Kinross looked and saw the cave mouth far below, the dwarfed clearing and the mighty slope curving convexly up from it to his present level. The moonlight touched the dark treetops with silver.

As they walked Kinross told Garcia about his dream. The Mexican did not doubt that it was genuine. Kinross

warned him about the peculiar timelessness of experience outside the re-entry barrier. "It's like everything happened two minutes ago," he said.

"Yes," said Garcia. "Look at that moon now, three-quarters full. Maybe we've been walking for a month."

"Or a minute," Kinross said.

It was not to be the same trip as before. Once on the high, gently curving plain he remembered, he found they were bearing sharply to the right, going up a gentle rise. Then the land pitched the other way and they began crossing shallow ravines with running water in their bottoms. The land grew rougher and the ravines deeper until, crossing one of them, Kinross saw that it bore directly for the moon. He continued down the stream bed in ankle-deep water instead of climbing out.

The banks were of wet, dark stone and became steeper and higher as they went. The stream narrowed and became knee-deep and the current tugged fiercely at them, forcing them to cling to the stones to maintain their footing. The sharp V of the ravine ahead almost cradled the full moon and Kinross could hear a distant roar of falling water.

"Looks rough up ahead, Garcia," he called to the Mexican ten feet behind him. "Watch it."

He moved ahead another hundred yards toward the increasing noise and edged around a rock shoulder against which the water swirled angrily. The force of the current quickened suddenly, almost snatching his legs from under him, so that he flattened himself against the rock and called a warning back to Garcia.

Over the glassily smooth, veined lip of the waterfall twenty feet in front of him, Kinross looked into a vast pit, steeply conical and many miles across. It was beaded around the rim and threaded down the sides with falling water that whispered enormously across the distance. The full moon riding directly above washed the whole with silver. At the bottom of the pit was another moon which,

Kinross thought fleetingly, must be a reflecting pond or lake.

Garcia called from behind. "What do you see, Kinross? Why have you stopped?"

"I see one more step and death, I think," Kinross called back. "It's a waterfall. We'll have to climb the bank here if we possibly can."

He made no move to return, but stared down into the pit. Abruptly the urge came to him to surrender, to let the water carry him over the brink. It was sudden and overpowering, almost sexual, a savage assault on his spirit. He clung desperately to the rock face and muttered a prayer under his breath, "Mother of God, spare me now."

The compulsion, still powerful, withdrew a little distance. "Garcia," he called, "start climbing, in the name of God. Keep talking to me."

"There's a ledge back here, slanting up," Garcia said from above. "Come back under me and I'll give you a hand up."

Kinross edged back around the rock shoulder and scrambled up to join Garcia. The Mexican led the way up the narrow ledge.

"There's something up ahead that will take your breath away," Kinross warned him. "A pit. Wait till you see it. And when you do, hang on to yourself."

Garcia grunted and kept climbing. The ledge petered out and the way became more difficult and dangerous. Then they were standing on a rocky headland falling steeply on three sides into the great pit that was all around them.

"*Madre de Dios!*" breathed Garcia. He repeated it several times, otherwise speechless. Both men stood silently, gazing into the pit. Finally Garcia raised a hand and whispered, "Listen!"

Kinross listened. He heard a crackling of brush and a rattling of dislodged pebbles. It came from the left, seemingly not far off.

"Something's coming up out of the pit," he whispered.

"What's coming? Kinross, we ain't alone in this world!"

"We've got to go closer," Kinross said. "Have to know. Walk easy."

They stalked the sound, retreating from the headland and skirting the edge of the pit. As they neared the source of the noise, the brush became tangled and waist-high and they made noises of their own, unavoidably. Then all was silent and Kinross feared their quarry was alarmed until he heard a snuffling, whimpering noise that set his nerves still more on edge. They crept closer. Then Garcia grasped his arm and pulled him to a crouch.

Kinross strained his eyes toward where the Mexican was pointing. Suddenly, taking vague form in the pattern of silvery light and shadow, he saw a human figure not fifty feet away. "We capture him," he told Garcia in dumb show. The Mexican nodded. Both men rose and rushed headlong.

Kinross' longer legs got him there first. The figure rose and fled a step or two before he brought it down with a flying tackle. A split second later the stocky Mexican added his considerable weight to the tangle of arms and legs and then a despairing, agonized scream arose from the captive. Electric surprise jolted Kinross.

"Let go, Garcia," he commanded. "Get up. It's a woman!"

She was Mary Chadwick and she had three strong brothers who could clobber any man in Queensland and Kinross and Garcia were beasts and savages and they were to take her home immediately or it would be the worse for them. Then she clung to Kinross and cried hysterically.

While Kinross tried awkwardly to comfort her, day came, less abruptly than usual but swiftly enough to remind Kinross how unaccountably time still ran. The light was harsh and bright and he saw the disk of the sun for the first time. The familiar overcast was gone, the sky

clear and blue. Sight of the two bearded men did not seem to reassure the woman.

She was quite young and dressed for riding, khaki shirt and trousers, with laced boots, outlining a tall and generous figure. Honey-colored hair hung loose to her shoulders. Her eyes, swollen with crying, were an intense blue verging on violet. Her fair skin was tanned to pale gold and a dusting of freckles lay across the bridge of her strong nose.

She recovered quickly. "Who are you?" she asked in a clear but low-pitched voice. "What is this place? Nothing like it in the Coast Ranges *I* ever heard of."

The men introduced themselves. Kinross failed completely to make her understand the nature of the world around them.

"Ships? Sailors? What rot!" she exclaimed. "You say you don't understand it yourselves, so go along with that nonsense. All we need do is walk until we find a track or see smoke or—you know all that."

"Okay, we're lost then," Kinross agreed. "We're somewhere in Australia, I take it?"

"Yes, Queensland, and somewhere on the south fork of the Herbert River. I was riding along and I must have fallen asleep . . . where my horse is, I'm sure I have no earthly notion."

Kinross and Garcia exchanged glances. "Excuse me, Mary," the Mexican said, his black eyes blazing with excitement. "I just have to talk crazy for a minute to my friend here." Then to Kinross, "How come? According to the soldiers of Tibesti story the gate should be in the Indian Ocean. Has this world got more than one hole in it, you suppose?"

"That's bothering me, too. The way I've always understood it, without ever believing any of it, mind you, the two worlds are not superimposed. They just have that one small area in common, the gate. . ."

"Well, if it opens on land. . ."

"I know what you're thinking. But we've got to give Kerbeck and Silva a chance. Anyway, those two." Kinross turned to the girl.

"Mary," he asked, "can you remember exactly where in that pit you first found yourself? Did you mark the spot?"

"No, why should I have? I'll not go back down there for all the mad fossickers in the entire North. Take me to your camp or your diggings or whatever. I hope someone there will talk sense to me."

The Mexican laughed suddenly. "I just remembered old Bart Garcia, my first ancestor in Mexico, was a prospector too," he said. "That was a new world and he had a rough time in it. Lead on, Kinross."

"All roads lead to Kruger," said Kinross, striding off.

"All but one," Garcia corrected, looking back at the great pit, shadowed now by slanting sunlight.

The way back was rugged at first, then more gentle. Kinross exclaimed in pleased surprise when a bird fluttered through the brush and Garcia said, "So that's what I been hearing." Then Kinross heard it too, a multitudinous chirping and twittering all around them. But the birds, like the indefinite trees and shrubs, were always annoyingly peripheral to direct vision. They were wing flashes, darting colors at the edge of sight.

"Doesn't it bother you, not being able to look at them?" he asked the girl.

"But I can see them," she said. "You strange men. . ."

Keck-keck-keck-kee-RACK! came a noise from the brush and Kinross jumped.

"There!" the girl pointed. "It's a coachwhip. Can't you see him now?"

Kinross could not. "There," she insisted, "hopping about in the wattle. Just *look*, won't you!"

Garcia saw it first. Finally Kinross believed he saw the small, dark green thrush shape with white throat, long,

perky tail and black crest. But he felt uneasily that he was really seeing a verbal description. Keck-keck-keck kee-RACK! He jumped again and felt foolish.

As they walked, Kinross questioned the girl. She lived on a small cattle station in the mountains south of Cairns with her father and three brothers. She was twenty-four and unmarried, had spent a year at school in Brisbane, didn't like cities. Her brothers worked part-time in the mines. This would be first-rate country for running stock and she couldn't imagine how the land survey had missed it.

"Look at the sun, Kinross," Garcia said once. "We're going west. Feels good to be able to say that."

The sun was low when they reached the height of land above the valley. "Kruger Valley," Kinross called it, since the girl demanded a name. The stupendous wooded slope rising on three sides from the cave mouth was touched with a glory by the declining sun and her pose of matter-of-fact assurance broke once more.

"Nothing like that in the Coast Ranges," she whispered. "I just know it."

When they started down the slope west of the forested area, Kinross was impressed too. Trees stood out in clear view, unique, individual. The coarse grass was plain to see, as well as clumps of flowers in bright colors. Small, brightly varicolored birds flitted ahead of them and Kinross knew that he was really seeing them. The flat sameness of color and the smooth regularity of form were gone from the land. Kinross with rising excitement pointed out to Garcia rock outcrops, gullies and patches of erosion-bared earth.

"Something's happened, Garcia," he said. "Here, inside the re-entry barrier, the land sticks backward into time now."

"Looks sure enough real," the Mexican agreed. "Wonder if we could light a fire tonight?"

"Yes, and chop trees," Kinross almost shouted. "Mary will need a shelter."

"Of *course* a fire," the woman said. "We shall want to roast things, I suppose."

"Maybe knock down some birds," Garcia said. "I'm hungry for meat."

"No!" the girl cried in outrage. "You wouldn't dare!"

"Not these pretty little ones," Garcia hastily assured her. "What do you call them, anyway?"

"They're pittas," she said. "Noisy little paint pots, aren't they? They say 'walk-to-WORK, walk-to-WORK.'"

"That's what we're doing, I guess," Garcia chuckled.

They picked their way down the fairly steep hillside, Kinross preparing the girl for what she would find down by the stream, when she interrupted him.

"Who are they?" she asked, pointing to the left.

Kinross and Garcia could see nothing. "What is it you see?" Kinross asked.

"A whole band of blacks, myalls," she whispered, obviously disturbed. "On their knees, in the bush."

"Now I partly see them," the Mexican said. "It's worse than the birds were this morning."

"I can't see a thing," Kinross complained. "Only trees and shrubs."

"Look slantwise," Garcia urged. "Let your eyes go slack. Every kid knows how to do that."

Kinross tried to unfocus his gaze and suddenly he saw them, dozens of them. Dwarfs, black with red eyes. Naked and grotesquely formed, huge hands and feet, knobbed joints, slubber lips, limbs knotted with muscles. They were looking back at him, but without apparent interest. Alarm bit into him.

"My God!" he breathed.

"They're a pack of devils," Garcia muttered. "Kinross, what in hell are they?"

"They're blacks," the girl said. "Back in the earlies they used to spear white men sometimes in the Coast Ranges,

but they're tame enough now. We must just walk by and pretend not to see them. They're supposed to be in the spirit world."

"They're dwarfs, pygmies," Kinross objected. "Do you have pygmies in Queensland?"

"They're on their knees," she answered sharply, "hiding from us in one of their spirit places. Come along! Walk by and pretend not to see them."

"Let's try," Kinross assented.

They walked on without incident until they reached the valley floor. As they walked along the level Garcia began looking sharply to left and right.

"Kinross, something's dogging us, slipping through the brush after us on both sides," he said.

"Those black things?" Kinross asked, stomach muscles knotting.

"No, can't see well, but they're taller and graylike."

"I can see them," the girl said. "They're gins, Binghi women of that mob we passed. They look like ghosts when they smear themselves with wood ashes."

"What are they after?" Kinross asked, half seeing the elusive shapes in the corner of his eye.

"They want to trail us to our camp so they can steal and beg," the girl said. "Mind you send them away straight off when they come in."

Garcia said, "They got nice shapes, now that I know they're women. Kinross, can you see them yet?"

"Just partly," Kinross said.

The flitting shapes left them before they reached the stream. As they stood doubtfully on the bank, distant shouting came from the hillside they had just descended. Kinross saw Kerbeck charging through the scrub, black motes scattering before him.

"God!" he gasped. "Kerbeck's fighting the black things!"

"Winning, too," Garcia commented, less perturbed than Kinross. "Look at 'em run."

"He shouldn't," the girl said. "They'll creep back and spear him tonight. All of us, perhaps." She shuddered.

Kerbeck came plunging down the hill in great leaps. He crossed the quarter mile of valley floor, in and out of sight, looming up bronzed and gigantic. His floating hair and beard were an aureole in the light of the westering sun. He shouldered Kinross aside and grasped the girl by her upper arms, staring fixedly into her eyes. He was humming and buzzing frantically.

Kinross pulled vainly at one of the great arms, protesting. Then the Swede quieted, releasing the girl, smiling and humming placidly.

"It's all right," the girl said. "He wanted to be sure that my eyes had pupils."

Kinross looked blankly from her blue-violet eyes to the flat blue eyes of the huge Norseman.

"He's been chasing the devil-devils," she explained. "He thought I might be one. Their eyes don't have pupils, just black smudges on white eyeballs." Kerbeck hummed happily. Kinross shook his head.

"She's right, Kinross," Garcia said. "I got part of it. It's another one of them things, you got to listen sideways-like."

"They turn into trees and rocks when he catches them," the girl added. "He's been up a gum tree for days about them and he's glad you two are back."

"Oh lord!" Kinross groaned. "I feel like a damned infant. So you do agree they're devils now?"

"No more!" she said sharply. "They're abos on a spirit-land walkabout. The whole push of you are mad as snakes."

"Let's make a fire," Kinross said, turning away.

There was plenty of dried grass and fallen branches, unlike before. Garcia had matches, soon had a fire. Kinross borrowed Kerbeck's belt knife to trim poles from the branches the giant Swede obligingly pulled off the trees, and work on a small hut went forward rapidly. Garcia

cut fronds from a palmettolike tree to weave between the upright poles, and the girl gathered brownish wool from the top of it to make herself a bed. "Burrawang," she called it. She pronounced the finished effort a passable "humpy."

Under the darkness they roasted nubbly breadfruit in the coals and peeled bananas. Kerbeck melted into the night. All ate in silence. Finally the girl said, "Where are we? Fair truth, now. Where are we?"

"Like I told you this morning—" Kinross began, but she stopped him.

"I know. I believe it has to seem that way to you. But do you know where I am?"

Both men murmured their question.

"In Alcheringa," she said. "In the Binghi spirit land. I fell into it somehow, riding through one of the old sacred places. There are picture writings all along the South Herbert. Today, when I saw the abos, I knew. . ."

"Mary, they *were* dwarfs," Kinross said. "They were not human."

"When the abos go back to the spirit land they are not human either," she said. "And at the same time something more than human. I've heard mobs of talk about it. But those gins—they shouldn't be here. Nor I. It's frightful bad luck for a woman to enter the spirit land. When I was a little girl I used to think it blanky unfair. . ."

"How do the natives get in and out of . . . Alcheringa?" Kinross asked with quickened interest.

"They dance and sing their way, paint themselves, use churingas—oh, all sorts of rites," she said. "No one must be about, especially no women."

From the darkness overhead a weird, whistling wail floated down. Both men jumped to their feet.

"Sit down," the girl bade them. "At home, on Chadwick Station, I would call that the cry of a stone curlew. They fly about and call in the darkness. The blacks call them the souls of children trying to break out of the

spirit world in order to be born. What are they here, I wonder?"

She looked upward. Kinross and Garcia sat down again. Then a slender bird with thin legs and long, curving beak dropped into the firelight to perch on her shoulder.

"Poor little night baby," the girl addressed it, "you'll watch over me, won't you?"

She rose abruptly, said good night and went into the hut. Kinross looked at Garcia.

"We're responsible for her being here," he said. "We've got to get her back to her people."

"Kruger's responsible," Garcia said.

"Us too. If Kruger doesn't come talk to me tonight I'm going in the cave in the morning. Will you come along?"

"Sure," said the Mexican, yawning. "Pleasant dreams."

Red dawn above the great slope up-valley woke Kinross from a dreamless sleep. He blew an ember into flame and built up the fire. Charred breadfruit rinds littered the ground and he reflected wryly that this world no longer policed itself. He put the rinds into the fire.

Somewhere on the hillside across the stream, Kerbeck shouted and brush crackled. Garcia got up and the woman peeped out of her hut as Kinross stood irresolute. Then Kerbeck came in view. He carried a stalk of yellow bananas over his left shoulder and with his right hand clutched a small man by the neck. He half pushed, half kicked the little man down the slope.

The huge Norseman hummed excitedly as he approached across the level. Suddenly Kinross, still half asleep, heard words in the humming, as he had sometimes heard wind-voices in the singing of telegraph wires when he was a boy on the high plains of Nebraska.

"I catch me a devil," Kerbeck was saying.

The devil was a swarthy, broad-faced little man dressed in baggy gray woolen garments. His eyes were closed, his

face screwed up in fear, and he was gabbling under his breath. Garcia listened, suddenly alert, and then spoke sharply to the man in Spanish. He got a torrent of words in reply.

"He's a Peruvian," Garcia interpreted. "He comes from the mountains above Tacna. He's been wandering lost for days. He thinks he's dead and that Kerbeck is the boss devil."

"Seems to be mutual," Kinross said. "Tell him he'll be all right now. I wonder how many more. . ."

Kerbeck went away, humming and buzzing. The little Peruvian, still badly frightened, crouched beyond the fire and ate bananas with them. Then Kinross, explaining his purpose to the woman, proposed to Garcia that they visit the cave.

"Not empty-handed," the Mexican reminded him. "Remember, we got a duty."

Along the way they gathered guavas and papayas into Kinross' shirt, pushed through the grove and laid the fruits on the stone platform. Silva sat beside it, rocking and wailing almost inaudibly. Kinross patted his shoulder.

"Cheer up, Silva, old man," he said. "We're going in to see Kruger now. May have some good news for you."

"Unholy," the old man moaned. "Full of devils. You're a devil."

The two men walked to the cave mouth and stopped. They looked at each other.

"What are we waiting for?" Garcia asked.

"I don't know. I expected Fay or Bo Bo to be on guard, I guess," Kinross said. "Hell with it. In we go."

The cave pinched sharply in to become a nearly round tunnel about fifteen feet high. The stream splashed along the bottom, forcing them to wade. The water shone with a soft light and moisture oozing through cracks in the black rock made luminous patches here and there on the walls. The rock had the blocky, amorphous look of ba-

salt. The air was cool and utterly still except for the murmur of the stream.

The two men waded in silence for a good way before they heard a clear noise of turbulent water somewhere ahead. Then they came into an indefinitely large chamber with the luminous water cascading broadly down its back wall from a blackness above. Fay and Bo Bo were asleep on rough terraces beside the stream.

"What have you come to tell me, Kinross?" Kruger's voice asked out of the dimness. It seemed to shape the noise of the cascading water into its words.

"We found a woman," Kinross said.

"I know. There are many others, both men and women, still making their way here. I have been greatly strengthened. Have you noticed how the world has firmed up and become extended in time?"

"Yes. But how do these people get here? Is there more than one gate?"

"No. It must have shifted."

"To where, then? One is from Australia, one from Peru."

"So?" Surprise rang in the silvery, liquid voice. "Perhaps it moves then."

"But Tibesti—"

"They didn't know a rotating earth. The sun of Tibesti goes around a stationary earth. But when we—I—set up a succession of days here I must have put a spin into this world. Perhaps it is slightly out of phase with our old world. The gate would wander . . ."

"You sound pleased," Kinross said.

"I am. It takes many people to hold a world in place, Kinross. In a few centuries there may be enough here so that I can really rest. They will breed of course, and they will be long-lived here."

"How big do you think the gate is?"

"About the size of the boat, I expect. Perhaps an ellipse thirty feet on the major axis."

"How do people come through, not knowing—?"

"Several ways are possible. Perhaps it sweeps over them at a moment of intense world-loathing, those moments a man can't support beyond a second or two. It snatches them up. Or perhaps daydreamers, with their sense of reality unfocused and their mooring lines to their real world slacked or cast loose. They want only to drift a little way out, but the gate comes by and snatches them. I don't really know, Kinross. Maybe this world is going to be populated by poets and self-haters."

"But the gate? Can we get through it the other way?"

"Yes. Some of the soldiers of Tibesti came back—or fled back or were driven back—the old tales are conflicting. But anyone passing back through this gate would risk dropping into an ocean. I suspect the gate sweeps the eighteenth parallel, or near it."

"Kruger, the woman wants to go back. We have to find a way."

"No. No one may go back. Especially not women."

"Kruger, we have no right—"

"We do have right and beyond that a duty. She would not be here if she had not voluntarily, at least for a moment, relinquished or rejected her own world. She belongs to us now, and we need her."

"Kruger, I may not obey that. I—"

"You must obey. You cannot pass the reentry barrier without my aid."

"Let it go, then, for now," Kinross conceded. "I have other questions. What are the black dwarfs and pearly-gray women?"

"Nature spirits, I suppose you could call them. I stripped them from Fay and Bo Bo, husked them off by the millions until only a bare core of nothingness was left. What those two are now I couldn't describe to you. But the world is partially self-operating and my load is eased."

Garcia spoke for the first time. "Tough on Fay, for all I hated the little rat."

"Was that what you wanted to do with me?" Kinross asked, shuddering.

"No," the clear, liquid voice said solemnly, "you are a different kind of man, Kinross. You could have helped me to bear the load, and perhaps together we could have endured it until the help came that is coming now. Do not wash your hands of Fay and Bo Bo, Kinross."

"Kruger," Garcia said hesitantly, "do you mean that all those devils are really Fay and Bo Bo?"

"Most of them are," the silvery voice confirmed, "but many of them are Kerbeck. He is disintegrating without my interference. And some are you, too, Garcia; some are Kinross, the woman, all of you. You are built into this world more than you know."

"I don't like it," Garcia said. "Kruger, I won't give up my devils."

"You can't help it, Garcia. But you have millions to spare, and besides you don't really lose them, you know. You just spread yourself through the world, in a way. Every time you put a compulsion on this world by expecting something, it costs you a devil or two. Do you understand?"

"No!" the Mexican growled.

"I think you do. If you don't, talk to Kinross later. But it's not so bad, Garcia. When you become a loose cloud of devils, instead of a shiny black stone, you will be a poet or a sylvan god."

"Kruger," Kinross broke in, "do you hold it against me, that I denied you my help that time?"

"Do you hold it against me that I initiated all this by blowing up the *Ixion*?"

"I don't know . . . I just don't know. . ."

"Nor do I know, Kinross. Perhaps we're even. And I still have need of you."

"Where is your body, Kruger? Can you animate it yet?"

"It is above the waterfall. I can see dimly now how I will animate it in the distant future and come into this world in a kind of glory. But not yet, not yet. . ."

"Your thirst, Kruger. Are you still thirsty?"

"Yes, Kinross. It still tears at me. I don't know how much longer I will have to endure it."

"Doesn't rapport with Fay—?"

"No one but you, Kinross. And now not even you. You disobeyed me once."

"Kruger, I'm sorry. I wish it didn't have to be. May we go now?"

"Yes. Go and serve our world. Try to be content."

"Let's go, Garcia," Kinross said, turning. The Mexican set off briskly, leading Kinross. When they were passing through the dark grove Kinross halted.

"Let's sit here and talk about devils for a while, Garcia," he proposed. "I'm not ready to face Mary Chadwick just yet."

When the two men returned to the fire, more than a dozen people were standing around it. Several were women. A tall, slender man wearing a leather jacket and gray trousers tucked into heavy boots came out of the group to meet them. He had reddish-blond hair.

"Mr. Kinross?" he asked. "Allow me to introduce myself and to apologize for making free of your fire. My name is Friedrich von Lankenau."

They shook hands. The newcomer had a sinewy grip in his long fingers. His face was gaunt and bony, frozen, with thin lips and a high, narrow beak of a nose. Kinross stared at him quizzically and deep-set gray eyes looked back at him steadily from under shaggy brows. The thin lips smiled slightly.

"Miss Chadwick tells me that you are Mr. Kruger's lieutenant, so to speak," the man said. "We are a group gathered together in chance meetings along the way here."

We are anxious to learn a rational, physical explanation of what we are experiencing.”

A babble of voices broke from the group. “Silence!” snapped the tall man. “If Mr. Kinross will explain, you may all listen, you who know English. I will then to the others explain.” The babble stilled.

Kinross told the story of the soldiers of Tibesti and of the sailors of the *Ixion*. He watched Lankenau closely as he spoke. The man never lost the rigid composure of his features, but his eyes blazed and he continually nodded his comprehension. When he finished Kinross checked the renewed babble by setting Garcia to telling the story in Spanish. Then he drew Lankenau to one side.

“Mind telling me where you were when you came through?” he asked.

“I was nearly to the top of Sajama in Bolivia, climbing alone.”

“How about the others?”

“From all over. Brazil, the New Hebrides, Mozambique, Australia, Rhodesia. . .”

“I guess Kruger’s right and the gate does sweep the eighteenth parallel,” Kinross mused.

“We can establish it quite exactly with a little questioning, I have no doubt,” Lankenau said confidently. “But sooner or later, Mr. Kinross, I would like to talk directly to the Herr Kruger if it can be arranged. I am much intrigued—”

“You just go see him, Mr. Lankenau. I’m not his secretary. But I can tell you now, he will permit no one to return to the old world.”

“I would not for anything return to the old world!” Lankenau spoke with feeling that broke through his composure.

“From boyhood I knew the story of the soldiers of Tibesti,” he continued. “As a very young man I sought the gate through all of the Tibesti, and perhaps found the spot, but it did not reveal itself to me as it did for the

Herr Kruger. So I sought a gate of my own, on mountaintops in winter, such peaks as Sajama. I am not at all sure that I came through your gate, Mr. Kinross, but I am sure that I came to stay."

"Mary—Miss Chadwick—has somewhat the same notion," Kinross said. "I never knew so many people—" His voice trailed off.

"Forgive my outburst," Lankenau said, composure regained. "For me this is a lost hope suddenly realized, and I am a bit overcome. If you will excuse me, I will visit the Herr Kruger now."

He bowed and strode away springily. Kinross became aware of the Australian woman at his elbow.

"Mary," he said, "did you hear him? But let me tell you, we can get back to your world, although it will be dangerous. I'll work on it and let you know."

She seemed hardly to listen, staring after the retreating figure. "Bonzer!" she said. "There walks a man."

Kinross walked away, slightly irritated. Garcia was talking to a group of Latins including the three women. Kinross sought out the Rhodesian, a stocky, florid man wearing plaid shorts. His name was Peter White.

"What do you think of all this?" he asked.

"You have quite a good thing here," the man replied. "Like being a child again, isn't it rather?"

Kinross grunted and asked him what he thought of Lankenau. White said he admired von Lankenau, that he had felt rather forlorn and drifting until he had joined von Lankenau's group. Kinross fidgeted over commonplaces for a few minutes and finally said, "You know, White, we can go back through that gate if we work it right."

"I wouldn't want to, just yet," White said soberly. "This is rather a lark."

"But in time—when you get tired—"

"Tired? That's as may be. You know, Kinross, the last I remember of the old world was being almost dead of

fever in the low veldt. Dreams . . . visions . . . I'm not ready to wake back. . ."

"Then you think this is a dream?"

"Yes. A different and a better one."

Kinross excused himself and walked away shaking his head. Garcia was still yapping in Spanish. He walked aimlessly for a while, then lay under a breadfruit tree near the fire and tried to sleep. He felt bored and angry. He saw two newcomers, both women, come down the hillside and left it to Garcia to welcome them.

Hours later von Lankenau strode back from the grove with an exalted look on his lean face. He called his group together and instructed them in their several languages as to their duties. Each must gather a token handful of fruit or berries every morning and place it on the cairn before the cave entrance. Then he spoke of huts and sanitary arrangements. White had a belt axe. One of the Mozambique Negroes had a bush knife and the other a grubbing hoe. When the work was going forward to his satisfaction he joined Kinross under the breadfruit tree. Garcia came with him.

"I talked to the Herr Kruger a long time," von Lankenau said, sitting down and clasping his long arms around his knees. "He told me much, and much of it about you, Mr. Kinross."

"What about me?" Kinross asked, narrowing his eyes.

"The special relation between you. Something about the reciprocal way you and he came into this world. He does not understand it himself. But he knows that you should be his lieutenant among the people."

Kinross said nothing. Von Lankenau regarded him gravely for a moment and continued, "I will cheerfully defer to your authority, Mr. Kinross, and help in any way I can."

"I don't want authority or responsibility," Kinross said.

"You go right on taking charge of things, Mr. Lankenau, only leave me out of it."

"If I must, by your default, then I will. But I hope that I can consult with you."

"Oh, by all means," Kinross said. "I'm good at talking."

"Let us talk then. Do you know, Mr. Kinross, this situation is absolutely fascinating. Cannot you feel it set fire to your thoughts?"

"I know what you mean, I suppose. We're tampering with some of the ultimate mysteries. I won't deny I haven't thought about them in my time and read strange books, too. But now I wonder. . ."

"No moral qualms now, please, Mr. Kinross. You will only torment yourself uselessly like that unfortunate Portuguese. We have a world to build and it need not be a copy of the old one. We may be able to simplify the chemistry, systematize the mineralogy . . . does not the thought *intrigue* you, Mr. Kinross?"

"Huh! You can't beat the energy laws, Mr. Lankenau. The more people come in, the more closely they will apply. Kruger told me that himself, and I can see them taking hold already."

"The Herr Kruger has never worshipped the Second Law. Otherwise none of us would be here. And most of the people who come in will not remain persons, you know."

Von Lankenau turned a doubtful look on Garcia and continued, "That is another fascinating thing, to watch the personality elements filter back into external nature until the boundary between subject and object is almost lost. Think of what a power of mass suggestibility we will dispose of then! The very trees and rocks will be amenable to suggestion, each with its indwelling fragment of the human spirit! Oh, Kinross . . . your Second Law . . . your dry, word-smothered world . . . this will be a world of magic for long ages before it becomes a world of science."

Kinross frowned. "What right have we to disintegrate personalities in that way? Or to let it happen? Fay and Bo Bo——"

"Those two are special cases, sacrificed to an emergency that will not occur again. As for the others, we will devise a set of ritual life patterns that will stabilize them at some lower limit. That is what I and the Herr Kruger talked longest about."

"Let me jump into this," Garcia growled. "Do you birds think that's going to happen to me? Suppose I won't come apart for you, what then?"

"You may not be able to help it, Mr. Garcia. And perhaps you will be much happier when you do . . . come apart."

"You sound like Kruger. Kinross, what does he mean?"

"He means the emptiness of this world pulls you apart, like it or not. Like when you put a lump of salt in a cup of fresh water, it will dissolve a little at a time."

"Emptiness? Not in the old world?"

"Only rarely, in places like the Antarctic, on a life raft at sea, empty places."

"I see. Like in most places the old world is already so salty it can't take more?"

"That's the idea. The lumps of salt gain instead of losing."

"Hmmm. Like we talked this morning. We used to push our devils off on each other."

"Devils. That is the Herr Kruger's analogy," von Lan-kenau interrupted.

"Funny how I know just what he meant by it, without being able to say it any different," Garcia said.

"You have to lose a few devils before you know," Kinross told him.

"Well, I've lost some, okay. But I'm still Joe Garcia and my insides work."

"Name magic is one of the oldest and most powerful means of binding one's devils into a unity, Mr. Garcia,"

von Lankenau assured him. "We will stabilize the villagers well above the name level, I hope."

"Why do you and Kinross just take it for granted that you're not in line for this . . . this devil losing?"

"We are. We lose devils cheerfully, but it is a selective losing. I, and I suspect Mr. Kinross also, we hold ourselves together under a higher magic."

"It's like this, Garcia," Kinross said, "you can either just plain *be* all your devils, or you can be yourself and carry a spare load of devils around with you."

"Devils, Mr. Garcia," von Lankenau said gravely, "are bits of experience, large or small, gay or mournful."

"The lived experiences, good or bad, we bind in to ourselves," Kinross said. "The unlived experiences, the regrets, the might-have-beens, the just-escaped things, we carry around on our backs. But we *know* it."

"We're really explaining to each other, aren't we, Mr. Kinross?" said von Lankenau. "We lose the devils which ride us and we keep the ones which power us. The villagers must lose both kinds indiscriminately."

"I'm still with you," Garcia said. "Keep talking."

"To draw on your earlier analogy, Mr. Kinross," von Lankenau said, "might I say that devils exert an osmotic pressure? It is strongly outward on mountaintops and in such places I have shrugged off a thousand devils. But in Berlin or Paris . . . back they came in tens of thousands."

"That I savvy," Garcia said. "It's the difference between being on a long cruise and coming ashore for a month. I get a burn on me to ship out."

"I think you're okay, Garcia," Kinross said. "If you weren't, you would've already drifted off like Kerbeck."

"Is not Kerbeck magnificent?" von Lankenau asked. "The end product of devil dispersion, an elemental force, with powers we hardly dare guess at. The Bo Bo thing, too, black and savage. Mr. Kinross, we pay a price for mind. But we must not let it happen to our villagers."

"No, I guess not," Kinross agreed. "You spoke of rituals. . . ."

"Yes, a pattern of group rituals to take them through their days and nights, perhaps later through seasons. We will keep them in a mass, maintain a local concentration of devils by mutual reenforcement or successive recapture . . . I don't know quite how to phrase it."

"I see. The thought disturbs me, Mr. Lankenau."

"It need not. I find it exhilarating. I hope that you and Mr. Garcia will help." Von Lankenau stood up and looked toward the hut-building activity.

"We'll think about it," Kinross said, getting up himself.

"I'll do what I can," the Mexican said. Lankenau excused himself and went over to the villagers.

"Kinross, something tells me you're still packing a devil as big as the *Queen Mary*, for all of your brains," Garcia said.

Krugertown, as they called it, was built in a day. Mary had a large hut of wattle and daub, near the stone-banked communal fire and a little apart from the village cluster, which lay nearer to the dark grove and the cave entrance. Kinross and Garcia built themselves a similar shelter a short way downstream from the fire. Von Lankenau lived in the village. Every morning Kinross and Garcia took a few bananas or a breadfruit to the cairn. Afterward Garcia often helped von Lankenau with the villagers, but Kinross walked apart with mixed feelings. He climbed about the hillsides, heedless of the growing number of black things and gray women that lurked there. Sometimes he saw Kerbeck, endlessly pursuing the dwarfs and the smoke women, and tried to talk to him. He tried to tell Kerbeck what Kruger had done to him in taking away his humanity. The massive Swede buzzed and hummed and Kinross did not know how much he understood.

Mary walked apart too, always in a flutter of birds. He saw dainty green and blue sun birds, green and white pittas, green and bronze drongos and the demure white nutmeg pigeons she loved most of all. When they met he tried to talk to her and found her aloof and remote.

"This world is harmful to you, Mary," he urged one day. "It disintegrates you, makes you lose part of yourself. Don't you want to go back to Queensland while you still can? Before it's too late?"

"I send out my birds and I call them back," she replied. "No harm here."

"That's no answer, Mary," he protested. He looked at her untroubled face with the red lips and the smooth brow and laid his arm across her shoulders. She slipped away from him.

"Mary, I'm going to take you back to Queensland," Kinross said sharply. "It's my duty to you."

She hummed like Kerbeck and moved away. Kinross looked after her morosely. Shortly after, he saw her high on the hillside talking to Kerbeck. . . Or humming with him.

New arrivals came in almost daily, by ones and twos, and melted at once into the village pattern. One day Kinross asked von Lankenau how long he thought it would go on.

"The rate is dropping off," von Lankenau said. "I expect it will decrease asymptotically and never quite stop. But the gate apparently sweeps a quite narrow path and has already caught up most of the susceptibles. And it may be that, as this world fills, its power of attraction lessens also."

"When will it be full?"

"Never, I hope. We want thousands, a large gene pool, a larger world. I estimate our surface is only about five miles in diameter now, Mr. Kinross."

"Can't Kruger make it larger if he likes?"

"Only at the expense of internal definition. He is striking a workable balance. But it is boundless by re-entry, and is not that a most fascinating experience, Mr. Kinross?"

"I found it disturbing and then frustrating," Kinross said.

"Ah! The limits, of course. But with more people we can extend our surface to more comfortable limits. In the end, I suppose, we shall make it spherical and remove the re-entry barrier to a higher dimension. But I shall be just a bit sorry when we do. Do you take my feeling, Mr. Kinross?"

"Just who are 'we'?" Kinross asked with a sudden edge in his voice. "You and Kruger?"

"Oh no. All of us. The culture, the Herr Kruger . . . you will have a part."

"You are kind, Mr. Lankenau."

The tall man looked at him sharply. "Mr. Kinross," he said solemnly, "any time that you wish to, you may take your rightful position in this world. I urge you to do so. I command by your default, and you know that very well."

"I'll have no part of it," Kinross said. "Damn Kruger and his world, snatching up a young woman like Mary Chadwick. . ."

"The Herr Kruger loves you, Mr. Kinross. You and Mr. Garcia are his sensorium, due to the peculiar circumstances of your coming here. He can be aware of his world only indifferently through the rest of us and through the Kabeiroi on the hillside."

"Well, I don't love the Herr Kruger. I hope he's still mad with thirst."

Von Lankenau raised a cautionary hand. "He does still suffer from thirst," he said in a low voice, "but your words are unworthy of you, Mr. Kinross. Hate me, if you must, but not the Herr Kruger."

"Why in hell do you have to shave every day?" Kinross asked angrily as he turned away.

He looked back from a distance and tugged at his beard. Mary Chadwick was talking to von Lankenau, standing close, looking up at him. Kinross reflected with a twinge that she had never looked up at him in that way. Then he remembered that she was as tall as himself and could not. He walked away swallowing a curse.

That night in their hut Kinross suggested to Garcia that next day they try to break the reentry barrier. The Mexican declined, saying that he and von Lankenau were working out a path-marking ritual with the villagers.

"Well, I will," Kinross said. "I'll go up there and walk right through it by not believing it's there, just like I should have done in the boat."

"Yes, and got your throat cut," Garcia said. "But it's there, all right. You'll find out."

Kinross found out. He fought the barrier all day, knowing its impossibility, striving to locate the exact point of reversal in order to step boldly across it. He came near doing so. Again and again, with the tiny instant of vertigo almost upon him, he saw the leering Kabeiroi drift by him and birds fly over, but each time he was turned back, suddenly half a mile down the hill and headed the wrong way. He came home in the evening disgruntled and exhausted.

"Lankenau called it a world of magic," he reflected. "Well, magic, then. Birds fly through the barrier. I'm doing this for Mary. If she would only help me—"

He decided to try again during the next thunderstorm, when he hoped Kruger would be too busy with his storm devils to guard the barrier. One morning several days later the sky darkened and the queer light lay along the ground and he knew a storm was making. The black things from the hillside invaded the valley in gusts of damp wind, sidling and eddying through the shrubbery

just out of eye reach. Poised on rocks, treetops and all pointed things, the gray women strained upward in a tension of half-visible air. With the first drops of rain Kinross set off up the hillside.

As he neared the barrier zone, the storm grew more violent. Thunder boomed and roared at him, rain slashed at him in sheets, jagged lightning flashes gave him glimpses of the storm devils. The Kabeiroi scurried around him with obscene menaces; over his head the gray women streamed by on the gusty wind. Once he saw Kerbeck, head thrown back, great chest bared to the wind.

All day he fought the barrier, spitting curses into the storm, and all day the storm spat and thundered back at him. He fell and rolled and rose again, over and over, straining up the hill with aching chest. Wind-driven twigs and branches lashed his face and body. Smothering rain drilled at him; wind snatched his breath away. At last his pounding heart and trembling knees convinced him that he was beaten. He turned back down the hillside.

"Well, Kruger, I gave you a fight," he gasped aloud. The storm abated as he limped down the slope and he saw downed trees and scattered branches and raw-earth gullies swirling with runoff. The thought came to him that he had at least forced Kruger to wreck von Lankenau's precious village. Then he was on the valley floor and the storm cleared entirely. Half a mile away he could see the village and its trees seemingly intact.

As he neared his hut, Mary came from behind a screen of shrubbery. White nutmeg pigeons perched on her head and shoulders. She smiled at him oddly.

"Regular cockeye bob up there, wasn't it, Allan?"

He looked at her stupidly. "Didn't it rain down here?" he asked.

"Only a sprinkle," she said, smiling. "Go in by the fire and dry your things. You look tired."

He walked on, soaked, mud-stained, limping on a

wrenched ankle. "She smiled and called me Allan," he thought. "No storm here. Called me Allan. Oh, hell. . ."

One morning, remote from the village, Kinross heard a pounding noise. In a clearing he found Peter White and two others beating mulberry bark with rounded paddles. The bearded Rhodesian looked tanned and fit and merry-eyed. The three men avoided looking at Kinross, as all the villagers tended to do, but they were aware of him and the rhythm of their pounding faltered.

On impulse Kinross called out, "White! Come over here!"

White paid no attention. Kinross spoke more sharply. White, without looking around, mumbled something about the Herr Kruger.

"I command you by the power of Kruger!" Kinross shouted in sudden anger. "Come over here!"

Reluctantly the man came to the clearing's edge. He looked down, but did not seem afraid. The Bantu and the Kanaka continued pounding.

"White, you were a man once," Kinross said. "How would you like to be a man again?"

"I am a man, Mr. Kinross," White said soberly.

"A man needs a wife. Do you have a wife, White?"

"Soon the Herr Kruger will give me one."

"I mean back home. Do you have a wife there?"

"There is no woman in my hut, but soon the Herr Kruger—"

"Damn your hut. I mean where you came from, in Rhodesia."

"I have always been here."

"No, you have not. You came from another world and if you try you can remember it. Can't you, now?"

The man looked up. "Yes, but I was a lot of different me's then. It was not a good world."

"Remember it. I command you to remember it by the

power of Kruger. Remember your wife and your children."

The man twisted his body and his face darkened. "There were many wives and children. It was an underground world. Everyone lived in tunnels that ran in straight lines. They were tumbled together like straws and sometimes they crossed, but none ran side by side. One of my tunnels came through into Krugerworld. I crawled up out of the ground and here I am. That is all I can remember."

"Okay, go back to your work," Kinross said.

White did not move. "First you must lift the name of the Herr Kruger from me," he said.

"All right, I remove the name," Kinross said.

"Once more. Twice you placed it on me."

"Okay, once more I remove it," Kinross snapped. "Go on, now."

He walked away. Behind him a third club took up the pounding and the rhythm steadied.

Alone in his hut he raged instead of sleeping. A magic world . . . what magic, then? Kruger's teachings . . . before the word, before the thought . . . what act would serve him now? What blind, wordless, unthinking act?

He decided he would refuse to place his usual token of fruit on the cairn in the morning and suddenly he could sleep.

Kinross rose early and walked through the various fruit groves, eating as he walked, until his hunger was stayed. His aimless walking had led him to the edge of the dark timber grove screening the cave mouth. On impulse he walked through the grove into the clearing and on the way discovered with surprise that he had a small guava in his pocket. He threw it away. Two villagers, a man and a woman, were placing fruit on the cairn. Kinross wondered whether they were mated.

Silva, as always, sat beside the cairn. Kinross tried to talk to the old man, patting him on the shoulder, but Silva repulsed him with an incoherent wailing about devils. Kinross shrugged and went back down the valley.

It was beautiful early in the day with birds and flowers color-spotting the green through which the clean-limbed, scantily clad villagers moved in twos and threes. Smoke rose above clean, red flame before Mary's hut. The air was perfumed with flowers, musical with bird-calls and spiced with woodsmoke. Kinross tried to feel good, but a restlessness drove him.

He walked back and forth, jerkily, sat down and got up again, driven to random action that he would not shape into the action demanded of him. He picked fruit and threw it away, drifted toward the dark grove and walked resolutely away from it. At last he decided to make the fight in his hut. He went inside and wove burawang fronds into a barrier across the door.

For hours, pacing or lying prone with clenched fists in the gloom, Kinross strove with his rebellious muscles and reproachful viscera. Finally the familiar silvery voice, long unheard, spoke to him out of the air.

"Kinross, I am hungry and thirsty. Bring me fruit."

"No. You have it from a hundred others."

"I need it from you, Kinross. We have a relation. I gave you back a lost life. You dragged my body here with your own strength. You owe me a duty."

"I deny it. If I ever did, I repudiate it."

"I have power, Kinross. Silva and Kerbeck bring no fruit. Would you be as they?"

"You lie, Kruger. You have not even the lesser power to command my muscles."

"I don't wish to command them directly. I wish to command you, with your consent, in this one small thing."

"No. I have tested your power before now."

"Not to the full, Kinross. Not to the full. I have been reluctant to hurt you."

Silence extended itself into Kinross' abrupt awareness that the tension was gone. He felt as tired as he had on the days he had fought the reentry barrier. He lay back to rest.

"Round one is mine," he thought comfortably.

Distant thunder rumbled. "Round two?" he thought uneasily and unbarred his door. Black clouds were boiling up over the great ridge above the cave mouth. Black storm devils sifted down from the hillsides and gray women danced singly and in groups on the tops of things. Kinross brought wood into his hut, also stones to bank a fire and a brand to kindle it, working rapidly.

The storm built up fast, with tremendous thunder and jagged bolts of lightning. Kinross shielded and tended his fire, unheeding. The drumming rain changed into a drizzle and set in cold. The day became night without a perceptible sunset. Kinross shivered through the long night, burrowed under sweet grass and with his belly pressed against the warm rocks that banked his fire.

Morning was cold and clear. Frost rimed the grass, flower petals drooped and tree leaves twinkled with silver. Kinross was standing in his hut door, shivering and stamping his feet, when he heard the frosty crunch of footsteps. It was von Lankenau, not yet shaven for the day.

"Good morning, Mr. Kinross," von Lankenau greeted him. "Please pardon my more or less forced intrusion on your privacy."

"That's all right. It's not an intrusion."

"Oh? I had thought that you were deliberately keeping to yourself these last weeks. But I would like to discuss this cold. . ."

"If you can't take it, grow a beard like me."

"I am inured to cold, Mr. Kinross. At the moment I entered this world I had been stopped on a ledge at sixteen thousand feet for about thirty hours. My arms

and my legs were frozen. The Seeings had begun . . . you touch my pride, Mr. Kinross, excuse me."

Kinross said nothing.

"How long are you prepared to go on with this defiance of the Herr Kruger?" von Lankenau asked.

"Maybe till hell freezes over." Kinross laughed harshly, adding, "No. Until Kruger agrees to let me through the reentry barrier. Me and Mary Chadwick."

"He will never let you go, Mr. Kinross. And Miss Chadwick does not wish to go."

"The thing this damned Krugerworld has made of her may not so wish. But if Kruger would give her back to herself—"

"She has never ceased to be herself, Mr. Kinross. We talk increasingly of late and I know her well, in time will know her better still. But I do know what you mean . . ."

"Skip what I mean. Did Kruger send you here?"

"Oh no. It is my curiosity, I am afraid. You interest me, Mr. Kinross, and in studying you I learn much about the Herr Kruger. Tell me: you know the villagers are suffering from cold and will soon be hungry: do you feel any responsibility for their sufferings?"

"No. Kruger's responsible. Let him ease off."

"He will not, I am sure. What then?"

"Then we shiver and we starve. When those lobotomies of yours in the village get desperate enough maybe they'll help me break through the reentry barrier and get their minds and their own world back."

"They will not. That I know. But let me congratulate you on your efforts to break the barrier, Mr. Kinross. Did you know that you had pushed it outward a good way and permanently distorted that corner of Krugerworld? You are a strong and resolute man, sir. I wish you would consent to take your rightful position among us."

"I'll take my rightful departure or die trying."

"Mr. Kinross, the villagers also have a right to live. I will not prompt them nor will Mr. Garcia. We have agreed on that. But if the Herr Kruger can reach them directly through dreams and inspired counsels, and if the collective will moves to act upon you, we will stand aside also."

"Fair enough," Kinross grunted.

"One other thing, Mr. Kinross. I fear you may be moving blindly toward a treason of the light. I will say no more."

Kinross did not answer. Von Lankenau half smiled and saluted him, then turned and left in silence. Within a minute other footsteps approached, light and rapid ones.

It was Mary Chadwick and she was in a fury. Her shirt was half unbuttoned and she clasped in her bosom a dozen or more of the white nutmeg pigeons with black wing and tail tips.

"Down with ice on their poor wings. Half-frozen. You stringybark jojo—" she stormed, face twisted with pity and anger.

"I'm sorry—" Kinross began.

"Then stop it, you fool! Stop it at once! Take that silly fruit to that stupid altar and put an end to this nonsense!"

"Did Lankenau or Kruger put you up to this?"

She stared a scornful denial. Kinross swallowed and felt his face burn under his beard.

"Why blame me and not Kruger?"

"Because I can't come at the Herr Kruger and I can come at you, of course. Hop, now!"

"All right," Kinross said. "I'll do it for you, Mary. Will you understand that I do it for you and not for Kruger, Mary? Will you accept?" He took hold of her hand among the rustling pigeons and looked into her blue-violet eyes murky with waning anger.

"Of course for me," she said. "That's what I came to tell you, idiot."

"Glory!" Kinross gasped and walked away rapidly.

When he came back through the grove the frost had already melted under a warming sun.

"Round two is at least a draw," he thought, "but I kind of think I won it too."

Weeks passed into months and the land smiled. Kinross left fruit at the cairn each morning, whispering under his breath, "For you, Mary." Also each morning he laid flowers on a quartz boulder he had carried up from the creek and placed by Mary's hut. The flowers always disappeared, although he never saw her take them.

Stragglers continued coming into Krugerworld by ones or twos every few days and the population of Krugertown approached three hundred. Kinross talked amicably with Garcia and von Lankenau from time to time. Von Lankenau discussed the expansion of Krugerworld with an increasing population. He thought that at some critical point it would expand enough to accommodate another village and perhaps be dumbbell-shaped rather than elliptical. Garcia told Kinross pridefully that Pilar was carrying a child, he hoped a son.

Sometimes Kinross talked with the villagers. They had lost all memory of their origin. They believed they had come from underground, shaped of earth's substance at the bottom of a great pit, and that sometime they might go back there to sleep again. They had no clear notion of death.

Kinross no longer wandered aimlessly. At a site a mile down-valley from the village, he built a stone hut. He built it massively, bedding large stones from the creek in clay and rammed earth, giving it several rooms beamed with ironwood and heavily thatched with nipa fronds. He built a stone fireplace and crude furniture.

Mary passed by several times a day, taking little interest in his work. When the house was complete she would not come in to look at it.

"It is a waste of strength and good living time," she

said, laughing. "Allan, Allan, walk under the trees again."

"Will you walk with me?" he asked.

She laughed and turned away.

Kinross built a walled garden around the hut. He brought water into it with a raised ditch, pierced for drainage, taking off from above a low dam he built in the creek. It fed a bathing pool and turned a small waterwheel. He threshed out grass seeds and spread them and berries on the flagstones of his garden. Birds came and ate, but Mary would not come in.

"You don't paddock me with anything cold as stone, not by half," she said.

He saw her more often with von Lankenau and gradually tended to avoid them both, nagged by a question he dared not ask for fear of an answer. The black moods came back and he neglected his house to roam the hillsides as of old. Sometimes he met Kerbeck, vacant-eyed and enormous, wild and shaggy as a bear, and cursed Kruger bitterly while Kerbeck buzzed and hummed. He did not fail to leave his token of fruit each morning on the cairn.

Then one day, leaving Kerbeck and the Kabeiroi on the hillside, he came into the valley and saw a village woman tending grapevines alone at the foot of the hill. She was young, supple and brown and wore only a short paperbark skirt. She stopped working and bowed her head, waiting for him to pass. He stopped and searched in his mind for his limited Spanish.

"Cómo te llamas?"

"Milagros, señor." Her voice was very low and she would not look at him.

"Bueno. Tu estás muy bonita, Milagros."

"Por favor, tengo que trabajar . . . el Señor Kruger. . ."

"Ven conmigo, Milagros. Yo te mando por el nombre del Señor Kruger."

She flushed darkly, then paled. She looked up at him with beseeching eyes shiny with tears.

"Por favor, por gran favor, no me mande usted. . ."

"Quién te manda?" asked a new voice from behind the screen of vines, and then, "Oh. You, Kinross?"

Garcia came into view around the vines. Like Kinross, he was barefooted and wore only staged-off dungaree trousers.

"What's it all about?" he asked.

"I was trying to talk to her. . ."

Garcia spoke rapidly in Spanish and the woman answered in a fearful voice. The thickset Mexican turned back to Kinross, fists knuckling hipbones.

"Take the name of Kruger back off of her, Kinross!"

"I remove the name, Milagros," Kinross said. "Garcia, I—"

"Take it off in Spanish," Garcia interrupted. "You put it on in Spanish."

Kinross garbled out a sentence in Spanish. Garcia was still angry. He sent the woman away.

"Kinross, I can't take away your power to use the name of Kruger. But if you use it wrong, I can beat you half to death. Maybe all the way to death. You get me?"

"Don't judge me so damned offhand. How do you know what I intended?"

"Milagros knew. She knew, all right. I believe her."

"Believe what you like, then."

"Listen, Kinross, stay away from the villagers. I command you in the name of Garcia and his two fists. You can outtalk me and outthink me, but—" The stocky Mexican struck his right fist into his left biceps with a solid thump.

Kinross clenched his teeth and breathed deeply through flaring nostrils. Then he said, "Okay, Garcia. I appreciate your position. The only man I really want to fight doesn't have a body."

"Good," the Mexican said. "No hard feelings, then. But you still stay clear of the villagers, a kind of agreement between you and me. Okay?"

"Okay," Kinross said and walked away.

When he came into his walled garden he saw nutmeg pigeons pecking at overripe mangoes he had placed there for them. Fearless, they hardly made way for his suddenly slowed feet. The two fluttered briefly when he, unthinking, bent and seized them. They quieted in his hands and he carried them inside, wondering why.

For hours after nightfall he sat before his fire and stared into the red coals. So he could outthink and out-talk Garcia, could he? Well, yes, he could. But the act? How act? How get at a man without a body?

Where was Kruger vulnerable? What force could he align against Kruger? He had touched Kruger once only, and that was by a refusal to act. That was negative. Now what was the positive side? What act, what unthinking, nameless act . . . and the fit stole over him and he took up the pigeons and left the house and walked through the dark grove to the cairn where Silva moaned in sleep and did what there was to do and returned and slept, to wake unremembering.

Day was advanced when Kinross came out of his house. He walked up the valley, crossing over the little stream to avoid the village, and picked two overripe mangoes, which he carried through the grove to the cairn. Silva was rocking and wailing thinly in an extremity of woe. To the right a knot of silent villagers clustered.

On the cairn he saw the headless pigeons with blood-dabbled feathers and the black, sticky blood on the stones. Fingers tugged at his memory and he frowned, refusing to think what this strange thing might mean. He flung down his mangoes into the blood spots with force enough to burst them and said aloud, "For you, Mary." Then he stared arrogantly at the knot of villagers and strode away. But he was reluctant to emerge from the grove, prowling its tangled shades far from path and stream for

upwards of an hour. Then he walked back toward the village.

A strange silence held the land. No air moved. The villagers were drifting toward the grove in small groups, without the customary singing and talking. He heard no birdcalls. Then, as he neared the village, he heard a woman's voice strident with grief and anger. It was Mary.

"What kind of Kelly rules do you keep here, you and your Kruger, you smooth-faced blood drinker?"

Then von Lankenau's voice, soothing and indistinct behind the huts, and then Mary again, agonized, "Oh, my lovely white sea pigeons! Poor dears, poor dears, I'll take them all away with me. You'll pay! You'll pay!"

She broke into a loud humming and came into view, running toward the hillside. Her long hair streamed behind her and her once lovely face was frightfully twisted and gaping with menace. Kinross noticed with another start that the black grotesques from the hillside had invaded the valley floor and were all about the village. They gave way before the infuriated woman and all at once the birds became vocal, deafeningly so, clouds of them swooping at the black things with squawks and screeches.

Kinross stood in vagueness, looking around. Never had he seen the sun of Krugerworld more warm and smiling, the flowers more voluptuous, the trees more heavily laden with bright fruit. At his feet earth tilted and crumbled and a red-capped mushroom emerged, visibly rising and unfolding. Von Lankenau, his shaven face set in grave lines, came toward Kinross from out of the cluster of huts. Before he could speak, Garcia shouted from the direction of the grove and they saw him running toward them.

"Something's haywire with the villagers," he told von Lankenau, panting. "They won't follow ritual. They won't obey me."

"What are they doing?" von Lankenau asked.

"Nothing. Just standing still. But I don't like the feeling of things in there, don't ask me why."

"Something of truly enormous significance has happened, Joe. I do not know what . . . I was about to ask Mr. Kinross for his ideas. Those pigeons . . . but you are right, we must get the villagers back to their huts and to the fruit groves. Perhaps Mr. Kinross will help us."

"How do you know I won't play Pied Piper and lead them clear out of Krugerworld?" Kinross asked, his thoughts beginning to mesh again.

"Perhaps, now, that would be merciful. I truly do not know, Mr. Kinross. But let us see what may be done."

A distant scream came out of the dark grove, repeated, a volley of screams.

"Silva's voice!" Garcia exclaimed. "*Por Dios*, what now?"

He started running back toward the grove. Kinross and von Lankenau ran after him. The screaming ceased abruptly.

In the clearing, villagers stood in silent groups on either side of the stone platform and in small groups elsewhere. On the cairn lay the body of the old Portygee, looking fragile and collapsed. His head was crushed horribly.

Garcia swore softly in Spanish. Von Lankenau said musingly, "Now, for as long as Krugerworld shall last . . . I must manage to understand. I must!" A dark memory itched in Kinross' fingers.

"Kinross," came a whisper from close behind their heads. The men whirled as one, to see nothing.

The whisper continued, still behind their heads so that they whirled again, vainly. "Thank you, Kinross, for teaching me how to relieve my thirst. My terrible thirst. I will purge my world of thirst, Kinross, with your service."

Von Lankenau gripped Kinross' arm with iron fingers.

"What have you done, Kinross?" he pleaded. "Tell me. I must know. *What have you done?*"

"You'll never know," Kinross said harshly. "Look behind us."

The three men turned round again. The villagers had compacted into a mob with a concave front that was slowly closing in on them. Von Lankenau ordered them back in whiplash tones, to no effect. He turned to Kinross, his face pale and grim.

"Command them under the name of the Herr Kruger, if you can, Mr. Kinross. We have no other chance."

"Stop, damn you, in the name of Kruger!" Kinross shouted. His hands were sweating and his heart was in his throat.

They did not stop. The horns of the crescent met on the far side of the cairn. The solid front of the villagers, coming on in a slow amoeboid shuffle of hundreds of feet, was ten yards away. Kinross saw the girl Milagros, teeth bared. They had seconds only before, as Kinross somehow knew, they would join Silva on the bloody stones.

"Quickly, Kinross," von Lankenau said. "Tell me while there is time. *What have you done?*"

"Heart's truth," Kinross whispered, "I don't know. *I don't know!*"

"Let's give 'em a fight," Garcia growled, then, "Hey! They've stopped!"

A cloud of birds came over the clearing, flashing in many colors, circling and shrieking. Brush crackled and water splashed in the dark grove. Then something went wrong at the back of the mob of villagers. It shuddered and broke into fragments which crept rapidly to either side, opening an aisle through its midst.

It was Kerbeck, floating hair and beard ablaze with sunlight. Rags of clothing fluttered on the great, bronzed limbs. Sweeps of his massive arms knocked villagers a dozen feet through the air. Booming and buzzing, wide

blue eyes two-dimensional and unknowing, he passed the three wonder-stricken men. In his wake ran Mary Chadwick, birds about her head.

"He's going in to kill Kruger's body," she told them, coming to a halt. The frightful malevolence still rode in her features and Kinross' fear was not wholly relieved.

"*Madre de Dios!*" Garcia gasped.

They watched the giant Swede round the stone platform and head for the cave. From the darkness floated a gobbling howl that sent a hair-bristling shudder down Kinross' back. The great form of Bo Bo emerged to block the entrance.

Kerbeck ran forward with a shout. The Negro ran to meet him with his bubbling squall. The two massive figures shocked together and the world seemed to tremble. They swayed, stumbling back and forth, locked in furious embrace, and a great sighing moan went up from the fragmented mob of villagers. Kinross felt a hand on his arm and glimpsed von Lankenau's white, rapt face beside him.

Black giant with white strove and roared and howled and stumbled. They cannoned into the cairn and destroyed it, scattering and treading the stones underfoot like pebbles. They splashed into the creek and out of it, roiling the clear water to dark turbidity. Both giants were increasing in stature, to Kinross' eyes, clearly superhuman now. The force of their roaring and howling beat down on him with physical pressure. He saw Mary Chadwick on his right, blue-violet fire blazing in her eyes, fierce red lips parted eagerly.

First one giant and then the other was forced to his knees, only to rise again in thunderous shouting and howling. The fight drifted nearer to the cave mouth, entered and swirled out again, entered and stayed. Kerbeck's hair and beard seemed to shine with a light of their own, dwindling sparklike into the depths. The gigantic battle shouts became a continuous hollow roaring under

the earth. Kinross felt a hand shaking him insistently. It was von Lankenau.

"Go now," he was saying. "For certain, the barrier will be down momentarily. I begin to understand. I almost—I do salute you, Mr. Kinross. Take the woman, if she will go."

Kinross collected his thoughts. "Mary, will you go?" he asked.

"Too bloody right I will," she said, "and take my birds off with me!"

Kinross looked at Garcia and held out his hand. "Part friends, Joe?" he asked.

"I don't savvy this, Kinross," the Mexican said, "but good luck and get out of here."

Kinross shook hands with the two men. Then he and Mary Chadwick, arms linked, walked rapidly back toward the village.

The dark grove swarmed with Kabeiroi, but no more than a scattering of the ugly shapes could be seen on the open valley floor. The sky was overcast and the diffuse, watery light of the early days lay again on the valley. The old indefinite quality was back, nothing quite in full view.

"Mary," Kinross said, "I do believe we're already through the barrier. Space has drawn in around the cave mouth."

"Good-oh!"

Kinross led her up the hillside, talking feverishly. They would marry, he said. He was quite well off, had a good job doing confidential work for the U.S. government. He had lots of back pay coming for his last job and a bonus, too, when he told them about it. They would live in California, it was a lot like Queensland. Trips, the theater, music, a fine home, gracious living.

Mary said little. Birds kept fluttering in to land on her head and shoulders but the number around her did not

seem to increase. The light grew weaker as they climbed and the land more indefinite. When they reached the height of land and Kinross knew for sure that they had escaped, it was almost dark. From time to time a rippling quiver ran over the ground sending them sprawling, but they rose and pressed onward. As before, progress seemed timeless and effortless. There was no moon.

Mary lagged behind him and Kinross kept turning to wait for her. By degrees in the fading light he saw the strained malevolence of her expression give way to a vague and remote sorrow. The wide brow was smooth again, red lips dreaming. Once she said, "My birds. I can't get back all my birds."

Suddenly the wailing cry of a stone curlew reached down from the darkness. Mary stopped and looked up. Kinross turned back to watch. The forlorn, throbbing cry repeated. Mary raised her arms to the black sky and crooned. Nothing happened.

She looked at Kinross, both of them vague in shadow. "It won't come down to me," she whispered plaintively.

A third time the call floated downward. Mary dropped her arms.

"I'm going back," she said. "You go on alone, Allan."

"No!" he protested. "You must come with me. I won't let you go back!"

He seized her shoulders. She came stiffly erect and a light gleamed from her eyes. A touch, a twinge only, of the old feeling hit him and his knees turned to water. He collapsed, kneeling, clasping her around the thighs, pleading, "No, no, Mary! Don't leave me alone here in the dark!"

"I must," she said calmly. Then, with a touch of pity, "Be brave and go along now, Allan. It is all you can do."

She raised him and kissed his forehead. He stumbled away, not daring to look back for fear of a renewed weakness. The sky rifted with silver as the overcast broke

up and presently a full moon rode high ahead. He looked back then, but she was nowhere.

On to the great pit under the moon, leg over leg unthinking. It was all he could do now. He found the ravine and waded down it, outrunning the current. He heard the roar of falling water and saw the last rock shoulder that interposed itself between him and the brink. For just a heartbeat he clung to the rock and stared into the pit with all its silver beauty and its reflecting pool in the bottom. Then, not letting the water take him only, but rushing, pitching his body forward, he went over the edge.

It was not a sheer drop but rather a series of stages. Plunge and strike and roll, plunge and strike and roll, rhythmically, painlessly, with intolerable excitement of the spirit, down and down he went until the circle of sky above him smalled with distance and the silvery pool below waxed enormous. It was as if the great pit were reversing its dimensions, flexing through itself, turning inside out, as if he were falling into the moon. Then, on the very point of an unbearable instant, the waters closed over him.

Down, down through the water, pain and darkness and fear vise-clamping his chest, kicking and waving his arms and there was a dry crackling and a pain in his toe and he sat in the thorn scrub gasping. His skin was dry.

It was daylight. A stream ran nearby and above it reared a yellowish sandstone ledge with figures of paunchy kangaroos and stick men done in faded red and black. He picked up a handful of earth and looked at it. There it was, hard and sharp and clear in all of its minute particulars, deep as any microscope might probe, solidly there beyond all tampering forever. It was the old world. His world. Kinross stood up, feeling an overpowering thirst.

He went down to the creek and drank deeply and was as thirsty as before. He buried his face in the water and

drank until he was near bursting and rose, wavering on his feet, thirst tearing at him unbearably. He tugged at his beard and wondered.

Sounds came, a jingle of metal and splashing. Then the creak of leather and low voices. Riders were coming up the creek. Suddenly he sensed them directly, horses and men, radiant with life, red, living blood pumping through veins and arteries. His thirst became a cloud of madness enfolding him, and he knew who and what he was.

He waited, wondering if they would be able to see him. . .

Gene Wolfe (about whom more will be heard) spent a few months in the U.S. Army avoiding the half-hearted attempts of the Chinese Army to kill him. Thanks to this short stint as a D-handled shovel operator and Fire Control Private on an M-1, the government was forced to finish his education and he emerged from the University of Houston as a B.S.M.E. He still works at the job he took after graduation, doing non-space R&D for a large corporation; has a wife and four children, is sunk in the "dull comfort of moderate middle-class success," and claims it is impossible to make his life sound interesting. "Sir magazine essayed the same impossible task when they published my story 'The Dead Man,' and were forced to fall back on such falsifications as the statement that I wished to raise Afghan hounds. I can truthfully say that I have never desired to see an Afghan hound higher than it is already."

"Trip, Trap" is pure science fiction, not fantasy. Nevertheless, there is a bridge in it, and under the bridge lives a troll. . .

TRIP, TRAP

By Gene Wolfe

Giants were fighting in the sky; the roar and crash of their weapons and the wind-scream of their strokes reverberated even on the echoless steppe where there was nothing to fling back sound between the Rock of the Carath-Angor and the gorge of the Elbanda-Rhun, where the waters made their own thunder always, whether the sky-giants fought or slept. And those were as far apart as a hard-riding traveler might go in three days.

The warriors had drawn their thick cloaks across their faces to protect them from the driving rain which was blown almost horizontally into their eyes, but their mounts had no such protection and stumbled forward scarcely faster than their riders could have walked. All were wet to the skin, cold, and nearly numb with fatigue. On an ordinary journey they would have halted hours ago, pitched their tents and waited out the storm in their sleeping robes. They did not do so now because they were going home, and because their leader, hurrying home too after three years of war, would not have permitted it.

Suddenly a spark struck from some giant ax lit up the sky from horizon to horizon and in the trembling instant the war leader saw far ahead the figure of a single rider spurring down the road as though blown by the storm. The leader watched him for a moment by the light of the flashes, then wheeled his animal to face his command

—shouting to make himself heard above the wind. The warriors freed their short lances from the straps holding them to their pommels and fanned out to form an arc across the road. There was a chance, if only a chance, that the rider was a straggler from the enemy horde, trying to reach the fastness of his own country. Besides, they were soldiers, led by a hero, and would not be met like a gaggle of pedlars.

The stranger made no attempt to evade them. Instead he came galloping into the center of their crescent and reined up before their commander. From his cloak he drew a rolled parchment covered with writing. . . .

At the same moment Dr. Morton Melville Finch, Ph.D. (Extraterrestrial Archaeology), paused in the act of setting a coffeepot on his galley stove as he heard the communicator in the main cabin begin to chatter. With the percolator still in his hand, he crossed the galley to see what message had been hurled at his little ship across light-years of space.

FROM: Prof. John Beatty
Edgemont Inst., Earth
TO: Dr. M. M. Finch
UNworld spcrft MOTH (Reg #387760)

Congratulations again on attaining your degree!

Morton, I know you have planned to make this trip of yours a pleasure cruise before taking up your teaching duties here, but I have come across something so extraordinary, and so perfectly in your line, that I feel sure you will forgive an old man for trying to interrupt your jaunt.

There, I've given the whole thing away before I meant to. That is always the way with us old diggers; we turn up the funeral ornaments when we ditch the tents, then get nothing else for years, like as not.

I doubt if you've ever heard of Carson's Sun, Morton; it is Sol type, but its habitable planet has been off-limits for colonization and trade because of a native race with too much intelligence to be counted mere animals (human-level intelligence in fact) and too little technology for their culture to hold its own in trade. It is open to scientific expeditions, however, although it appears that none have ever gone there.

Now I have a correspondent, a W. H. Wilson, who is a captain in the merchant service. He is one of those enthusiastic amateurs who have contributed so much to our little corner of learning. Knows enough to spot a find when he comes across one and keeps his eyes peeled.

Well, it seems that Wilson picked up a distress call from a life-craft on his last trip out. I doubt if I need tell you now, Morton, that it came from the habitable planet of Carson's Sun.

It seems that a spaceman who escaped the wreck of the *Magna Vega* (you may remember that it was originally thought that no one survived) was able to get his craft to Carson III. He spent a year and a half there before Wilson picked up his call. Naturally—or perhaps not so naturally, how many merchant skippers would have done as much?—Wilson questioned him about his experiences with the natives. I am forwarding Wilson's full report to you, together with language tapes, but the important point is this: a number of the symbols used in writing the native language are identical with the ones found on those unclassifiable porcelain shards from Ceta II which furnished you with such fine material for your doctoral dissertation! The points of correspondence are too numerous and too complete for this to be coincidence. I truly feel that Man has at last found evidence of a preceding interstellar technology.

Morton, I would never have thought it possible for me to be so happy for a man I envy as whole-souledly as I

do you. A few months' investigation on Carson III may furnish you with a reputation which will make you a department head at thirty-five. Don't let this get past you.

Yours in hope,
J. Beatty

JB/sl

The war chieftain had watched with impassive patience while his followers erected a tent for him using poles whose terminals were skillfully carved and painted to represent the heads of beasts, and a soft leather covering impregnated with oil. Only when this was up and his chief lieutenant had kindled a fire using stone and steel and tinder from a hoarded packet near his skin was he able to read the scroll.

His Supremacy the Protector of the West Lands bids this be written to Garth the Son of Garth, Holder of the High Justice:

Know that there came some days ago to our court a party of traders returned from the north. Their leader tells us that in passing through some deserted vales of that land he beheld scratched upon boulders appeals for aid from any of the West People who should pass that way. Proceeding, as the scratchings directed him, to a cave in those hills he found a poor waif once apprenticed to the scribe of the Lord Naid the Son of Kartl who, as you know, rode into that country three seasons ago and has never returned or sent any word to us who loved his valor.

This boy recounts that his master's party was set upon by one of the wild tribes who rove that land, and that his master and all save himself were slain. The lad's tale grieves us much, though we had feared the Lord Naid had deserted our cause, taking the gifts we had given

him to bear to the Protector of the Grey Lands as our pledge of friendship.

This ill news came only as another knot in the tangle of that land. While our swords have been hot with war here the evils in the north have grown bold. The lesser Protectors of that land have been loud in lamentations to us of late.

Those who pay us tribute have a right to our protection, and no warriors of the West Men have been seen in those lands now for many seasons. Thus the gold and enamel work due us have been slow to come. Now that the West Lands are again at peace it comes to us that it is time the north country feel again the strength of the West People's hand. Nay, that our grasp stretch farther than ever before. Thus it would be well for you to take up the dignity of Watcher of the North Marches, which you have earned by the blows you have struck for us, and go to that land with such of your people as seem well to you and hold the land for your Protector. Aid our tributaries and prove our strength to such as may dispute you. Accept no excuses from those who owe us for past years; rather urge that payment be sent at once, nor should you leave their domains until it is forthcoming.

Should you chance upon that hoard which the Lord Naid bore for us—such chances often come to the brave—or should you discern the spoor it has left in passing—as the astute may sometimes do—take it; use force always when force is needed.

Go then quickly as you may. Work our will as we have told you and your reward shall be just.

Let not your scribe be idle, but send couriers to teach us how you fare.

*Klexo the Scribe hath written
this for the PROTECTOR.*

When the scroll was rolled again and tied, the war chieftain spoke briefly to his waiting lieutenants, his voice

almost lost in the howling wind and pounding rain outside. The scarred faces in the firelight looked pleased in a grim fashion.

Garth, the Son of Garth, Holder of the High Justice, Watcher of the North Marches, bids this be written to the Protector of the West Lands:

Know that as you commanded I have removed myself and the braver of my people to these northern hills. Many of my people were unwilling to go, owing to the evil repute of these lands, but the braver have followed me as I say, and it is them I shall have need of. Now hear me say as I have seen.

After fording the bitter waters of Elbanda-Rhun and tramping the wastelands ten days we came to the lands of Your Supremacy's tributary the Protector of Jana. The city is of goodly size with a wall well built and a good strong-house on an eminence overlooking all. The Protector (so he styles himself) boasts he could call full five hundred men to his banner at the last extremity, though it may be he draws the bow over far.

We were welcomed with much joy by the Protector and entertained with feasting and hunting for several days. It soon came to me, however, that he wished more of us than our merry company. Often I sought to draw him out, but he resisted me politely and seemed to await his own time to tell his thought. While we thus tarried I exercised myself to discover all the ways of this Northland, where many things differ from our own country and there are a thousand old family blood-wars and tangled allegiances which must be known and considered ere one act. On the eighth day that we were at Jana, when we were riding back after a hunt I began to question the Protector about these and other things and found him well disposed to talk. He told me of the wildness of the country and the many evil things that still inhabit it; then, just as he seemed ready to tell his own tale, whatever it might be, we came

upon a strange, uncouthly clad person perched on a stone beside the road. . . .

FROM: M.M. Finch Ph. D.

TO: Prof. John Beatty,
Edgemont Inst.
Earth.

Professor, it is with feelings of triumph that I transmit this, my first communication to the scientific world as represented by yourself from an actual site. And a promising one too. Not a full-fledged digging site as yet, but that is sure to come in time. Meanwhile, let me tell you what I have found thus far.

After completing an aerial survey of the planet I decided to land *Moth* in an unfrequented area and conceal it as well as I could. It was a temptation, of course, to use it to impress the natives in order to secure their cooperation; however, I knew that I would have to leave it eventually, and the prospect of having it cast into some lake as a devil's carriage was not attractive. Also, I thought it best to get some first-hand knowledge of the natives and their customs before I demonstrated all the power of Confederation technology.

My survey had shown that the northwest edge of the principal continent was sparsely settled, so I landed there in a clearing surrounded by dense vegetation; before coming down I had noted carefully the position of a crude village within walking distance. Upon landing I hid *Moth* and set the cabin communicator to relay the signals of my handset. A vigorous hike brought me to an unpaved road and after following that for about a mile I encountered a party of mounted natives.

These are quite human in appearance; if it were not for their hands, which have only three fingers, and their rather large noses they might pass unremarked on the streets of any city in the Confederation. The individuals I now met were of the military caste and wore armor

of brightly polished iron plates sewn to leather shirts, and elaborate helmets. There is always something repellent about the concept of violence done to another intelligent being and I am not ashamed to say that I was a bit sickened to see these barbarians flaunting their spears and long cross-hilted swords, not to mention the bows with which they had been murdering the wildlife of their planet. Knowing that my paralyzer would make me master of the situation should any trouble begin, I faced them with a boldness quite suitable to a representative (even if unofficial) of Earth. . . .

. . . This person rose hastily as we approached, and seemed fearful and timid, though determined to stand his ground. He had manifestly been pushing through the wood on foot and his clothing showed many a tear where the thorned vine the people hereabout call Reluctant Lover had found his flesh. All saw him to be a warlock or fayman, for his face was flat as a trencher and he had more fingers on his hands than does a man right. So afrighted was he that I could not resist smiling at the poor loon, though I liked it not that the Protector's talk had been broken; my smiling seemed to make him feel easier and he looked at us as doltishly as would make one think he'd never seen true men before. And, indeed, it may be he had not.

We of the West Lands are told strange tales of this north country; one expects the strangeness to grow less when one approaches the land itself—for is not that the way of all travelers' tales? At any rate, I still hear here those tales of maids who vow to demons and are seen no more, though their strange children long after come down from the high waste places now and again. But here in the north this is not told of some far country but of the next town or the next farm. It may be that this creature is such a one. He will not tell clearly, but only talks of

the stars and strange suns when I ask. (By which you may see that I have heard his prattle much since the meeting I speak of now.) . . .

. . . If one could ignore the general bloodthirstiness of their equipage it was really a thrilling sight, this group of savages with their huge buffalolike riding animals. For a moment I almost wished I had taken my degree in extra-terrestrial sociology instead of archaeology, so as to be able to help them direct their energy and courage to more profitable, humane channels. Why are we archaeologists so insistent on confining our study to things which are good and dead?

Speaking of *dead*, I got a lesson in the zoology of the planet here, for the natives had been hunting and were returning with their butchered victims. Several of their specimens looked like creatures a wise young scholar would not want to study any other way, however much one might regret their demise. I particularly remember a naked-looking animal like a saber-toothed lemur. The natives call it *Gonoth-hag*—the Hunting-devil. There was also what looked like a very big wild dog or wolf, a *Warg*; formidable looking, but not beside the *Gonoth-hag*.

The tapes you transmitted to me have given me enough of the language to make my meaning clear, although I am sure my pronunciation is bad and I don't understand all the words the natives use. I spoke now to a broad-chested fellow who seemed to be in charge and told him that I was a traveler and a Confederation citizen who would appreciate a lift to the village. As you no doubt remember, the man your good Capt. Wilson saved emphasized the sacred nature of guestship in this culture. I thought it prudent to put myself under this protection as soon as I could. . . .

. . . *He seemed to assume that I, and not the Protector, was leader and asked at once to be my guest. This would*

have made many wroth and lost him his head, no doubt; but I could see the poor gangrel did not know a guest must rank with his host except the host invite him first, so I told him I would take him under my protection and this satisfied him. I thought to have some sport with him after the banquet in the strong-house of Jana, and the Protector, who is good-humored enough when his melancholy leaves him, agreed. If I have wearied your Supremacy by too long talk of this person, I beg your indulgence, for he has his part to play in my tale by and by.

. . . They mounted me upon one of their animals (which jolted terribly) and after what I suppose a travel writer would describe as a brisk canter, *i.e.*, a pace sufficiently swift to throw up clouds of dust and sufficiently slow to require a half-hour to cover perhaps four miles, we arrived at a native building which I will call a castle, although it is a far cry from those graceful buildings which were preserved in the Franco-German Province until the early part of the last century. This castle is a thick-walled stone structure of two stories huddling at the edge of a perpendicular cliff. The only feasible approach is guarded by a massive wall nearly as thick as it is high—precisely like one of the promontory forts of ancient Eire. All, as I am sure you will agree, very fittingly archaeological; but, alas, this is no sun-dried ruin. The stench is abominable. (No doubt you have already guessed, from my slipping into the present tense, that I am sending from this place. So I am, although I have left it once since the first arrival I am telling you about. The smell, however, awaited my return.)

. . . *When we returned to the strong-house I asked the Protector to continue his talk as he had begun it before we were interrupted by meeting this vagabond, and he*

did so. I shall have the scribe set down his words themselves that you may hear as I heard.

He said: "I know you have guessed that all is not as we would wish in this Protectorate of Jana. Know then the reason. If a traveler follow the road through our city northward he will come upon a fine bridge built by the men of Jana of the olden day, when the men and cities of the north were famed.

"Now there are rich fields upon that other shore of the river which have been tilled by us since that old time."

I asked him who held those fields now, for I thought our aid was to be asked in some border war, but he undeceived me, saying, "No one holds them and they grow only weeds and wild herbs. It is he who holds the bridge who keeps us from them, for one of every three who cross in these declining days is taken, and it is against him that I would ask your aid."

This was the first time that our help had been openly asked, and I thought it best to turn it away with a jest until I better knew against whom we were to war, so I laughed loud and said, "Why do you not ask the aid of the fayman we found? Any power that can hold a bridge without the land on either side must surely be magical in its operation, and did he not tell us he had scratched himself by falling from a star?"

"Do not mock," the Protector told me, "for that bridge is not a fit subject for it. A troll holds the passage, and I tell you he takes his tithe of those who go north or south across, and so has he done for so long as the oldest here can remember." Thus he spoke, and I confess, Supremacy, that for a moment I could say nothing. The demons who frightened us as children have some power over our minds all our lives.

Playing for time I said, "How was it then in the olden time, was there no troll then?"

"In the olden time such a concourse of travelers, pilgrims and traders made use of the bridge that the troll's

share was scarce to be seen out of all that went over. Also our peasants, being clever wights, abode in huts upon the farther shore and only crossed after some stranger had recently been chosen, for in those good days if a man were taken all were safe for a fortnight or so. Now, knowing (so I think) that no other may be by for some long time, he is like as not to seize on two or three at once." He sighed.

"Boats we cannot use, for until midsummer the current runs too swift; and the exactions of your Liege are such that ten years' remission at least would be required. . ."

. . . When we reached this fortress I lost no time searching out a native who had the inclination to talk. I found one soon enough, a venerable old fellow who did odd jobs in the kitchen, but when I questioned him about old writings he was able to show me nothing going more than a hundred years or so back. He told me, however, that there was a bridge to the north, "very old, with much carving and some writing," adding that not even the priests could read the inscriptions now. You may imagine how that affected me. Carving with a little writing must (I thought) surely indicate pictures with accompanying text, and those might be the beginning of an understanding of the language. With little more than that they were able to break Cretan B four hundred years ago. And if that old script from which the present inhabitants borrowed some of their symbols could be read today!

I was so overcome with this thought that I rushed out in search of the native who had accepted me as his guest. After blundering about the castle for what seemed like hours, I learned that he had gone to a room in the watchtower where (after brushing past two guards before they could stop me) I found him in conference with an older native and burst in upon them with a violence which I fear would be called bad-mannered on any world.

As soon as I could get my breath I begged them to

guide me to the bridge I had been told of. They seemed taken aback, but after staring at each other for a moment (it was strange to see these aliens behaving in such a human fashion, although I was so overwrought at the time that I hardly noticed it), the older one agreed, saying that all three of us—he looked rather intently, I thought, at my host—would go tomorrow.

. . . He held his peace then, for he saw my face darken. I was about to accept the challenge he had implied and make my offer to slay the monster when there was a great noise at the door, which flew open and in came none other than our freakish vagabond, who I have since discovered calls himself Dokerfins, flying as swift as if he had been kicked. Without so much as a bow or a courteous word he demanded that we lead him to the troll's lair without delay. The Protector, who cared nothing for the poor creature's life, consented; and I was forced to agree, though I feared his presence might interfere with my own plan.

No sooner had he left us than I began to turn over in my mind the methods our forefathers, the illustrious warriors of your glorious grandsire's golden circle, used when such creatures troubled our own land as severely as they still vex this unhappy north. It is unfortunate that those heroes who survived such encounters were so reticent, except perhaps among themselves, about how they did it.

Strength, I knew, would not support me. Cirman, the most sinewy of all that band, never emerged from the sunken palace of the Horogat troll. And was not Selimn, the cleverest, found babbling in the waters of the Hidden Canal, never to speak sense again? Yet Gerhelt the Great and Tressan his Son are both said to have destroyed trolls and so, I felt, might I.

. . . I began at once to check over my equipment for the trip. I had my minicamera and illuminator, and my

notebook; precious little of the proud tools of modern archaeology. However, the site seemed an easy one. Everything aboveground and no organic matter to be carefully preserved for carbon 14 testing.

As my benefactors had promised, we left the next day; not only we three, but twenty or more soldierish ruffians, and cooks, grooms, servants, and so forth. It was very thrilling and medieval, Professor, but I fear it also bore a certain resemblance to the Gardenia Day festival at dear old Edgemont—all it lacked was a few semiprofessional undergraduate beauties on floats. The parade started at least an hour behind schedule. (I think it may have been more, actually, but I am not too clear on the local horological system. It seems to depend on the changing of various nominal "guards" having no connection with the real pikemen on the wall. Some of the periods are longer than others; evidently day guards at whatever castle the system originated in stood longer watches than the night men. In addition there are special short "guards" for meals.)

Also—getting back to our parade—there were some youngsters lurking about the fringes of the crowd holding clods behind their backs and waiting for a moment when no one was looking. Perhaps I am wrong in trying to separate these things from the medieval element, however. The more I consider, the more I am inclined to think that the Black Prince or the Cid might have felt completely at home when our gaudy banner was unfurled and the crowd (the whole town had come to see us off) gave their weak, the-rack-if-you-don't cheer.

The country through which we passed after we left the village can only be described as a decayed wilderness. The road was a dusty rut which had never known pavement, and there were no buildings more pretentious than squalid log huts. . . .

We left at first light, the party consisting of myself with a few of my most trustworthy retainers, the Protector with

his guards, and one or two servants, the minimum dignity permitted, for we meant to live with the simplicity suitable to those who march against foes more than human. The whole of the inhabitants of the Protector's strong-house, and many of the more respectable residents of Jana, were early from their beds to see us off; they raised a great cheer as our column left the strong-house gate. Hearing it, I ordered that the standard of the West Lands should be unfurled, and this brought forth a greater cheer still.

I have often observed since how much friendship the folk of Jana feel for us of the West Lands, and their gratitude for your Supremacy's protection, though I suspect it might be greater still if it were not for their Protector's telling them that the tribute is much more than we ask in order to extract taxes from them. Indeed, it might be better if they were directly subject to some West Lands High Justice, who would repay your Supremacy in armed followers to whose maintenance the people could scarce object considering the lawlessness of the country. Would not a vassal with a loyal army be preferable to an inconstant tributary?

I believe that I forgot to mention, in what my scribe has put into letters already, that by the will of the Protector the mountebank went with us. He is a clumsy rider, and sneezed so much from the dust as to furnish us all with a deal of low amusement.

The country about Jana is fair enough, fertile valleys lacing the rocky hills and even the uplands supporting swine and suchlike useful cattle in some number, though as we drew nearer the bridge, dwellings failed till even the swineherds' cots were rare to the eye. When we came the third day to the bridge itself, I saw that the Protector's boast that the men of Jana had built it was only vainglory, for it is clearly a work of the forgotten age; a thing greater than even the West People could make, and having in it a spirit we could not contrive. This I saw as we paused at the crest of a hill just before the land sloped to the river.

Then I saw too something which made my eyes like to burst with wonder, for the vagabond, Dokerfins, had slipped off his mount and was running at full speed down the bank toward the bridge!

. . . How I wish I could convey to you the thrill I felt when I first viewed that bridge! It is built of monolithic slabs of white stone so skillfully joined that the crevices are difficult to detect even at close range, and it vaults its little river with a flat curve somehow suggesting an easy arrogance, as though its planners were a little ashamed at having to bridge this modest stream. The carving which covers every surface except the roadway saves it from the severity which disfigures our modern construction. It is deeply incised bas-relief.

Need I tell you how eagerly I went to examine those carvings? You will not be surprised when I admit that in my single-minded concentration I rushed forward without waiting for the rest of the party.

I had just begun to scrutinize a large group of written characters about a quarter of the way across, for the moment slighting some pictographic work nearer the bank, when I was startled by a loud thump behind me. Turning, I discovered the native who had taken me as his guest sprawled on his face on the roadway, having apparently been pitched from his mount, which was rearing and plunging in a most alarming manner just behind him. He had not been badly hurt by his fall, though, for he jumped up at once and began gesticulating to me, shouting very rapidly in the native language something about a *traki*; it was a word I had heard them use among themselves before, but the meaning was not on the tapes. I tried to get him to speak more slowly, but he only became more excited than ever and positively gibbered. I was perhaps ten feet farther onto the bridge than he, and although he started forward once as though to actually seize me, he seemed afraid to go farther.

Suddenly something behind me grasped me by the shoulders. I tried to turn; but no matter how vigorously I twisted the lower half of my body, the upper half was kept directed straight ahead; I jerked my head about until I nearly sprained my neck, but all I could see was a blurred dark object at the extreme edge of my field of vision.

Before I could collect my wits enough to think of getting out my paralyzer, I found myself flying through the air and saw the dark water of the river rushing toward my face. I hit it with a terrific slap and lost consciousness.

. . . I spurred after him, and had almost grasped him by the collar (for he would not heed my calls) when he stepped onto the bridge itself and my steed pulled up so sharply that I was thrown over its head and onto the bridge.

For an instant I lay stunned, then I leaped to my feet and looked about for the wretched fayman. He must have fled, or so I thought then, for he was not to be seen; instead there stood before me the troll. I challenged him to attack me, stamping my foot to show him I stood upon the bridge he claimed. For a moment neither of us moved. I stared at him, wishing to fix his appearance in my mind, so that after my victory, should the spirits of the place grant one, I might tell others his true shape and save them from going ignorant into battle as I had done.

My eyes have been called sharp by many, but the longer I gazed at the troll the less well could I see him, and although the day was cool the bridge shimmered as the southern plains do when the sun gives a traveler no more shadow than is under his feet. Still, it seemed to me that the troll was a warrior, tall and fell, whose face was more like my own than the faces of most men are. In one hand he held a great sword, heavy and cruelly curved at the tip, and in the other, as a boy might hold a wriggling pup, he grasped the wretched Dokerfins, he looking no larger

than a child or almost a child's doll. I knew then that it was their spirits I saw and not the flesh. Then it was with me as though a blade had opened the veins of my legs; I weakened and my eyes were darkened and I thought nevermore to see the sun. The troll I saw coming toward me with arm outstretched, and his look was not kind.

When I woke it was in the troll's den. It was dark and the air had such a filthy odor as the pools in swamps have. What light there was came upward from a pool at the end of the hall, showing that the tales are right in saying that trolls dwell in caverns under the riverbank whose only entrances are under water. When I tried to gain my feet and draw my sword I found I could do neither. My legs had no feeling and my hands no strength.

I then began to pray as hard as ever in my life to all the gods that are and most especially to the great God who made them all and the shades of the holy men of the north, who might have the most authority in their own country; and I rubbed my hands against my legs to bring the life back.

One kind spirit at least must have looked with favor upon me, for soon the life returned to my members and I was able to stand. The troll was not to be seen. I bethought me of the treasures trolls are said to hoard—gems and strangely made ornaments of precious metals, shields no weapon can pierce and knives that will carve iron. Indeed, the old tales tell of things greater yet, of magical windows through which one can spy where he chooses and rods whose touch blasts like lightning, but I think these must be lies.

With such thoughts in my mind I began to probe about the chamber. In a corner I found the skull of one long dead; it had been split to get the brains out and seemed unlikely to have any special power, so I flung it away. Where it struck the wall it knocked off some of the foulness and I saw something shine. I cleared a spot with the blade of my dirk and discovered that the wall was faced with a

hard substance like polished stone. It had the color of enamelwork, but the tints were within. There was much looking like gold in it and this I tried to pry out with the point of my knife, but the hardest stroke would not penetrate it. The work must have been very fair once; alas, it is cracked in many places now so that the river ooze seeps in.

In the darkest part of the chamber I found the fayman Dokerfins, lying so still I thought him dead. This comforted me a bit, for I had feared that he had leagued with the troll to destroy me, but now I saw that he was taken like myself. Washed all clean by the river water save where the filth of the floor touched him, he was a pale, piteous thing.

I was bending over him hoping to find signs of life when I heard the great roaring voice of the troll behind me; so loud and terrible was it that I wished to stop my ears against it. So that your Supremacy may know the troll's speech I have instructed my scribe to write all his words large; thus your scribe shall apprehend to raise his voice in reading. This trick of clerkmanship I learnt of Dokerfins and like it well though my clerk thinks it gross and mechanical.

Then said he: "THAT ONE CANNOT AID YOU; YOU MUST FACE ME ALONE."

And turning I beheld the troll, but not as I had seen him on the bridge. Here he glowed like the flame of a candle, so that every wrinkle could be seen in the dimness, and his form was that of a great Hunting-devil, but larger yet and higher above the eyes and wearing there a circlet of some metal. He had no sword nor other weapon, nor wore he armor.

I spoke to him boldly, saying, "I do not fear to face you, but rather think it strange that you who have neither blade nor byrnie should leave me my sword."

"I CARE NOTHING FOR YOUR TOOL OR YOUR HARD SKIN—THEY WILL NOT HELP YOU IN THE HUNT WHICH

IS TO COME. BUT FIRST TELL ME WHERE YOU FOUND YOUR COMPANION. HIS IS A STRANGE THOUGHT, OR SEEMED SO WHEN I TOUCHED IT ON THE BRIDGE TODAY."

"He says he fell here from a star, if that moon-talk is aught to you. As to touching minds, I found the head of one whose mind you touched a moment past, but you do not seem to have done that to my friend yet."

I confess, Supremacy, that I was surprised to hear myself speaking of the betattered Dokerfins as my friend, but I find the common occupancy of a troll's den breeds a strange feeling of comradeship.

"WHAT YOU CALL MOON-TALK MEANS MUCH TO ME. HE HAS BEEN BROUGHT FROM OUTWORLD TO THE GAMES IN OUR CITY; IT MAY BE THAT WHEN HE WAKES HE WILL SHOW SPORT. THOUGH I SHALL PERHAPS NEVER HAVE THE POWER OVER HIM I HOLD OVER YOU, YET HE SHALL AT LEAST SEE ME AS I WISH."

"I shall see you as I wish," I told him, "and that is dead." And I drew forth my sword and came at him.

I never blade-reached him. Instead I found myself running breathless down a narrow valley with steep hills to either side. It was night, the air moist and cool in my lungs but smelling of smoke, as when water has been poured on a fire. My armor and all my raiment were gone; instead of my sword I held a length of green sapling, and was minded to toss it away when I noted it hung unnaturally heavy in my hand. Then I knew it was not I but my spirit running, and the sapling was my good sword in truth, though seeming not so in the spirit land; I suppose because it was a new-made blade and not my father's sword I bore.

I turned then to face whatever might come, but saw nothing and heard only a loud humming as of a swarm of flies. Mounted or afoot, it bodes best to hold the high ground, so I began to scramble up the bank on my left. In the gloom I had thought the hill to be of stones and

earth in the common way, but the stones my feet kicked free sometimes clanged like iron or smashed with a noise like crockery. Often too my fingers felt ashes or cloth instead of grass. . . .

. . . When I became aware of my surroundings again, my first thought was that the impact of the water on my eyes had resulted in blindness. It was several minutes before my pupils dilated enough for me to make out objects, and even then I could perceive only bulky shadows. The floor upon which I lay seemed to be of stone, covered with two inches of almost liquid mud. Even now, Professor Beatty, it humiliates me to recall it, but to set the record right let me admit that during my first few moments of consciousness I experienced nausea, a sort of dizziness or giddiness, and panic terror.

When I got myself under control I remembered my pocket illuminator and tried to get it out. My fingers were so swollen and weak that I could not unfasten the buttons of my shirt pocket. If you have ever tried to open a jack-knife when your hands were nearly numb with cold you will know how I felt then.

I was still fumbling with the pocket when a pool of water at the far end of the chamber in which I found myself heaved violently and a creature larger than a man emerged. This, as I learned later, was the *traki*. I will give you a detailed description of him before I close this letter, but for the present I am not going to let you see more of him than I did. All I knew was that the dank and stinking den in which I found myself had now been invaded by some huge creature, whether beast or nonhuman intelligence I had no way of knowing. I felt that I was about to die, to be killed with a horrible violence, and I could no longer turn away, as I have been in the habit of doing all my life, from the sickening thought of my mind's termination and my body's reduction to carrion.

All of us have encountered a telepathic adept at one

time or another, but I certainly did not expect one here, nor had I ever before realized fully the enormous difference between communication with a human Talent and contact with one as alien as the *traki*. A Talent has always given me the impression that someone I could not otherwise sense was whispering in my ear while the supposed Talent sat passive some distance away. When the *traki* sent his signal it was as though a public-address system of enormous amplification and poor fidelity had been planted in the back of my skull, and when he received I felt myself an intelligent insect probed from above by some vast, corrupt intelligence.

“HOW DID YOU ESCAPE?”

The question boomed and screeched until I felt I must go mad. Intellectually I am quite convinced (though I know you are not in complete agreement) that our minds are merely protoplasmic computers of great sophistication—that we have no thought or life except that conferred by matter; yet I have never felt so much in sympathy with the so-called “liberal” cast of thought which holds otherwise as I did then. My body seemed a cast, an almost inert but painful prison from which the essential “I” struggled to escape, and while the essence of my being thus twisted to get away it forced my lips and larynx to say that it did not appear to me that I had escaped, and made my wooden fingers continue clawing at my pocket.

“IT IS WISE OF YOU TO KNOW THAT. WE WHO BROUGHT YOU HERE HOLD ALL THIS WORLD AND YOU CANNOT CROSS THE SEAS OF EMPTINESS AGAIN WITHOUT OUR AID.”

I was too busy at the moment to digest that rather cryptic statement. I had managed to open the pocket at last and was getting out my paralyzer and illuminator. As soon as I was able to fumble off the safety catch on the paralyzer, I lit up the cavern.

I promised you a good description of him earlier, Professor, but now I am not sure I can give you one without sounding like the author of a tenth-century bestiary, and

no description can make you see him as I saw him, crouched in that dank chamber. Four limbs reminiscent of a gorilla's arms, but hairless and shining black, were joined to a shapeless, swagbellied body. The head was more nearly human in appearance, a square face dominated by a great slit mouth like a catfish's. The only clothing, if you can call it that, was a metal band covered with incised hieroglyphics which he wore about his head. I know this description must sound like that of an animal, but that was not the impression he gave. Rather I sensed a monstrous cunning, and most of all that he was old, and tainted with senility.

I had only time for the brief glimpse I have given you when the *traki* seemed to turn in upon himself and become something entirely different. It was as if the entire creature were one of those shapes topologists make which, when turned inside out, become totally unrecognizable. I am still not sure what it was I saw while this inversion was taking place (it lasted not more than half a second) but when it was complete the *traki* had become an elderly man in a white togalike robe. I hope this will not offend you, but his features had a noticeable resemblance to your own; in fact, during the conversation which followed, I sometimes found it difficult in spite of the painful nature of the thought contact to remember that it was not you to whom I spoke—a Professor Beatty who had grown a trifle strange, and more wise and powerful than I could ever hope to be.

“SINCE YOU HAVE FOUND A LIGHT, WHICH I PERCEIVE YOU MUST HAVE STOLEN FROM US AS YOUR KIND IS INCAPABLE OF SHAPING SUCH THINGS, I THINK IT BEST THAT YOU SEE ME AS I REALLY AM.”

I said as well as I could that I thought I had seen the real *traki* when I had first turned on my illuminator.

“YOU CAN NEVER SEE ME OBJECTIVELY, YOUR RACE BEING WITHOUT OBJECTIVE PERCEPTION. THE SHAPE

YOU SEE NOW IS SUBJECTIVELY CORRECT, WHICH IS THE WAY YOU DEFINE REALITY."

I decided that if this last transmission meant anything at all it meant that he was going to deny that he "really" had any shape other than the one I now saw, so I dropped the subject and asked what he intended to do with me.

"I SHOULD KEEP YOU UNTIL THEY COME FOR YOU, BUT THEY HAVE BEEN SLOW IN SENDING OUT MY SUPPLIES FROM THE CITY OF LATE."

His thought seemed hesitant, although the kindly face was as imperturbable as ever. I said that I did not know what city he meant.

"THE CITY TO WHICH YOU WERE TAKEN—THE CITY FROM WHICH YOU ESCAPED. YOU MAY SEE ITS TOWERS FROM THE BRIDGE I GUARD—BUT SUPPLIES ARE SLOW TO COME NOW. FOR SOME TIME I HAVE SUBSISTED ON THE WILD ANIMALS I CATCH UPON THE BRIDGE."

It seemed prudent to divert the conversation, so I asked what kind of animals he meant.

"YOU WILL FIND ONE IN THE CORNER BEHIND YOU."

I looked in the direction he indicated and saw the native who had accepted me as a guest lying there. The gaudy surcoat he wore over his mail was splattered with mud, and his sword lay near his outstretched hand.

"HE WILL NOT GO TO THE CITY. HE IS ONE OF THE WILD ONES WHO LIVE IN THE FORESTS NEAR HERE."

"He is an intelligent being."

"HE IS AN ANIMAL. JUST SUCH CREATURES AS HE I HUNTED IN MY YOUTH LONG AGO. THEY HAVE GROWN MORE CLEVER NOW, AND SOME MAKE HARD SHELLS FOR THEMSELVES, BUT THEY ARE THE SAME."

He paused for a moment, his noble, benevolent face lost in introspection.

"NOW I TAKE THEM AT THE BRIDGE. MANY OF THEM CROSS IN THESE TIMES; PERHAPS THEY WISH TO SCRABBLE THROUGH THE RUBBISH HEAPS OUTSIDE THE CITY, AS I RECALL THEY USED TO DO."

"And you kill such creatures?"

The *traki's* smile was tolerantly amused now, as though a child had asked a particularly naïve question.

"I MUST LIVE, AND THE BRIDGE MUST BE PROTECTED."

My paralyzer was set on high discharge. I depressed the firing stud and held it down until I felt the unit cease to vibrate. The *traki* appeared completely unaffected.

"YOU EMPLOYED YOUR FINGERS WELL WHILE YOU WERE IN OUR CITY, I SEE, THOUGH I CANNOT GUESS WHY ONE OF OUR PEOPLE BUILT A TOY TO DO WHAT WE CAN DO SO EFFORTLESSLY WITH OUR MINDS. DID YOU THINK OUR DEVICE WOULD OPERATE ON ONE OF US?"

Professor, have you ever been so frightened that your knees actually shook? Until then I had always thought that to be a conventional exaggeration; in that slimy crypt I learned that it is not. I admit I became hysterical. I cannot remember just what I said, but I told the *traki* that his precious city did not exist, and that he was only a native devil on a primitive world. I threatened him with all the authority of the Confederation and condemned him, his imaginary city, and his mythical race. I stopped at last only because my teeth were chattering so badly I could no longer speak. When I finished, his smile was as serene as ever.

"NO RACE AND NO CITY? WHO BROUGHT YOU HERE? WHO BUILT THE FORTRESS YOU SEE ABOUT YOU? ITS WALLS ARE THICKER THAN THIS CHAMBER IS WIDE, AND THE MECHANISM YOU SEE ABOUT YOU CAN BLAST SUCH FLYING CITIES AS BROUGHT YOU HERE BACK TO THE ELEMENTAL DUST."

Something about the creature so compelled belief that I was forced to look about me. The cave was still empty except for the *traki*, the unconscious native, and myself; it reeked with the ferment of stagnant river water and rotting organic matter. It was only then that I understood that unshakable calm which gave the *traki* his atmosphere of invulnerable power. Call it dementia, psychosis, or what-

ever madness you like, he had lost touch with reality—I think long ago.

With more restraint than I would have thought myself capable of a moment before, I said, “Why is the floor of this room covered with mud?”

“THE FLOOR IS PAVED WITH TILES IN A PATTERN COMPLEX BEYOND YOUR UNDERSTANDING.”

I dropped my discharged paralyzer and flung a handful of the slime at him. I believe I shouted, “Look! Mud!” as I threw it.

It struck his white robe and vanished.

It did not slide off, or disintegrate in a puff of dust or fire, or fade away. It was and was not, disappearing instantly as though it had never existed.

I am afraid I lost control completely then. I scooped up another handful of the filth and rushed at him to rub it in his face. His face had the consistency of smoke. Momentum carried me through the complete patriarchal figure until I collided with something solid behind it. I ran my hands over it several times before I realized what I had struck. It was the ape-limbed bulk of the *traki* as I had first seen him.

“YES, IT IS I.”

My self-confidence returned. This was not the eye-of-the-storm feeling I had had earlier—I was my own man again, and joyfully, confidently glad of it.

The *traki* had not moved a muscle during the time I had been touching him.

“YOU ARE CORRECT. WHAT YOU CALL MY VOLUNTARY MOTOR SYSTEM HAS BEEN IMMOBILIZED, TEMPORARILY, BY YOUR WEAPON.”

I took a step backward and found myself addressing the white-robed illusion again. “Since you are the most expert telepathic liar I have ever met,” I said, “I am not going to ask you whether or not it would be possible for me to swim out of the beaver lodge, or whatever it is. Excuse me.”

"IT IS QUITE FEASIBLE. HOWEVER, YOU MUST GO QUICKLY. ALREADY I CAN FEEL LIFE IN MY BODY AGAIN. I WILL EXPLAIN YOUR ABSENCE TO YOUR FRIEND."

The illusion of a man smiled with only the slightest hint of malice and waved gracefully toward the unconscious native.

In my momentary triumph I had completely forgotten the poor barbarian. I am not a particularly strong swimmer, Professor; I knew that it would be suicidal folly for me to attempt to escape into the river carrying him, but there seemed to be nothing else to do. In my heart I knew it meant death for us both. I had begun to pick him up when my eyes fell on his sword lying in the ooze. I picked that up instead.

It was as long as a wrecking bar and nearly as heavy; brutal, primitive, capable of slaughtering anything that came within its four-foot range.

"You tell me the solution," I said. "How can he and I leave here alive? Think, because if you cannot tell me how, I intend to kill you with this."

"THERE IS NO BETTER WAY."

He paused and I could feel him probing my mind harder than he had ever done previously.

"YOU WILL NOT KILL ME. THE SLAYER IS NOT IN YOU. YOU HAVE BEEN TAUGHT ALL YOUR SHORT LIFE THAT THERE EXISTS NO GREATER CRIME THAN TAKING THE LIFE OF AN INTELLIGENCE. EVEN WHEN YOU CAME TO THIS WORLD WHERE DEATH COMES SO OFTEN, YOU BROUGHT ONLY A WEAPON WHICH DOES NOT KILL. AND I AM WITHOUT DEFENSE."

I raised the sword for a blow, but as I did I realized that the *traki* was right. My arm shook and my stomach was a writhing knot. In my imagination I could hear the hiss of that life-defiling blade, feel the tug and release as it clove the vertebrae and the gushing, sticky bath of hot blood; worst of all I knew in anticipation the haunting sense of uncleanness, of my own self-condemnation, life-

long, without hope of absolution. I wished that it were I who stood in such danger of dissolution, and I lost consciousness.

. . . When I reached the hilltop there was more light, though no moon shone. I looked about me and to one side saw points of light, undying sparks, as though a mountain stood there, and many men with torches scaled its sides. To my other hand I could see starlight on water and I knew, without knowing how I knew, that it was the river and safety upon the farther side. All about were the low, steep hills.

I could see no pursuers, but the humming noise waxed ever louder and I feared it without knowing why. I do not believe, Supremacy, that I would have felt so in the country of men; in the spirit land some enchantment draws away a warrior's blood, leaving a cold juice supporting life but not valor.

I was about to run again when I spied something glittering at my feet. It was a piece of red glass—such stuff as the priests use to form pictures in the windows of temples. It was broken and useless; yet before I could reflect on what I did I had snatched it up and thrust it among other such litter in a bag of knotted grass I had slung about my shoulders. I cannot tell why I did so foolish a thing or why I felt so vain about it, like a country wench with a new ribbon.

A night fog was coming up from the river now and filling the valleys. Though it brought forth foul odors from the soil at my feet, I blessed it, knowing it would conceal me.

The hills were lower and the fog thicker as I fled from valley to valley and I knew the river must be close by, but every breath burned in my chest and my steps stumbled. The roaring of the blood in my ears was so loud that I did not hear another running in the valley I crossed until he was nearly upon me. He was naked as I, and his

long hair hung down in a filthy mat, but I would have kissed him as a brother had there been time, so happy was I to see a human face in that grim land.

He shouted to me—words I had never heard before, yet they were as clear to me as West Speech—“This way! You are lost. Follow me!”

He led me through a narrow crevice in the hills, which I had passed without seeing a moment before. On the other side the ground sloped cleanly down to the river and I could see the long white arch of a bridge that spanned it. We were almost upon it before I saw that it was the bridge of the troll, and then I knew fear indeed, and would have turned back had not my companion gripped me by the arm.

“A troll watches this bridge,” I said, but the clear words I formed in West Speech issued from my lips as guttural gruntings. He seemed to understand, however, and pointed to a low strong-house set almost at the water’s edge.

“He is there, but he cares nothing for us. He is a sky watcher. See the Eye?”

I looked again and saw that there was a great eye of metal lace above the strong-house; it turned slowly as though it searched for something, but its gaze was always toward the stars. Then the bridge was filled with light and the humming noise grew to a roar.

We ran faster than ever then; there was just time enough to get clear of the bridge and scramble up a little rise on the other side before they were upon us.

I halted there. We had run before them as vermin run; now I, at least, would stand as a man and a West Lands warrior should. My companion mewed with fright, but I heard laughter also and it was the fell laughter of trolls.

They were coming toward us faster than any beast could bear them, mounted on shining things which roared without pause and whose single eyes glared with the yellow light I had seen. They halted at the foot of the knoll on

which we stood and the roar of their mounts subsided to a murmur. The faces of trolls are not as the faces of men, yet I could see the triumph on every face and I recall thinking that thus the faces of men must look to a hunted beast who turns to make his stand.

One of the trolls dismounted then, and my gaze was drawn to him. He was larger than any forest devil and the muscles stood out under his skin and flickered as he moved. Had he been but a beast he would have been such as to chill the heart of the boldest hunter, but he was no mere animal. His eyes were of the yellow-green of seacoal fire and blazed more fiercely—level as a man's and filled with terrible wisdom. Strangely wrought weapons hung from his belt, and when I looked upon them, memories that were not mine came rushing into my mind, and I seemed to see naked men and women and children rent to pieces as if by thunderbolts.

By force of will I tore my gaze from them and looked about me lest I be taken from behind; and as I looked the other trolls seemed to fade and become less real, so that I knew they were but the creatures of his art where in truth only his spirit and mine stood alone.

I lifted my green stick as he came toward me. It was a mere wand still to my eyes, but it had an honest weight in my hand and light shone along the bark as though it were steel. Then in an instant all I saw was gone. I stood in the troll's den once more, swaying and grasping my true sword with a weak hand. The troll was before me still, older now, and bereft of the terrible weapons which had dangled from his belt before.

Then he laughed loud and deep, and I was again on the hillock. Scarce able to stand, I lashed his great arm with my wand and it snapped half off; as he grasped me the darkness closed upon me once more as it had on the bridge, but I struck him with the shattered stub of my stick until I knew no more.

When I woke again the troll's cave was better lit than

when I had previously seen it, though light no longer rose from the pool. Instead a great brightness issued from a silver wand no longer than a man's finger which lay in the mud close to Dokerfins. I had seen too much that day to fear anything however strange, and plucking it from the muck, I used its light to search out the hole.

My sword I found in Dokerfins' hand, it and he both drenched in the troll's dark blood; the grim mock-man himself lay not much farther off, all cut about with gaping wounds from which the blood no longer welled. At the first sight I thought it strange to see that the point had never told, but soon I understood all, as you, Supremacy, wiser than ever I, no doubt do now. For when Dokerfins awoke he was as one deep in drink or drug, babbling and unheeding. Then I knew that his body had but fought here the battle my own spirit had won from the troll in the spirit land, and his soul was scarce returned, alone and affrighted, to its proper place. That his untenanted husk could not use my sword's point was thus explained, for the sword's spirit was maimed when it broke in my hand.

From the pool's dimness I knew the day must be fast fading. It would be an evil venture to try to swim from that place in darkness, so taking the circlet the troll had worn and holding the mewling fayman as best I could I dived into the pool to free us or die, as might be. My spirit-broken blade I left to watch the troll rot; who would dare trust such a thing in war?

When I became aware again the sun was full in my face. Oh that blessed sun of Carson!

Can you understand what it meant to me to know I was no longer in that foul abscess under the riverbank? I will not bore you by describing the pleasure of the natives when they found us on the following day. My host—his name is Garth, have I mentioned that before?—had killed the *traki* in what he calls "a great spirit

fight" which I take to mean that it was a sort of contest of wills as well as a physical battle, which with the *traki* I can well believe. Even knowing that the life of an intelligent being has been deliberately extinguished by him, I cannot feel the repulsion which perhaps I should, but it does somewhat disturb me that he seems to consider me a sort of squire or assistant in what he believes to have been a very creditable deed. At least it has given me useful prestige with the natives.

Now for the really amazing part of this adventure of mine. Garth brought back the metal circlet the *traki* had worn. When I examined it I found that the inscription on it is in characters similar to those found on Ceta II. The same is true of the carvings on the bridge. I thought the poor *traki*'s talk of a great city madness, and so it was, no doubt; but there exist shades of derangement. One is to believe in the reality of things wholly fictitious. Another, very characteristic of the old, is to hold in the mind's present the shadows of the now-gone-forever. What might we not have learned from the *traki* had not Garth killed it?

Yours for learning,
Morton M. Finch, Ph.D.

The cold river water seated Dokerfins' spirit in him aright while it washed the troll's blood from his skin and garments, so that when we reached the grassy bank at last he knew not how he came there and I must needs tell him all that had occurred and of his help in the battle, though I misdoubt he understood. The servants tell me that since that time he speaks a strange tongue abed of nights and beats with his arms upon the sleeping furs as a man kills snakes with a staff; no doubt the troll's spirit often troubles him in dreams, as it sometimes does mine.

The silver wand of light I gave him as a reward, for he swore that it was his. Doubtless he came upon it in the troll's cave.

The coronet the troll wore, which I took from his brow with my own hand, I send to you by the courier who bears this letter. It is a fair thing; but I would, if I dared, advise you, Supremacy, against wearing it—though it will fit a man, for it became less in compass as I drew it from the troll's head, by what power I know not. It is a fell thing still, and made the world grow strange when I wore it, and all men seem lower to me than beasts. I was ill and dizzy when I snatched it off.

Such is the tale of my travels thus far. I am proud that the glory of the West Lands is enhanced in Jana since the death of the troll. Dokerfins, whom I bore for mercy's sake from the den of the troll, has become a clever friend and useful, his wit good though his thought strange. He is so intent upon digging into old places that I would think him a ghoul if he did not do it with such innocence. He wished mightily to have the troll's crown, though I kept its secret from him, but I think it better far to give it to a stronger mind.

Nammue the scribe hath written this for the Lord Garth, the Son of Garth, and Watcher of the North Marches.

FROM: Prof. John Beatty
Edgemont Inst., Earth

TO: Dr. M.M. Finch
UNworld spcrft MOTH (Reg #387760)

Sorry to be so slow to write, Morton, but I have been busy as ten sub-instructors at theme time doing a new symposium for *Archaeological Worlds*. Some of the people who want to write in this kind of thing are such asses!

About your native, this Garth. Morton, let an old friend warn you; it is always a temptation for someone situated as you are to strike a lofty pose and impress the natives. "Me great magician, come from star in silver boat." And

all that. But, Morton, sooner or later he is bound to discover that you are only flesh, even as he. Don't carry on in such a way that this comes to him as too great a shock; he may turn on you then if you have. Take him into your confidence at times; explain the simpler principles of what you are doing and allow him to make a minor decision at times—whether to camp or go on, which of a group of similar sites to tackle first—that kind of thing. Fear and awe alone will not suffice indefinitely.

Meanwhile, would you please send more detail on the markings and pictures. Rubbings and photographs as soon as you can get them and arrange for civilized mail service. I had to write my article for *Arch. Worlds* (the one that stirred up all this symposium rubbish) on the very sketchy information in your letter; how sketchy it was you will note in the clipping I am having transmitted with this. I gave you full credit, as you will see. It is the paragraph beginning: "I sent an investigator. . ."

Hastily,
J. Beatty

JB/sl

"Philip Latham" is the pen name of Robert S. Richardson, an American astronomer formerly on the staffs of the Mt. Wilson and Palomar Observatories. He was born in Kokomo, Indiana; his wife won't let him say when, but he can remember seeing Halley's Comet the last time around. He is the former holder of the UCLA record in the 100-yard dash—101 yards in 9.8 seconds (he was set back a yard for jumping the gun). After about twenty-five years at Mt. Wilson, he joined Griffith Planetarium for a few years, then resigned to devote himself to writing. He is not retired. ("Just try to retire and make your living as a free-lance writer!")

THE DIMPLE IN DRACO

By Philip Latham

There was never any doubt when quitting time came to the Institute for Cosmological Physics, Bill Backus reflected. Promptly at 4:53 the women all started heading for the powder room, whence shortly thereafter came the sound of water in turbulence. It was one of the zero points in this uneasy world.

For the third time he reached for the telephone and for the third time hesitated. It was 4:57 now. The girl at the switchboard always got sore if you kept her after five o'clock. Oh, well, the hell with her. He needed help. He seized the phone.

"Two-seven, please."

No answer . . . no answer . . . no . . .

"MacCready," came a noncommittal voice.

"Mac, this is Bill."

"Bill! It's so good to hear your voice!"

"Listen, Mac, I've got something down here in the measuring room I think will interest you."

"So's my wife. She's probably mixing it now."

"I'd like your opinion very much. Shouldn't take ten minutes."

One . . . two . . . three . . .

"All right. See you."

A few minutes later MacCready sauntered into the measuring room, hoisted one leg over a corner of the

bench that ran along the wall, and applied a match to his pipe. When the tobacco was going to his satisfaction, he folded his arms and gazed expectantly at Bill.

"Here I am. Interest me."

Bill indicated the Toepfer measuring engine beside him.

"Plate's on there. Got it last week with the prime focus spectrograph. Six-hour exposure in the second order blue. I nearly froze. Coldest night in the memory of man—"

"You don't look so good," MacCready remarked.

"Maybe that's because I don't feel so good," Bill said. He rose and began pacing the floor. "Take a look at the plate, will you, and tell me what you think."

"But your feet seem better," MacCready added encouragingly.

"Yeah, they are better. Now will you look at the plate?"

MacCready laid aside his pipe and peered into the eyepiece.

"Nice spectrum," he said. "Real sharp lines."

"But *what* lines?" Bill cried. "I've been working on those lines for three days. Can't identify a single one." He ran his fingers through his back hair. "It's driving me crazy."

"Well, d'you have to get so dramatic about it?" MacCready asked. He gave the focusing screw a touch. "What is this famous object, anyhow?"

"Well, you see, that's what I don't know."

"*You don't know!*" MacCready stared at him. "Do you realize how much it cost the Institute to get this plate? Do you know that we have seventeen applications on file for time at this instrument? Applications from highly qualified individuals with no suspicion of insanity in their background. And then you take our giant eye, as the newspapers are pleased to call it, and bang away at any old—"

"Mac, shut up." Bill lit a cigarette. "I was after NGC 2146, that way-north nebula in Cepheus, I guess it is. This new night assistant was on that evening. Poor guy got all

balled up. My fault as much as his. You wouldn't believe it possible but he got set on the wrong side of the pole. Landed me over in Draco somewhere. I thought the setting looked kind of funny—"

"Couldn't you tell from your star field?"

"Well, I should, but the fields weren't so different. Anyhow—"

"—anyhow you goofed but you got *something*," MacCready finished for him. "By any chance would you have the vaguest notion what it is? Radio source? Interloper? QSG? Haro-Luyten object? Humason-Zwicky star? Have I left out anything?"

"All I know, it's got a spectrum nobody ever saw before."

"Then what are you griping about?" MacCready demanded. "That's *good*. Maybe this object's got the world's biggest red shift. You've probably dredged up some lines buried thousands of angstroms deep in the ultraviolet."

"Nope, won't suit, Mac. Remember the Houston meeting? It was agreed we're living in an exploding universe with a q -zero of 2.5. This thing's way off the beam—much too bright."

"You know what your problem is, Bill?" MacCready was suddenly serious. "You've always got to relate to somebody else. You're afraid to take your results just as they stand."

"But there must be an answer," Bill protested. "What else can it be?"

MacCready shrugged and fell to scrutinizing the plate again.

"Wouldn't surprise me if the answer's staring us right in the face," he said. "Only it's so simple we can't see it."

He moved the plate carriage a bit.

"Now you take these three big lines I see here. . . Why couldn't the one on my left be that HeII line at—what is it?—1640? And the one in the middle—"

"Oh, my gawd, don't you think I've been all through

that search list?" Bill said wearily. "None of 'em's any good. I've tried a bunch of hundred-to-one shots. They're no good either. Nothing fits."

"Too bad." MacCready frowned slightly. "Strange . . . these lines are all in absorption, aren't they?"

"Here's my list of wavelengths," Bill said, handing him a sheet of paper. "They're the means of my measures on the machine and some runs with the electronic line-profile comparator. They ought to be pretty good."

"I'm sure they are," MacCready murmured. He shot a sudden glance at Bill. "You sure you set the grating in the right order spectrum?"

"Mac, I *couldn't* make a mistake like that."

"Congratulations."

There was a long silence broken only by an occasional motor starting up in the parking lot, and the steady rumble of traffic from the boulevard nearby. MacCready was the first to speak.

"After you got this plate, did you take another exposure on a familiar object, same spectrograph—same emulsion—same everything?"

"Yes."

"All right?"

"Yes."

"It was?"

"Yes!" Bill shouted. "In France it's *oui*. In Spanish it's *si*. In Russian it's *da*."

MacCready transferred his attention from the plate to Bill's list of wavelengths.

"You know, these three big lines remind me of something," he muttered. "But I'll confess I haven't the faintest notion what it is."

Bill looked completely deflated. He began pacing the room again, clasping and unclasping his hands behind him. MacCready seemed to have forgotten his existence.

Bill tossed away his cigarette.

"Well, thanks for coming down, Mac. I'd gotten to the

end of my rope. Thought perhaps you could suggest something."

There was no response. Bill paced the floor for another five minutes.

"Well, I've got to go. We're having company tonight."

"Yeah, you run along," MacCready told him. "Leaving myself in a minute . . . just want to check one thing."

Bill was nearly out the door when MacCready called suddenly, "Bill."

"Yeah?"

"Call my wife, will you? Tell her I'll be a little late."

Bill had to wait forever before he got a break in the traffic at Los Robles. Why did he keep coming this way? he asked himself. There was no answer. You saw an opening—you took a deep breath—uttered a prayer—and if you were lucky you made it.

Turning north toward Hillhurst he saw that the signal at Cordova was going to be red, as usual. The signal was always red at Cordova. In the past five years he must have crossed Cordova going north at least two thousand times. There had been just three times by actual count when he had hit the green light. His confidence in the theory of probability had been badly shaken.

Through the tangle of varicolored lights, leering Santa Clauses, liquor advertisements, and five-pointed stars* of Bethlehem, Bill perceived a huge sign looming ahead, VILLAGE MARKET. *Click!* What was he supposed to do? What was he supposed to—Helen's grocery list, of course. Good old autohypnosis.

Within the Village Market the aisles were abustle with hausfrauen pushing metal carts, their vacant gaze reflecting the trancelike state induced by the sight of merchandise in profusion. Bill took a cart himself and went to work on Helen's grocery list, tracking down the various

*Stars do not have points sticking out of them. Stars are spherical.

items by the awkward process of taking them in the order written. Occasionally when it seemed like a good idea he tossed in an extra item or two. How often he had come in for a fifty-nine-cent piece of cheese and departed laden down with a lot of junk he never originally had the slightest intention of buying. But who were we? Mere puppets moving at the bidding of the vast formless things that operate these huge pleasure domes of produce.

Helen wrote her shopping items in a code that might have baffled the best brains in Interpol. This time, however, it had been pretty clear sailing. He now had in the cart the "6 nce rd rpe toms" and the "2 pkes lmn jlo," and finally had reached the last item, "2 dz Ye Olde Eng Muffs." This sounded almost too easy. On any rational distribution system Olde English Muffins could hardly be anywhere else but in the bread section. He glanced at the Store Guide. Bread? . . . Bread? . . . Section 5. Where was he? Way over in 21 among Frozen Desserts and Mouth Wash. He deftly changed course and started bearing toward smaller numbers. 2 . . . 3 . . . 4 . . . 6 . . . 7. No 5! Must have missed it. Scan more carefully now . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . 4 . . . 6 . . . 7. Number 5 was absolutely and positively missing.

He looked around for a clerk but there was none in sight. Neither was there any bread. He explored one aisle after another as fast as traffic permitted. There were shelves and bins loaded with pickles and olives, wieners and knockwurst, yoghurt and horseradish. But no Olde English Muffins. Well, he couldn't spend the evening pushing a metal cart around the Village Market. He picked up a box of Bixmix and headed for Checkers' Row.

The porch lights were already burning when he turned in the driveway. That was bad. It meant that even now company was ominously near. Closing the garage door, he noticed the stars of Auriga rising over the mountains to the north. How odd Capella looked, reddened al-

most to the color of Mars by the smoke and haze. Auriga had always been his favorite constellation. All the constellations had a background rich in mythological lore—except Auriga. Auriga was known as “the Charioteer.” But where were his chariot and horse? Nobody knew. The stars of Auriga were meaningless.

“Well, where have *you* been?” Helen demanded, as he staggered into the kitchen with his load of groceries. She was a small woman whose early blond prettiness was beginning to show signs of wear under the ceaseless battering of suburbia: the Garden Club, the Art League, WAGS,* etc., etc.

“Where do you think?” Bill growled. “Picking up the stuff you forgot.”

She started sorting over the groceries. “It shouldn’t have taken—*Where’s the muffins?*”

“Couldn’t find ’em. Got Mixbix instead.”

“Why couldn’t you find them?”

“Hidden too well, I guess.”

“Why, they’re right by the bread.”

“Couldn’t find the bread either.”

“Did you ask a clerk?”

“Didn’t see any to ask.”

“But there’s always—”

“It’s the truth!” he cried. “What do you want me to do? Lie to you?”

“Oh, do as you like. I don’t care.” With a resigned air she began putting away the various items. “Now hurry and change your clothes. They’ll be here any minute.”

He was scarcely halfway up the stairs when she came dashing after him. “Your feet! What’s happened to your feet?”

“Don’t know.” He shrugged. “They just didn’t hurt when I got up this morning.”

“What did I tell you,” Helen told him triumphantly.

*Women Against Smog.

"You wouldn't go to see Dr. Levine. He's only the best orthopedic specialist in town but of course you know more than he does. If I hadn't made an appointment for you, you'd *never* have gone. Now admit it. Those arch supporters did help, didn't they?"

"If I'd worn those arch supporters one more day I wouldn't be ambulant now."

"But they must have done you *some* good." She regarded him with despair. "If it wasn't the arch supporters, what was it?"

Bill did not answer immediately. He leaned against the railing, gazing thoughtfully at some of Helen's abstract artwork on the opposite wall.

"Last night," he declared solemnly, "my feet were healed."

"Healed?"

He nodded. "What they called a miracle in the old days."

"So it was a miracle and not the arch supporters?"

"Why couldn't I be cured by a miracle?" he demanded angrily. "Other people are. People with their stomach and lungs eaten up by cancer. Suddenly they're all right. They rise from their bed and walk. They've got sworn medical testimony to prove it."

Helen hesitated uncertainly. "But you're not the miracle type."

"What's the matter with me?"

"I always supposed you had to be kind of on the saintly side."

He dismissed her objection with a wave of his hand.

"Merely a technicality." He closed his eyes for a few moments as if in meditation. "I hadn't intended to say anything about it, but for your information, I was healed by an angel who appeared in my room last night."

"So that was what I heard going on in there."

"She appeared over by the filing cabinet," Bill continued. "She was surrounded by a golden halo that il-

luminated the whole room. I thought I'd forgotten to turn the lights out at first." His voice dropped almost to a whisper. "She was no ordinary angel, either."

"It's so nice you got special attention."

"She had the most beautiful golden-red hair." There was a faraway look in his eyes. "Her name was Edna."

"No last name?"

"Naturally I was somewhat startled at the sudden appearance of this apparition. 'What do you want?' I asked, in a voice that trembled.

"'Have no fear, William,' she replied, approaching the bed. 'I have come to heal you. Not to harm you.'"

"'To heal me?' I whispered.

"'Move over, William,' she said, 'so that I may touch you.'"

"So I shoved over in the bed a little—"

His narrative was interrupted by the flash of headlights and the sound of a car pulling up in the driveway.

"There they are now!" Helen exclaimed. "And here I've been wasting my time talking to you about your feet and this red-headed angel."

Bill slowly mounted the stairs, his lips continuing to move inaudibly. In his room he stood for a while inspecting the place where he had recounted Edna's appearance. From the lower depths came the shriek of feminine voices raised in greeting interspersed with occasional masculine rumbles. Evidently the Nortons had picked up Bernice and Clem on the way over. Clem Tuttle was in advertising and Jim Norton was an agent for Inertia Acres, a real estate project for the retired. Bernice Tuttle and Dottie Norton were among his favorite wives, but he found it hard to work up much enthusiasm for their husbands. It was while struggling into his shirt that it occurred to him that all the people they saw were friends of Helen's. Outside the office he had no friends.

Bill came downstairs, said hello all around, and made a quick exit to the kitchen to mix the cocktails. He put

too much vodka into the martinis and had to drink a couple of glasses to provide more room for the vermouth. Back in the living room he had hoped to strike up a conversation with Bernice or Dottie, but the situation was hopeless. The girls were in ecstasy over Helen's Christmas tree, which was not a Christmas tree at all but a dead limb salvaged from the oak in the back yard. She had adorned its gnarled branches with blue and silver balls, with here and there an aerodynamically inadequate angel in flight. Since the girls were engaged, he was thrown upon the company of Jim and Clem, who were discussing the situation that had developed at Anoakia U., their old alma mater. It appeared that the quality of the faculty and student body had been steadily deteriorating since their departure in '41. Since Bill had never attended Anoakia U., and never had had much use for the place anyhow, he found the conversation less than fascinating. He sipped his cocktail, and moodily contemplated Bernice Tuttle's knees.

As if from a great distance he heard Helen calling him. "Bill, telephone." He went into the hall, taking his glass with him. As he expected, it was Mac.

"Bill, what's your dispersion on that plate?"

"Hundred and ninety angstroms per millimeter."

"What kind of plate was it?"

"Ila-O, baked. Why?"

"Just checking, was all."

"Say, Mac, I explained to your wife it was my fault about getting home late."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I'm still at the office."

"Still at the office!" Bill went cold sober in an instant. "Mac, what do you know?"

"Nothing I want to talk about yet. But I think I'm gaining on it."

"Give me a ring—" But he had hung up.

Bill's mind was racing. Mac would never have called unless he was on to something big. A "critical" object that

might settle the cosmological controversy once and for all. He gulped down the rest of his drink and casually strolled back to the living room. How petty they all were. Jim and Clem were thoroughly agreed that autonomy was not for Anoakia U. The girls were deploring the Santa Claus situation that had developed at the various department stores around town. That Santa Claus at the Bon Marché, they must have got him from central casting! Did you get a whiff of his breath? And the way he talked to the children! Honestly, you'd have thought he was playing King Lear!

The soggy part of a Hillhurst evening came after dinner, when the guests were swollen with food, and the cocktails only a dull memory. There were two ways to endure the time till departure: (1) the men gathered at one end of the room and talked about their automobiles and their children, while the women went into a huddle at the other end and talked about their clothes and their children; or (2) somebody showed color slides of their trip to Hawaii last summer. One hostess had made a valiant attempt to break the pattern by handing out selected passages from Ovid and Chaucer to be read aloud, but some of the men had balked. But a few bold spirits still fought on. When her guests were comfortably relaxed over their coffee and liqueurs, Helen stepped to the center of the room and clapped her hands.

"Now I'm not going to let you sit around all evening," she informed them. "We're going to play a game called Three Answers. One person, called the Grand Inquisitor, asks the questions. The rest of us give the answers. We make up some sort of story and the Grand Inquisitor, by questioning us, tries to find the key to it."

This announcement was followed by a brief silence.

"Sounds like one of these fun things," Clem grunted, knocking the ashes from his cigar.

Jim raised his hand. "Mrs. Chairman, I would like to

nominate my wife for Grand Inquisitor. She can beat any lie detector that was ever invented."

Dottie had a question. "How do we know what answers to give?"

"We answer as a group," Helen said. "The Grand Inquisitor can ask all the questions he likes. But we can only answer in three ways: yes, no, or maybe. I'll explain the details later. Now who'll be Grand Inquisitor?"

"I hereby nominate Bill Backus for G.I.," Clem said.

"Second the motion," Jim said promptly.

"Bill analyzes this deep space stuff all day," Clem said. "Ought to be easy for him."

"I'd *love* to be analyzed by Bill," Dottie cried.

"Well, darling, I guess you're Grand Inquisitor," Helen said. "Now go out in the kitchen and wait there till I call you."

Bill shuffled out to the kitchen, where he began picking at the remains of the turkey. From the front room came snatches of conversation and bursts of stifled laughter, but he was unable to distinguish any words. His mind kept going back to Mac at the office. It was nearly eleven. He had hoped to hear from him by this time if he knew anything exciting. Probably the whole thing had collapsed and Mac was home in bed. He had half a notion to give him a ring when he heard Helen calling him, "All right, you can come now."

Bill strode into the living room trying to assume the grim expression appropriate to a Grand Inquisitor. How to begin this crazy game? Try some questions of a general nature until he got a lead.

"Has Clem landed that brassiere account yet?"

"No," they responded in unison.

"Have Jim and Bernice run off together?"

"No."

"Was it some sort of crime?"

"Yes."

"Was the crime committed in this city?"

"Maybe."

"In this immediate area?"

"Yes."

"Was it a murder?"

"No."

"Something more ghastly?"

"Maybe."

This was tougher than he had anticipated. Why had Helen ever gotten him into this thing? How to proceed? They were gazing at him expectantly . . . gleefully. . .

"Was the person involved a man?"

"No."

"A woman?"

"No."

"An animal, then?"

"No."

No? What on earth . . .? A suspicion began to dawn. *Was it something on earth?*

"Was the victim a creature from outer space?"

"Yes!"

On the trail at last!

"Was it a creature from Mars?"

"No."

"Was it from Venus?"

"No."

"Mercury?"

"Maybe."

Not what he had expected, but keep on.

"Was it from Jupiter? Saturn? Uranus?"

"No! No! No!"

Well . . . there weren't many planets left. With elaborate casualness he inquired, "Did this creature, by any chance, come from Pluto?"

"Yes!" they shrieked.

At last!

"Is this Plutonian creature at present somewhere within the environs of this city?"

"Maybe."

"So you don't know?"

"Maybe."

Perhaps it would help if he knew more about the creature itself.

"Have you seen this creature?"

"Yes."

"Is it larger than man-size?"

"Yes."

"Is this creature affected adversely by the heat?"

"No."

A flash of inspiration.

"Is it in this house right now?"

"Maybe."

They were hedging now.

"Is it in the basement?"

"No."

"The attic?"

"No."

"The refrigerator?"

"No."

"Under the stairway?"

"Maybe."

Relentlessly he pursued the phantom creature over the house. But despite his best efforts it eluded him. He fancied he detected a hint of scorn . . . even contempt . . . in their eyes. Suddenly he recalled Mac's remark: *The answer may be staring us right in the face. Only it's so simple we can't see it.*

Go back . . . see if he had overlooked anything.

"You said this creature is also an inhabitant of Mercury?"

"Maybe."

"Then it is capable of withstanding a high temperature?"

"Yes."

He was groping for the next question when the telephone rang. *Mac!*

"Don't go. Be back in a minute."

It was Mac, all right.

"Well, Bill, I think I've got the answer." He sounded more relaxed. "But I'll be darned if I know what it means."

"Let me have it anyhow."

"Remember those three big lines I said reminded me of something? You naturally assumed they were ultraviolet lines Doppler-shifted into the visible. Only you couldn't identify 'em with anything in the UV. Neither could I. Wasted about two hours convincing myself of the fact."

He took about a three count.

"So, since I was all alone, I decided to play a crazy hunch. Bill, do you know what those lines are?"

"How the hell—"

"They're those three big ionized calcium lines in the infrared."

"*Infrared!*"

"This thing's got a velocity of about $0.6c$."

"That wouldn't give so much of a redshift."

"Who said anything about a *redshift*? This is a *violet* shift. Bill, this thing is coming *our way*."

"Get out!"

"Fact!"

"Mac, you can't screw up the whole universe that easy. Why, it contradicts everything we know. Besides, three lines aren't enough. You could force an agreement . . . a pretty good agreement."

"I'm sorry, Bill, but everything else fits, too. Your line at 3929 is 7699 of potassium . . . 4494 is 8806 of magnesium. . ."

"Mac, what does it *mean*?"

"From the geometry of the situation I would say it means there's a dimple in the expanding universe in the direction of Draco."

It was so long before he spoke again that Bill began to wonder if he'd hung up.

"I'm only giving you an answer, Bill. What it means is *your* problem."

Bill found his guests in various stages of relaxation when he returned to the living room. It was hard to get his mind on Hillhurst again.

"I'm afraid it's getting late," Bernice said. "Clem and I have to be up early tomorrow. We're driving to Carmel, you know."

"Oh, don't go," Helen protested.

"It's been such a lovely evening," Dottie told her. "But really—"

"Now wait a minute," Jim boomed, coming from the bathroom. "We've got to put the Grand Inquisitor straight first."

"Sure do," Clem chuckled. "Bill would toss all night."

Jim shook his head regretfully. "Bill, old boy, I'm afraid the game was rigged."

"Rigged?" He had only been half listening.

"You see," Jim went on, "if the last letter in the last word of a question was a vowel we all answered yes. If it was a consonant we answered no. And if it was a W or Y we answered maybe." He grinned. "Get it?"

It took a while.

"So I could have gone on asking questions forever," Bill said slowly. "And you could have gone on giving me answers forever. And I'd never have known any more than in the beginning."

"Afraid that's about the size of it," Jim said. He crunched out his cigar. "Well, Dottie, go get your costly mink. . ."

Bill accompanied his guests to the door, dutifully went through the ritual of parting, and waved as they went down the driveway.

Back in the living room Helen gazed listlessly at the

remains of the hors d'oeuvres and the cigarette trays. "No use cleaning up tonight, I guess." She glanced at Bill standing by the north window. "What's the matter? Aren't you coming to bed?"

"I believe I'll stay down here for a while," he told her.

"I should think you'd be anxious to see your red-headed friend."

"Perhaps I am."

Helen paused at the stairs. "You didn't exactly sparkle tonight, did you?" she remarked. "What was the matter?"

"Tired, I guess."

"Who was it called?"

"MacCready."

"What did he want?"

"Oh . . . nothing."

"Nothing! When he calls after midnight!"

"It was about a dimple in Draco."

"A dimple—"

"Object's headed toward the earth. Everything else is rushing away. Puts a dimple in the universe out in Draco."

"Headed toward the earth! Very fast?"

Bill shrugged. "About six-tenths c—hundred thousand miles a second."

"You mean it's going to hit us?"

"Afraid not. You see, it's quite a ways off."

"How far?"

"Oh, hell, I don't know," he said impatiently. "A billion light-years maybe."

"Well, you don't need to be so disagreeable about it. I can ask, can't I?"

"It's like Job asking the Voice out of the Whirlwind how much torque He's got."

Helen stood without speaking for several moments, then turned and went slowly up the stairs. Bill waited until he heard her door close. Then he switched out the lights and drew the curtains away from the window.

Capella was far above the haze now, shining in the

stars of Auriga with a golden-reddish glow, as bright as the glow of Edna's hair. Suddenly Bill had the most intense sense of identity with Auriga. How lonely he must be up there among all those gods and monsters, the only one without a story. Did the old Charioteer ever ponder the meaning of his stars? If so, what were *his* answers? Or did he bother to ask questions anymore—when the answers had no meaning?

Joanna Russ, born in 1937, attended Cornell and the Yale Drama School, where she got a "totally useless" M.F.A. in playwriting. She was a Westinghouse STS scholar in 1954, with a project on the growth of Aspergillus janus under light of various wavelengths; she has acted in community theater (the Brooklyn Heights Players) and semi-professional groups (the West Broadway Workshop).

The notion of a prehistoric world of barbaric cruelty and splendor, a world closer than ours to the ambiguous beginnings of things, has been explored by Robert E. Howard, Fritz Leiber and Avram Davidson, among others . . . but never like this. Here, in the first two stories of a series, Joanna Russ gives us a new kind of prehistoric hero—not Howard's broad-thewed Conan, not Leiber's bearded Fafhrd, nor even Davidson's learned Virgil, but Alyx—a gray-eyed, quiet, black-haired young woman.

I GAVE HER SACK AND SHERRY

By Joanna Russ

Many years ago, long before the world got into the state it is in today, young women were supposed to obey their husbands; but nobody knows if they did nor not. In those days they wore their hair piled foot upon foot on top of their heads. Along with such weights they would also carry water in two buckets at the ends of a long pole; this often makes you slip. One did; but she kept her mouth shut. She put the buckets down on the ground and with two sideward kicks—like two dance steps, flirt with the left foot, flirt with the right—she emptied the both of them. She watched the water settle into the ground. Then she swung the pole upon her shoulder and carried them home. She was only just seventeen. Her husband had made her do it. She swung the farm door open with her shoulder and said:

SHE: Here is your damned water.

HE: Where?

SHE: It is beneath my social class to do it and you know it.

HE: You have no social class; only I do, because I am a man.

SHE: *I* wouldn't do it if you were a—

(Here follows something very unpleasant.)

HE: Woman, go back with those pails. Someone is coming tonight.

SHE: Who?

HE: That's not your business.

SHE: Smugglers.

HE: Go!

SHE: Go to hell.

Perhaps he was somewhat afraid of his tough little wife. She watched him from the stairs or the doorway, always with unvarying hatred; that is what comes of marrying a wild hill girl without a proper education. Beatings made her sullen. She went to the water and back, dissecting him every step of the way, separating blond hair from blond hair and cracking and sorting his long limbs. She loved that. She filled the farm water barrel, rooted the maidservant out of the hay and slapped her, and went indoors with her head full of pirates. She spun, she sewed, she shelled, ground, washed, dusted, swept, built fires all that day and once, so full of her thoughts was she that she savagely wrung and broke the neck of an already dead chicken.

Near certain towns, if you walk down to the beach at night, you may see a very queer sight: lights springing up like drifting insects over the water and others answering from the land, and then something bobbing over the black waves to a blacker huddle drawn up at the very margin of the sand. They are at their revenues. The young wife watched her husband sweat in the kitchen. It made her gay to see him bargain so desperately and lose. The maid complained that one of the men had tried to do something indecent to her. Her mistress watched silently from the shadows near the big hearth and more and more of what she saw was to her liking. When the last man was gone she sent the maid to bed, and while collecting and cleaning the glasses and the plates like a proper wife, she said:

"They rooked you, didn't they!"

"Hold your tongue," said her husband over his shoulder. He was laboriously figuring his book of accounts

with strings of circles and crosses and licking his finger to turn the page.

"The big one," she said, "what's his name?"

"What's it to you?" he said sharply. She stood drying her hands in a towel and looking at him. She took off her apron, her jacket and her rings; then she pulled the pins out of her black hair. It fell below her waist and she stood for the last time in this history within a straight black cloud.

She dropped a cup from her fingers, smiling at him as it smashed. They say actions speak louder. He jumped to his feet; he cried, "What are you doing!" again and again in the silent kitchen; he shook her until her teeth rattled.

"Leaving you," she said.

He struck her. She got up, holding her jaw. She said, "You don't see anything. You don't know anything."

"Get upstairs," he said.

"You're an animal," she cried, "you're a fool," and she twisted about as he grasped her wrist, trying to free herself. They insist, these women, on crying, on making demands, and on disagreeing about everything. They fight from one side of the room to the other. She bit his hand and he howled and brought it down on the side of her head. He called her a little whore. He stood blocking the doorway and glowered, nursing his hand. Her head was spinning. She leaned against the wall and held her head in both hands. Then she said:

"So you won't let me go."

He said nothing.

"You can't keep me," she said, and then she laughed; "no, no, you can't," she added, shaking her head, "you just can't." She looked before her and smiled absently, turning this fact over and over. Her husband was rubbing his knuckles.

"What do you think you're up to," he muttered.

"If you lock me up, I can't work," said his wife and then, with the knife she had used for the past half year

to pare vegetables, this woman began to saw at her length of hair. She took the whole sheaf in one hand and hacked at it. Her husband started forward. She stood arrested with her hands involved in her hair, regarding him seriously, while without taking his eyes off her, running the tip of his tongue across his teeth, he groped behind the door—he knew there is one thing you can always do. His wife changed color. Her hands dropped with a tumbled rush of hair, she moved slowly to one side, and when he took out from behind the door the length of braided hide he used to herd cattle, when he swung it high in the air and down in a snapping arc to where she—not where she was; where she had been—this extraordinary young woman had leapt half the distance between them and wrested the stock of the whip from him a foot from his hand. He was off balance and fell; with a vicious grimace she brought the stock down short and hard on the top of his head. She had all her wits about her as she stood over him.

But she didn't believe it. She leaned over him, her cut black hair swinging over her face; she called him a liar; she told him he wasn't bleeding. Slowly she straightened up, with a swagger, with a certain awe. *Good lord!* she thought, looking at her hands. She slapped him, called his name impatiently, but when the fallen man moved a little—or she fancied he did—a thrill ran up her spine to the top of her head, a kind of soundless chill, and snatching the vegetable knife from the floor where she had dropped it, she sprang like an arrow from the bow into the night that waited, all around the house, to devour.

Trees do not pull up their roots and walk abroad, nor is the night ringed with eyes. Stones can't speak. Novelty tosses the world upside down, however. She was terrified, exalted, and helpless with laughter. The tree on either side of the path saw her appear for an instant out of the darkness, wild with hurry, straining like a statue.

Then she zigzagged between the tree trunks and flashed over the lip of the cliff into the sea.

In all the wide headland there was no light. The ship still rode at anchor, but far out, and clinging to the line where the water met the air like a limpet or a moray eel under a rock, she saw a trail of yellow points appear on the face of the sea: one, two, three, four. They had finished their business. Hasty and out of breath, she dove under the shadow of that black hull, and treading the shifting seas that fetched her up now and again against the ship's side that was too flat and hard to grasp, she listened to the noises overhead: creaking, groans, voices, the sound of feet. Everything was hollow and loud, mixed with the gurgle of the ripples. She thought, *I am going to give them a surprise*. She felt something form within her, something queer, dark, and hard, like the strangeness of strange customs, or the blackened face of the goddess Chance, whose image set up at crossroads looks three ways at once to signify the crossing of influences. Silently this young woman took off her leather belt and wrapped the buckleless end around her right hand. With her left she struck out for the ship's rope ladder, sinking into the water under a mass of bubbles and crosscurrents eddying like hairs drawn across the surface. She rose some ten feet farther on. Dripping seawater like one come back from the dead, with eighteen inches of leather crowned with a heavy brass buckle in her right hand, her left gripping the rope and her knife between her teeth (where else?) she began to climb.

The watch—who saw her first—saw somebody entirely undistinguished. She was wringing the water out of her skirt. She sprang erect as she caught sight of him, burying both hands in the heavy folds of her dress.

“We-ell!” said he.

She said nothing, only crouched down a little by the rail. The leather belt, hidden in her right—her stronger—hand, began to stir. He came closer—he stared—he leaned

forward—he tapped his teeth with his forefinger. “Eh, a pussycat!” he said. She didn’t move. He stepped back a pace, clapped his hands and shouted; and all at once she was surrounded by men who had come crack! out of nothing, sprung in from the right, from the left, shot up from the deck as if on springs, even tumbling down out of the air. She did not know if she liked it.

“Look!” said the watch, grinning as if he had made her up.

Perhaps they had never seen a woman before, or perhaps they had never seen one bare-armed, or with her hair cut off, or sopping wet. They stared as if they hadn’t. One whistled, indrawn between his teeth, long and low. “What does she want?” said someone. The watch took hold of her arm and the sailor who had whistled raised both hands over his head and clasped them, at which the crowd laughed.

“She thinks we’re hot!”

“She wants some, don’t you, honey?”

“Ooh, kiss me, kiss me, dearie!”

“I want the captain!” she managed to get out. All around crowded men’s faces: some old, some young, all very peculiar to her eyes with their unaccustomed whiskers, their chins, their noses, their loose collars. It occurred to her that she did not like them a bit. She did not exactly think they were behaving badly, as she was not sure how they ought to behave, but they reminded her uncannily of her husband, of whom she was no longer at all afraid. So when the nearest winked and reached out two hands even huger than the shadow of hands cast on the deck boards, she kicked him excruciatingly in the left knee (he fell down), the watch got the belt buckle round in a circle from underneath (up, always up, especially if you’re short), which gave him a cut across the cheek and a black eye; this leaves her left hand still armed and her teeth, which she used. It’s good to be able to do several things at once. Forward, halfway from hori-

zon to zenith, still and clear above the black mass of the rigging and the highest mast, burned the constellation of the Hunter, and under that—by way of descent down a monumental fellow who had just that moment sprung on board—frothed and foamed a truly fabulous black beard. She had just unkindly set someone howling by trampling on a tender part (they were in good spirits, most of them, and fighting one another in a heap; she never did admit later to all the things she did in that melee) when the beard bent down over her, curled and glossy as a piece of the sea. Children never could resist that beard. Big one looked at little one. Little one looked at big one. Stars shone over his head. He recognized her at once, of course, and her look, and the pummeling she had left behind her, and the cracked knee, and all the rest of it. “So,” he said, “you’re a fighter, are you!” He took her hands in his and crushed them, good and hard; she smiled brilliantly, involuntarily.

“I’ll take you on,” he said. “You’ve got style.”

When she fenced with him (she insisted on fencing with him) she worked with a hard, dry persistence that surprised him. “Well, I have got your —— and you have got my teaching,” he said philosophically at first, “whatever you may want with *that*,” but on the second day out she slipped on soapsuds on the tilting deck (“Give it up, girl, give it up!”), grabbed the fellow who was scrubbing away by the ankles, and brought him down—screaming—on top of the captain. Blackbeard was not surprised that she had tried to do this, but he was very surprised that she had actually brought it off. “Get up,” he told her (she was sitting where she fell and grinning). She pulled up her stockings. He chose for her a heavier and longer blade, almost as tall as she (“Huh!” she said, “it’s about time”), and held out the blade and the scabbard, one in each hand, both at the same time. She took them, one in each hand, both at the same time.

“By God, you’re ambidextrous!” he exclaimed.

"Come on!" she said.

That was a blade that was a blade! She spent the night more or less tangled up in it, as she never yet had with him. Things were still unsettled between them. Thus she slept alone in his bed, in his cabin; thus she woke alone, figuring she still had the best of it. Thus she spurned a heap of his possessions with her foot (the fact that she did not clean the place up in womanly fashion put him to great distress), writhed, stretched, turned over and jumped as a crash came from outside. There was a shuttered window above the bed that gave on the deck. Someone—here she slipped on her shift and swung open the shutter—was bubbling, shouting, singing, sending mountains of water lolloping across the boards. Someone (here she leaned out and twisted her head about to see) naked to the waist in a barrel was taking a bath. Like Poseidon. He turned, presenting her with the black patches under his armpits streaming water, with his hair and beard running like black ink.

"Hallooo!" he roared. She grunted and drew back, closing the shutter. She had made no motion to get dressed when he came in, but lay with her arms under her head. He stood in the doorway, tucking his shirt into his trousers; then this cunning man said, "I came to get something" (looking at her sideways), and diffidently carried his wet, tightly curled beard past her into a corner of the cabin. He knelt down and burrowed diligently.

"Get what?" said she. He didn't answer. He was rummaging in a chest he had dragged from the wall; now he took out of it—with great tenderness and care—a woman's nightdress, worked all in white lace, which he held up to her, saying:

"Do you want this?"

"No," she said, and meant it.

"But it's expensive," he said earnestly, "it is, look," and coming over to sit on the edge of the bed, he showed the dress to her, for the truth was it was so expensive

that he hadn't meant to give it to her at all, and only offered it out of—well, out of—

"I don't want it," she said, a little sharply.

"Do you like jewelry?" he suggested hopefully. He had not got thoroughly dried and water was dripping unobtrusively from the ends of his hair onto the bed; he sat patiently holding the nightgown out by the sleeves to show it off. He said ingenuously, "Why don't you try it on?"

Silence.

"It would look good on you," he said. She said nothing. He laid down the nightgown and looked at her, bemused and wondering; then he reached out and tenderly touched her hair where it hung down to the point of her small, grim jaw.

"My, aren't you little," he said.

She laughed. Perhaps it was being called little, or perhaps it was being touched so very lightly, but this farm girl threw back her head and laughed until she cried, as the saying is, and then:

"Tcha! It's a bargain, isn't it!" said this cynical girl. He lowered himself onto the floor on his heels; then tenderly folded the nightgown into a lacy bundle, which he smoothed, troubled.

"No, give it to me," she demanded sharply. He looked up, surprised.

"Give it!" she repeated, and scrambling across the bed she snatched it out of his hands, stripped off her shift, and slid the gown over her bare skin. She was compact but not stocky and the dress became her; she walked about the cabin, admiring her sleeves, carrying the train over one arm while he sat back on his heels and blinked at her.

"Well," she said philosophically, "come on." He was not at all pleased. He rose (her eyes followed him), towering over her, his arms folded. He looked at the nightgown, at the train she held, at her arched neck (she had to look up to meet his gaze), at her free arm curved to

her throat in a gesture of totally unconscious femininity. He had been thinking, a process that with him was slow but often profound; now he said solemnly:

"Woman, what man have you ever been with before?"

"Oh!" said she startled, "my husband," and backed off a little.

"And where is he?"

"Dead." She could not help a grin.

"How?" She held up a fist. Blackbeard sighed heavily.

Throwing the loose bedclothes onto the bed, he strode to his precious chest (she padded inquisitively behind him), dropped heavily to his knees, and came up with a heap of merchandise: bottles, rings, jingles, coins, scarves, handkerchiefs, boots, toys, half of which he put back. Then, catching her by one arm, he threw her over his shoulder in a somewhat casual or moody fashion (the breath was knocked out of her) and carried her to the center of the cabin, where he dropped her—half next to and half over a small table, the only other part of the cabin's furnishings besides the bed. She was trembling all over. With the same kind of solemn preoccupation he dumped his merchandise on the table, sorted out a bottle and two glasses, a bracelet, which he put on her arm, earrings similarly, and a few other things that he studied and then placed on the floor. She was amazed to see that there were tears in his eyes.

"Now, why don't you fight me!" he said emotionally.

She looked at the table, then at her hands.

"Ah!" he said, sighing again, pouring out a glassful and gulping it, drumming the glass on the table. He shook his head. He held out his arms and she circled the table carefully, taking his hands, embarrassed to look him in the face. "Come," he said, "up here," patting his knees, so she climbed awkwardly onto his lap, still considerably wary. He poured out another glass and put it in her hand. He sighed, and put nothing into words; only she felt on her back what felt like a hand and arched a little—like

a cat—with pleasure; then she stirred on his knees to settle herself and immediately froze. He did nothing. He was looking into the distance, into nothing. He might have been remembering his past. She put one arm around his neck to steady herself, but her arm felt his neck most exquisitely and she did not like that, so she gave it up and put one hand on his shoulder. Then she could not help but feel his shoulder. It was quite provoking. He mused into the distance. Sitting on his lap, she could feel his breath stirring about her bare face, about her neck—she turned to look at him and shut her eyes; she thought, *What am I doing?* and the blood came to her face harder and harder until her cheeks blazed. She felt him sigh, felt that sigh travel from her side to her stomach to the back of her head, and with a soft, hopeless, exasperated cry (“I don’t expect to enjoy this!”) she turned and sank, both hands firstmost, into Blackbeard’s oceanic beard.

And he, the villain, was even willing to cooperate.

Time passes, even (as they say) on the sea. What with moping about while he visited farmhouses and villages, watching the stars wheel and change overhead as they crept down the coast, with time making and unmaking the days, bringing dinnertime (as it does) and time to get up and what-not— Well, there you are. She spent her time learning to play cards. But gambling and prophecy are very closely allied—in fact they are one thing—and when he saw his woman squatting on deck on the balls of her feet, a sliver of wood in her teeth, dealing out the cards to tell fortunes (cards and money appeared in the East at exactly the same time in the old days) he thought—or thought he saw—or recollected—that goddess who was driven out by the other gods when the world was made and who hangs about still on the fringes of things (at crossroads, at the entrance to towns) to throw a little shady trouble into life and set up a few crosscurrents and undercurrents of her own in what ought to be a regular and predictable business. She herself did not believe in

gods and goddesses. She told the fortunes of the crew quite obligingly, as he had taught her, but was much more interested in learning the probabilities of the appearance of any particular card in one of the five suits*—she had begun to evolve what she thought was a rather elegant little theory—when late one day he told her, “Look, I am going into a town tonight, but you can’t come.” They were lying anchored on the coast, facing west, just too far away to see the lights at night. She said, “Wha’?”

“I am going to town tonight,” he said (he was a very patient man) “and you can’t come.”

“Why not?” said the woman. She threw down her cards and stood up, facing into the sunset. The pupils of her eyes shrank to pinpoints. To her he was a big, blind rock, a kind of outline; she said again, “Why not?” and her whole face lifted and became sharper as one’s face does when one stares against the sun.

“Because you can’t,” he said. She bent to pick up her cards as if she had made some mistake in listening, but there he was saying, “I won’t be able to take care of you.”

“You won’t have to,” said she. He shook his head. “You won’t come.”

“Of course I’ll come,” she said.

“You won’t,” said he.

“The devil I won’t!” said she.

He put both arms on her shoulders, powerfully, seriously, with utmost heaviness and she pulled away at once, at once transformed into a mystery with a closed face; she stared at him without expression, shifting her cards from hand to hand. He said, “Look, my girl—” and for this got the entire fortunes of the whole world for the next twenty centuries right in his face.

“Well, well,” he said, “I see,” ponderously, “I see,” and stalked away down the curve of the ship, thus pass-

*ones, tens, hundreds, myriads, tens of myriads

ing around the cabin, into the darkening eastern sky, and out of the picture.

But she did go with him. She appeared, dripping wet and triumphantly smiling, at the door of the little place of business he had chosen to discuss business in and walked directly to his table, raising two fingers in greeting, a gesture that had taken her fancy when she saw it done by someone in the street. She then uttered a word Blackbeard thought she did not understand (she did). She looked with interest around the room—at the smoke from the torches—and the patrons—and a Great Horned Owl somewhat the worse for wear that had been chained by one leg to the bar (an ancient invention)—and the stuffed blowfish that hung from the ceiling on a string: lazy, consumptive, puffed-up, with half its spines broken off. Then she sat down.

“Huh!” she said, dismissing the tavern. Blackbeard was losing his temper. His face suffused with blood, he put both enormous fists on the table to emphasize that fact; she nodded civilly, leaned back on her part of the wall (causing the bench to rock), crossed her knees, and swung one foot back and forth, back and forth, under the noses of both gentlemen. It was not exactly rude but it was certainly disconcerting.

“You. Get out,” said the other gentleman.

“I’m not dry yet,” said she in a soft, reasonable voice, like a bravo trying to pick a quarrel, and she laid both arms across the table, where they left two dark stains. She stared him in the face as if trying to memorize it—hard enough with a man who made it his business to look like nobody in particular—and the *other gentleman* was about to rise and was reaching for something or other under the table when her gentleman said:

“She’s crazy.” He cleared his throat. “You sit down,” he said. “My apologies. *You* behave,” and social stability thus reestablished, they plunged into a discussion she understood pretty well but did not pay much atten-

tion to, as she was too busy looking about. The owl blinked, turned his head completely around, and stood on one foot. The blowfish rotated lazily. Across the room stood a row of casks and a mortared wall; next to that a face in the dimness—a handsome face—that smiled at her across the serried tables. She smiled back, a villainous smile full of saltpeter, a wise, nasty, irresponsible, trouble-making smile, at which the handsome face winked. She laughed out loud.

“Shut up,” said Blackbeard, not turning round.

He was in a tight place.

She watched him insist and prevaricate and sweat, building all kinds of earnest, openhearted, irresistible arguments with the gestures of his big hands, trying to bully the insignificant other gentleman—and failing—and not knowing it—until finally at the same moment the owl screeched like a rusty file, a singer at the end of the bar burst into wailing quartertones, and Blackbeard—wiping his forehead—said, “All right.”

“No, dammit,” she cried, “you’re ten percent off!”

He slapped her. The other gentleman cleared his throat.

“All right,” Blackbeard repeated. The other man nodded. Finishing his wine, drawing on his gloves, already a little bored perhaps, he turned and left. In his place, as if by a compensation of nature, there suddenly appeared, jackrabbited between the tables, the handsome young owner of the face who was not so handsome at close range but dressed fit to kill all the same with a gold earring, a red scarf tucked into his shirt, and a satanic resemblance to her late husband. She looked rapidly from one man to the other, almost malevolently; then she stood rigid, staring at the floor.

“*Well, baby,*” said the intruder.

Blackbeard turned his back on his girl.

The intruder took hold of her by the nape of the neck but she did not move; he talked to her in a low voice; finally she blurted out, “Oh yes! Go on!” (fixing

her eyes on the progress of Blackbeard's monolithic back towards the door) and stumbled aside as the latter all but vaulted over a table to retrieve his lost property. She followed him, her head bent, violently flushed. Two streets off he stopped, saying, "Look, my dear, can I please not take you ashore again?" but she would not answer, no, not a word, and all this time the singer back at the tavern was singing away about the Princess Oriana who traveled to meet her betrothed but was stolen by bandits, and how she prayed, and how the bandits cursed, and how she begged to be returned to her prince, and how the bandits said, "Not likely," and how she finally ended it all by jumping into the Bosphorus—in short, art in the good old style with plenty of solid vocal technique, a truly Oriental expressiveness, and innumerable verses.

(She always remembered the incident and maintained for the rest of her life that small producers should combine in trading with middlemen so as not to lower prices by competing against each other.)

In the first, faint hint of dawn, as Blackbeard lay snoring and damp in the bedclothes, his beard spread out like a fan, his woman prodded him in the ribs with the handle of his sword; she said, "Wake up! Something's happening.

"I am," she added. She watched him as he tried to sit up, tangled in the sheets, pale, enormous, the black hair on his chest forming with unusual distinctness the shape of a flying eagle. "Wha'?" he said.

"I am," she repeated. Still half asleep, he held out his arms to her, indicating that she might happen all over the place, might happen now, particularly in bed, *he* did not care. "*Wake up!*" she said. He nearly leapt out of bed, but then perceived her standing leaning on his sword, the corners of her mouth turned down. No one was being killed. He blinked, shivered, and shook his

head. "Don't do that," he said thickly. She let the sword fall with a clatter. He winced.

"I'm going away," she said very distinctly, "that's all," and thrusting her face near his, she seized him by the arms and shook him violently, leaping back when he vaulted out of the bed and whirling around with one hand on the table—ready to throw it. That made him smile. He sat down and scratched his chest, giving himself every now and then a kind of shake to wake himself up, until he could look at her directly in the eyes and ask:

"Haven't I treated you well?"

She said nothing. He dangled one arm between his knees moodily and rubbed the back of his neck with the other, so enormous, so perfect, so relaxed, and in every way so like real life that she could only shrug and fold her arms across her breast. He examined his feet and rubbed, for comfort, the ankle and the arch, the heel and the instep, stretching his feet, stretching his back, rubbing his fingers over and over and over.

"Damn it, I am cleverer than you!" she exclaimed.

He sighed, meaning perhaps "no," meaning perhaps "I suppose so"; he said, "You've been up all night, haven't you?" and then he said, "My dear, you must understand—" but at that moment a terrific battering shook the ship, propelling the master of it outside, naked as he was, from which position he looked his woman in.

(In those days craft were high, square and slow, like barrels or boxes put out to sea; but everything is relative, and as they crept up on each other, throwing fits every now and again when headed into the wind, creaking and straining at every joist, ships bore skippers who remembered craft braced with twisted rope from stem to stern, craft manned exclusively by rowers, above all craft that invariably—or usually—sank, and they enjoyed the keen sensation of modernity while standing on a deck large enough for a party of ten to dine on comfortably and steering by use of a rudder that no longer required

a pole for leverage or broke a man's wrist. Things were getting better. With great skill a man could sail as fast as other men could run. Still, in this infancy of the world, one ship wallowed after another; like cunning sloths one feebly stole up on another; and when they closed—without fire (do you want us to burn ourselves *up*?)—the toothless, ineffectual creatures clung together, sawing dully at each other's grappling ropes, until the fellows over there got over here or the fellows over here got over there and then—on a slippery floor humped like the back of an elephant and just about as small, amid rails, boxes, pots, peaks, tar, slants, steps, ropes, coils, masts, falls, chests, sails and God knows what—they hacked at each other until most of them died. That they did very efficiently.

And the sea was full of robbers.)

Left alone, she moved passively with the motion of the ship; then she picked up very slowly and looked into very slowly the hand mirror he had taken for her out of his chest, brass-backed and decorated with metal rose-wreaths, the kind of object she had never in her life seen before. There she was, oddly tilted, looking out of the mirror, and behind her the room as if seen from above, as if one could climb down into the mirror to those odd objects, bright and reversed, as if one could fall into the mirror, become tiny, clamber away, and looking back see one's own enormous eyes staring out of a window set high in the wall. Women do not always look in mirrors to admire themselves, popular belief to the contrary. Sometimes they look only to slip off their rings and their bracelets, to pluck off their earrings, to unfasten their necklaces, to drop their brilliant gowns, to take the color off their faces until the bones stand out like spears and to wipe the hues from around their eyes until they can look and look at merely naked human faces, at eyes no longer brilliant and aqueous like the eyes of angels or goddesses but hard and small as human eyes are, little control

points that are always a little disquieting, always a little peculiar, because they are not meant to be looked at but to look, and then—with a shudder, a shiver—to recover themselves and once again to shimmer, to glow. But some don't care. This one stumbled away, dropped the mirror, fell over the table (she passed her hand over her eyes) and grasped—more by feeling than by sight—the handle of the sword he had given her, thirty or forty—or was it seventy?—years before. The blade had not yet the ironical motto it was to bear some years later: *Good Manners Are Not Enough*, but she lifted it high all the same, and grasping with her left hand the bronze chain Blackbeard used to fasten his treasure chest, broke the lock of the door in one blow.

Such was the strength of iron in the old days.

There is talent and then there is the other thing. Blackbeard had never seen the other thing. He found her after the battle was over with her foot planted on the back of a dead enemy, trying to free the sword he had given her. She did so in one jerky pull and rolled the man overboard with her foot without bothering about him further; she was looking at an ornamented dagger in her left hand, a beautiful weapon with a jeweled handle and a slender blade engraved with scrolls and leaves. She admired it very much. She held it out to him, saying, "Isn't that a beauty?" There was a long gash on her left arm, the result of trying to stop a downward blow with nothing but the bronze chain wrapped around her knuckles. The chain was gone; she had only used it as long as it had surprise value and had lost it somewhere, somehow (she did not quite remember how). He took the dagger and she sat down suddenly on the deck, dropping the sword and running both hands over her hair to smooth it again and again, unaware that her palms left long red streaks. The deck looked as if a tribe of monkeys had been painting on it or as if everyone—living and dead—had smeared himself ritually with red paint. The sun was

coming up. He sat down next to her, too winded to speak. With the intent watchfulness (but this will be a millennium or two later) of someone focusing the lens of a microscope, with the noble, arrogant carriage of a tennis star, she looked first around the deck—and then at him—and then straight up into the blue sky.

“So,” she said, and shut her eyes.

He put his arm around her; he wiped her face. He stroked the nape of her neck and then her shoulder, but now his woman began to laugh, more and more, leaning against him and laughing and laughing until she was convulsed and he thought she had gone out of her mind. “What the devil!” he cried, almost weeping, “what the devil!” She stopped at that place in the scale where a woman’s laughter turns into a shriek; her shoulders shook spasmodically but soon she controlled that too. He thought she might be hysterical so he said, “Are you frightened? You won’t have to go through this again.”

“No?” she said.

“Never.”

“Well,” she said, “perhaps I will all the same,” and in pure good humor she put her arms about his neck. There were tears in her eyes—perhaps they were tears of laughter—and in the light of the rising sun the deck showed ever more ruddy and grotesque. *What a mess*, she thought. She said, “It’s all right; don’t you worry,” which was, all in all and in the light of things, a fairly kind goodbye.

“Why the devil,” she said with sudden interest, “don’t doctors cut up the bodies of dead people in the schools to find out how they’re put together?”

But he didn’t know.

Six weeks later she arrived—alone—at that queen among cities, that moon among stars, that noble, despicable, profound, simpleminded and altogether exasperating capital of the world: Ourdh. Some of us know it. She materialized so quietly and expertly out of the dark that the gatekeeper found himself looking into her face with-

out the slightest warning: a young, gray-eyed countrywoman, silent, shadowy, self-assured. She was hugely amused. "My name," she said, "is Alyx."

"Never heard of it," said the gatekeeper, a little annoyed.

"Good heavens," said Alyx, "not yet," and vanished through the gate before he could admit her, with the curious slight smile one sees on the lips of very old statues: inexpressive, simple, classic.

She was to become a classic, in time.

But that's another story.

THE ADVENTURESS

By Joanna Russ

This is the tale of a voyage that is of interest only as it concerns the doings of one small, gray-eyed woman. Small women exist in plenty—so do those with gray eyes—but this woman was among the wisest of a sex that is surpassingly wise. There is no surprise in that (or should not be) for it is common knowledge that Woman was created fully a quarter of an hour before Man, and has kept that advantage to this very day. Indeed, legend has it that the first man, Leh, was fashioned from the sixth finger of the left hand of the first woman, Loh, and that is why women have only five fingers on the left hand. The lady with whom we concern ourselves in this story had all her six fingers, and what is more, they all worked.

In the seventh year before the time of which we speak, this woman, a neat, level-browed, governessy person called Alyx, had come to the City of Ourdh as part of a religious delegation from the hills intended to convert the dissolute citizens to the ways of virtue and the one true God, a Bang tree of awful majesty. But Alyx, a young woman of an intellectual bent, had not been in Ourdh two months when she decided that the religion of Yp (as the hill god was called) was a disastrous piece of nonsense, and that deceiving a young woman in matters of such importance was a piece of thoughtlessness for which it would take some weeks of hard, concentrated

thought to think up a proper reprisal. In due time the police chased Alyx's coreligionists down the Street of Heaven and Hell and out the swamp gate to be bitten by the mosquitoes that lie in wait among the reeds, and Alyx—with a shrug of contempt—took up a modest living as pick-lock, a profession that gratified her sense of subtlety. It provided her with a living, a craft and a society. Much of the wealth of this richest and vilest of cities stuck to her fingers but most of it dropped off again, for she was not much awed by the things of this world. Going their legal or illegal ways in this seventh year after her arrival, citizens of Ourdh saw only a woman with short, black hair and a sprinkling of freckles across her milky nose; but Alyx had ambitions of becoming a Destiny. She was thirty (a dangerous time for men and women alike) when this story begins. Yp moved in his mysterious ways, Alyx entered the employ of the Lady Edarra, and Ourdh saw neither of them again—for a while.

Alyx was walking with a friend down the Street of Conspicuous Display one sultry summer's morning when she perceived a young woman, dressed like a jeweler's tray and surmounted with a great coil of red hair, waving to her from the table of a wayside garden-terrace.

"Wonderful are the ways of Yp," she remarked, for although she no longer accorded that deity any respect, yet her habits of speech remained. "There sits a red-headed young woman of no more than seventeen years and with the best skin imaginable, and yet she powders her face."

"Wonderful indeed," said her friend. Then he raised one finger and went his way, a discretion much admired in Ourdh. The young lady, who had been drumming her fingers on the tabletop and frowning like a fury, waved again and stamped one foot.

"I want to talk to you," she said sharply. "Can't you hear me?"

"I have six ears," said Alyx, the courteous reply in such a situation. She sat down and the waiter handed her the bill of fare.

"You are not listening to me," said the lady.

"I do not listen with my eyes," said Alyx.

"Those who do not listen with their eyes as well as their ears," said the lady sharply, "can be made to regret it!"

"Those," said Alyx, "who on a fine summer's morning threaten their fellow-creatures in any way, absurdly or otherwise, both mar the serenity of the day and break the peace of Yp, who," she said, "is mighty."

"You are impossible!" cried the lady. "Impossible!" and she bounced up and down in her seat with rage, fixing her fierce brown eyes on Alyx. "Death!" she cried. "Death and bones!" and that was a ridiculous thing to say at eleven in the morning by the side of the most wealthy and luxurious street in Ourdh, for such a street is one of the pleasantest places in the world if you do not watch the beggars. The lady, insensible to all this bounty, jumped to her feet and glared at the little pick-lock; then, composing herself with an effort (she clenched both hands and gritted her teeth like a person in the worst throes of marsh fever), she said—calmly—

"I want to leave Ourdh."

"Many do," said Alyx, courteously.

"I require a companion."

"A lady's maid?" suggested Alyx. The lady jumped once in her seat as if her anger must have an outlet somehow; then she clenched her hands and gritted her teeth with doubled vigor.

"I must have protection," she snapped.

"Ah?"

"I'll pay!" (This was almost a shriek.)

"How?" said Alyx, who had her doubts.

"None of your business," said the lady.

"If I'm to serve you, everything's my business. Tell me. All right, how much?"

The lady named a figure, reluctantly.

"Not enough," said Alyx. "Particularly not knowing how. Or why. And why protection? From whom? When?" The lady jumped to her feet. "By water?" continued Alyx imperturbably. "By land? On foot? How far? You must understand, little one—"

"*Little one!*" cried the lady, her mouth dropping open. "*Little one!*"

"If you and I are to do business—"

"I'll have you thrashed—" gasped the lady, out of breath, "I'll have you so—"

"And let the world know your plans?" said Alyx, leaning forward with one hand under her chin. The lady stared, and bit her lip, and backed up, and then she hastily grabbed her skirts as if they were sacks of potatoes and ran off, ribbons fluttering behind her. *Wine-colored ribbons*, thought Alyx, *with red hair; that's clever*. She ordered brandy and filled her glass, peering curiously into it where the hot, midmorning sun of Ourdh suffused into a winy glow, a sparkling, trembling, streaky mass of floating brightness. *To* (she said to herself with immense good humor) *all the young ladies in the world*. "And," she added softly, "great quantities of money."

At night Ourdh is a suburb of the Pit, or that steamy, muddy bank where the gods kneel eternally, making man; though the lights of the city never show fairer than then. At night the rich wake up and the poor sink into a distressed sleep, and everyone takes to the flat, white-washed roofs. Under the light of gold lamps the wealthy converse, sliding across one another, silky but never vulgar; at night Ya, the courtesan with the gold breasts (very good for the jaded taste) and Garh the pirate, red-bearded, with his carefully cultivated stoop, and many many others, all ascend the broad, white steps to someone's roof. Each

step carries a lamp, each lamp sheds a blurry radiance on a tray, each tray is crowded with sticky, pleated, salt, sweet. . . Alyx ascended, dreaming of snow. She was there on business. Indeed the sky was overcast that night, but a downpour would not drive the guests indoors; a striped silk awning with gold fringes would be unrolled over their heads, and while the fringes became matted and wet and water spouted into the garden below, ladies would put out their hands (or their heads—but that took a brave lady on account of the coiffure) outside the awning and squeal as they were soaked by the warm, mild, neutral rain of Ourdh. Thunder was another matter. Alyx remembered hill storms with gravel hissing down the gullies of streams and paths turned to cold mud. She met the dowager in charge and that ponderous lady said:

“Here she is.”

It was Edarra, sulky and seventeen, knotting a silk handkerchief in a wet wad in her hand and wearing a sparkling blue-and-green bib.

“That’s the necklace,” said the dowager. “Don’t let it out of your sight.”

“I see,” said Alyx, passing her hand over her eyes.

When they were left alone, Edarra fastened her fierce eyes on Alyx and hissed, “Traitor!”

“What for?” said Alyx.

“Traitor! Traitor! Traitor!” shouted the girl. The nearest guests turned to listen and then turned away, bored.

“You grow dull,” said Alyx, and she leaned lightly on the roof-rail to watch the company. There was the sound of angry stirrings and rustlings behind her. Then the girl said in a low voice (between her teeth), “Tonight someone is going to steal this necklace.”

Alyx said nothing. Ya floated by with her metal breasts gleaming in the lamplight; behind her, Peng the jeweler.

“I’ll get seven hundred ounces of gold for it!”

“Ah?” said Alyx.

"You've spoiled it," snapped the girl. Together they watched the guests, red and green, silk on silk like oil on water, the high-crowned hats and earrings glistening, the bracelets sparkling like a school of underwater fish. Up came the dowager accompanied by a landlord of the richest and largest sort, a gentleman bridegroom who had buried three previous wives and would now have the privilege of burying the Lady Edarra—though to hear him tell it, the first had died of overeating, the second of drinking and the third of a complexion-cleanser she had brewed herself. Nothing questionable in *that*. He smiled and took Edarra's upper arm between his thumb and finger. He said, "Well, little girl." She stared at him. "Don't be defiant," he said. "You're going to be rich." The dowager bridled. "I mean—even richer," he said with a smile. The mother and the bridegroom talked business for a few minutes, neither watching the girl; then they turned abruptly and disappeared into the mixing, moving company, some of whom were leaning over the rail screaming at those in the garden below, and some of whom were slipping and sitting down involuntarily in thirty-five pounds of cherries that had just been accidentally overturned onto the floor.

"So that's why you want to run away," said Alyx. The Lady Edarra was staring straight ahead of her, big tears rolling silently down her cheeks. "Mind your business," she said.

"Mind yours," said Alyx softly, "and do not insult me, for I get rather hard then." She laughed and fingered the necklace, which was big and gaudy and made of stones the size of a thumb. "What would you do," she said, "if I told you yes?"

"You're impossible!" said Edarra, looking up and sobbing.

"Praised be Yp that I exist then," said Alyx, "for I do ask you if your offer is open. Now that I see your necklace more plainly, I incline towards accepting it—

whoever you hired was cheating you, by the way; you can get twice again as much—though that gentleman we saw just now has something to do with my decision.” She paused. “Well?”

Edarra said nothing, her mouth open.

“Well, speak!”

“No,” said Edarra.

“Mind you,” said Alyx wryly, “you still have to find someone to travel with, and I wouldn’t trust the man you hired—probably hired—for five minutes in a room with twenty other people. Make your choice. I’ll go with you as long and as far as you want, anywhere you want.”

“Well,” said Edarra, “yes.”

“Good,” said Alyx. “I’ll take two-thirds.”

“No!” cried Edarra, scandalized.

“Two-thirds,” said Alyx, shaking her head. “It has to be worth my while. Both the gentleman you hired to steal your necklace—and your mother—and your husband-to-be—and heaven alone knows who else—will be after us before the evening is out. Maybe. At any rate, I want to be safe when I come back.”

“Will the money—?” said Edarra.

“Money does all things,” said Alyx. “And I have long wanted to return to this city, this paradise, this—swamp!—with that which makes power! Come,” and she leapt onto the roof-rail and from there into the garden, landing feet first in the loam and ruining a bed of strawberries. Edarra dropped beside her, all of a heap and panting.

“Kill one, kill all, kill devil!” said Alyx gleefully. Edarra grabbed her arm. Taking the lady by the crook of her elbow, Alyx began to run, while behind them the fashionable merriment of Ourdh (the guests were pouring wine down each other’s backs) grew fainter and fainter and finally died away.

They sold the necklace at the waterfront shack that smelt of tar and sewage (Edarra grew ill and had to wait outside), and with the money Alyx bought two

short swords, a dagger, a blanket, and a round cheese. She walked along the harbor carving pieces out of the cheese with the dagger and eating them off the point. Opposite a fishing boat, a square-sailed, slovenly tramp, she stopped and pointed with cheese and dagger both.

"That's ours," said she. (For the harbor streets were very quiet.)

"Oh, *no!*"

"Yes," said Alyx, "that mess," and from the slimy timbers of the quay she leapt onto the deck. "It's empty," she said.

"No," said Edarra, "I won't go," and from the landward side of the city thunder rumbled and a few drops of rain fell in the darkness, warm, like the wind.

"It's going to rain," said Alyx. "Get aboard."

"No," said the girl. Alyx's face appeared in the bow of the boat, a white spot scarcely distinguishable from the sky; she stood in the bow as the boat rocked to and fro in the wash of the tide. A light across the street, that shone in the window of a waterfront café, went out.

"Oh!" gasped Edarra, terrified, "give me my money!" A leather bag fell in the dust at her feet. "I'm going back," she said, "I'm never going to set foot in that thing. It's disgusting. It's not ladylike."

"No," said Alyx.

"It's *dirty!*" cried Edarra. Without a word, Alyx disappeared into the darkness. Above, where the clouds bred from the marshes roofed the sky, the obscurity deepened and the sound of rain drumming on the roofs of the town advanced steadily, three streets away, then two . . . a sharp gust of wind blew bits of paper and the indefinable trash of the seaside upwards in an unseen spiral. Out over the sea Edarra could hear the universal sound of rain on water, like the shaking of dried peas in a sheet of paper but softer and more blurred, as acres of the surface of the sea dimpled with innumerable little pockmarks. . .

"I thought you'd come," said Alyx. "Shall we begin?"

Ourdh stretches several miles southward down the coast of the sea, finally dwindling to a string of little towns; at one of these they stopped and provided for themselves, laying in a store of food and a first-aid kit of dragon's teeth and ginger root, for one never knows what may happen in a sea voyage. They also bought resin; Edarra was forced to caulk the ship under fear of being called soft and lazy, and she did it, although she did not speak. She did not speak at all. She boiled the fish over a fire laid in the brass firebox and fanned the smoke and choked, but she never said a word. She did what she was told in silence. Every day bitterer, she kicked the stove and scrubbed the floor, tearing her fingernails, wearing out her skirt; she swore to herself, but without a word, so that when one night she kicked Alyx with her foot, it was an occasion.

"Where are we going?" said Edarra in the dark, with violent impatience. She had been brooding over the question for several weeks and her voice carried a remarkable quality of concentration; she prodded Alyx with her big toe and repeated, "I said, where are we going?"

"Morning," said Alyx. She was asleep, for it was the middle of the night; they took watches above. "In the morning," she said. Part of it was sleep and part was demoralization; although reserved, she was friendly and Edarra was ruining her nerves.

"Oh!" exclaimed the lady between clenched teeth, and Alyx shifted in her sleep. "When will we buy some decent *food*?" demanded the lady vehemently. "When? When?"

Alyx sat bolt upright. "Go to sleep!" she shouted, under the hallucinatory impression that it was she who was awake and working. She dreamed of nothing but work now. In the dark Edarra stamped up and down. "Oh, wake up!" she cried, "for goodness' sakes!"

"What do you want?" said Alyx.

"Where are we going?" said Edarra. "Are we going to some miserable little fishing village? Are we? Well, are we?"

"Yes," said Alyx.

"Why!" demanded the lady.

"To match your character."

With a scream of rage, the Lady Edarra threw herself on her preserver and they bumped heads for a few minutes, but the battle—although violent—was conducted entirely in the dark and they were tangled up almost completely in the beds, which were nothing but blankets laid on the bare boards and not the only reason that the lady's brown eyes were turning a permanent, baleful black.

"Let me up, you're strangling me!" cried the lady, and when Alyx managed to light the lamp, bruising her shins against some of the furniture, Edarra was seen to be wrestling with a blanket, which she threw across the cabin. The cabin was five feet across.

"If you do that again, madam," said Alyx, "I'm going to knock your head against the floor!" The lady swept her hair back from her brow with the air of a princess. She was trembling. "Huh!" she said, in the voice of one so angry that she does not dare say anything. "Really," she said, on the verge of tears.

"Yes, really," said Alyx, "really" (finding some satisfaction in the word), "really go above. We're drifting." The lady sat in her corner, her face white, clenching her hands together as if she held a burning chip from the stove. "No," she said.

"Eh, madam?" said Alyx.

"I won't do anything," said Edarra unsteadily, her eyes glittering. "You can do everything. You want to, anyway."

"Now look here—" said Alyx grimly, advancing on the girl, but whether she thought better of it or whether she heard or smelt something (for after weeks of water,

sailors—or so they say—develop a certain intuition for such things), she only threw her blanket over her shoulder and said, “Suit yourself.” Then she went on deck. Her face was unnaturally composed.

“Heaven witness my self-control,” she said, not raising her voice but in a conversational tone that somewhat belied her facial expression. “Witness it. See it. Reward it. May the messenger of Yp—in whom I do not believe—write in that parchment leaf that holds all the records of the world that I, provoked beyond human endurance, tormented, kicked in the midst of sleep, treated like the off-scourings of a filthy, cheap, sour-beer-producing brewery—”

Then she saw the sea monster.

Opinion concerning sea monsters varies in Ourdh and the surrounding hills, the citizens holding monsters to be the souls of the wicked dead forever ranging the pastureless wastes of ocean to waylay the living and force them into watery graves, and the hill people scouting this blasphemous view and maintaining that sea monsters are legitimate creations of the great god Yp, sent to murder travelers as an illustration of the majesty, the might and the unpredictability of that most inexplicable of deities. But the end result is much the same. Alyx had seen the bulbous face and coarse whiskers of the creature in a drawing hanging in the Silver Eel on the waterfront of Ourdh (the original—stuffed—had been stolen in some prehistoric time, according to the proprietor), and she had shuddered. She had thought, *Perhaps it is just an animal*, but even so it was not pleasant. Now in the moonlight that turned the ocean to a ball of silver waters in the midst of which bobbed the tiny ship, very very far from anyone or anything, she saw the surface part in a rain of sparkling drops and the huge, wicked, twisted face of the creature, so like and unlike a man’s, rise like a shadowy demon from the dark, bright water. It held its baby to its breast, a nauseating parody of human-

kind. Behind her she heard Edarra choke, for that lady had followed her onto the deck. Alyx forced her unwilling feet to the rail and leaned over, stretching out one shaking hand. She said:

"By the tetragrammaton of dread,
By the seven names of God.
Begone and trouble us no more!"

Which was very brave of her because she did not believe in charms. But it had to be said directly to the monster's face, and say it she did.

The monster barked like a dog.

Edarra screamed. With an arm suddenly nerved to steel, the thief snatched a fishing spear from its place in the stern and braced one knee against the rail; she leaned into the creature's very mouth and threw her harpoon. It entered below the pink harelip and blood gushed as the thing trumpeted and thrashed; black under the moonlight, the blood billowed along the waves, the water closed over the apparition, ripples spread and rocked the boat, and died, and Alyx slid weakly onto the deck.

There was silence for a while. Then she said, "It's only an animal," and she made the mark of Yp on her forehead to atone for having killed something without the spur of overmastering necessity. She had not made the gesture for years. Edarra, who was huddled in a heap against the mast, moved. "It's gone," said Alyx. She got to her feet and took the rudder of the boat, a long shaft that swung at the stern. The girl moved again, shivering.

"It was an animal," said Alyx with finality, "that's all."

The next morning Alyx took out the two short swords and told Edarra she would have to learn to use them.

"No," said Edarra.

"Yes," said Alyx. While the wind held, they fenced up and down the deck, Edarra scrambling resentfully. Alyx

pressed her hard and assured her that she would have to do this every day.

"You'll have to cut your hair, too," she added, for no particular reason.

"Never!" gasped the other, dodging.

"Oh, yes, you will!" and she grasped the red braid and yanked; one flash of the blade—

Now it may have been the sea air—or the loss of her red tresses—or the collision with a character so different from those she was accustomed to, but from this morning on it became clear that something was exerting a humanizing influence on the young woman. She was quieter, even (on occasion) dreamy; she turned to her work without complaint, and after a deserved ducking in the sea had caused her hair to break out in short curls, she took to leaning over the side of the boat and watching herself in the water, with meditative pleasure. Her skin, that the pick-lock had first noticed as fine, grew even finer with the passage of the days, and she turned a delicate ivory color, like a half-baked biscuit, that Alyx could not help but notice. But she did not like it. Often in the watches of the night she would say aloud:

"Very well, I am thirty—" (Thus she would soliloquize.) "But what, O Yp, is thirty? Thrice ten. Twice fifteen. Women marry at forty. In ten years I will be forty—"

And so on. From these apostrophizations she returned uncomfortable, ugly, old and with a bad conscience. She had a conscience, though it was not active in the usual directions. One morning, after these nightly wrestlings, the girl was leaning over the rail of the boat, her hair dangling about her face, watching the fish in the water and her own reflection. Occasionally she yawned, opening her pink mouth and shutting her eyes; all this Alyx watched surreptitiously. She felt uncomfortable. All morning the heat had been intense and mirages of ships and gulls and unidentified objects had danced on the horizon,

breaking up eventually into clumps of seaweed or floating bits of wood.

"Shall I catch a fish?" said Edarra, who occasionally spoke now.

"Yes—no—" said Alyx, who held the rudder.

"Well, shall I or shan't I?" said Edarra tolerantly.

"Yes," said Alyx, "if you—" and swung the rudder hard. All morning she had been watching black, wriggling shapes that turned out to be nothing; now she thought she saw something across the glittering water. *One thing we shall both get out of this*, she thought, *is a permanent squint*. The shape moved closer, resolving itself into several verticals and a horizontal; it danced and streaked maddeningly. Alyx shaded her eyes.

"Edarra," she said quietly, "get the swords. Hand me one and the dagger."

"What?" said Edarra, dropping a fishing line she had begun to pick up.

"Three men in a sloop," said Alyx. "Back up against the mast and put the blade behind you."

"But they might not—" said Edarra with unexpected spirit.

"And they might," said Alyx grimly, "they just might."

Now in Ourdh there is a common saying that if you have not strength, there are three things which will serve as well: deceit, surprise and speed. These are women's natural weapons. Therefore when the three rascals—and rascals they were or appearances lied—reached the boat, the square sail was furled and the two women, like cast-aways, were sitting idly against the mast while the boat bobbed in the oily swell. This was to render the rudder useless and keep the craft from slewing round at a sudden change in the wind. Alyx saw with joy that two of the three were fat and all were dirty; *too vain*, she thought, *to keep in trim or take precautions*. She gathered in her right hand the strands of the fishing net stretched inconspicuously over the deck.

"Who does your laundry?" she said, getting up slowly. She hated personal uncleanness. Edarra rose to one side of her.

"You will," said the midmost. They smiled broadly. When the first set foot in the net, Alyx jerked it up hard, bringing him to the deck in a tangle of fishing lines; at the same instant with her left hand—and the left hand of this daughter of Loh carried all its six fingers—she threw the dagger (which had previously been used for nothing bloodier than cleaning fish) and caught the second interloper squarely in the stomach. He sat down, hard, and was no further trouble. The first, who had gotten to his feet, closed with her in a ringing of steel that was loud on that tiny deck; for ninety seconds by the clock he forced her back towards the opposite rail; then in a burst of speed she took him under his guard at a pitch of the ship and slashed his sword wrist, disarming him. But her thrust carried her too far and she fell; grasping his wounded wrist with his other hand, he launched himself at her, and Alyx—planting both knees against his chest—helped him into the sea. He took a piece of the rail with him. By the sound of it, he could not swim. She stood over the rail, gripping her blade until he vanished for the last time. It was over that quickly. Then she perceived Edarra standing over the third man, sword in hand, an incredulous, pleased expression on her face. Blood holds no terrors for a child of Ourdh, unfortunately.

"Look what I did!" said the little lady.

"Must you look so pleased?" said Alyx, sharply. The morning's washing hung on the opposite rail to dry. So quiet had the sea and sky been that it had not budged an inch. The gentleman with the dagger sat against it, staring.

"If you're so hardy," said Alyx, "take that out."

"Do I have to?" said the little girl, uneasily.

"I suppose not," said Alyx, and she put one foot against

the dead man's chest, her grip on the knife and her eyes averted; the two parted company and he went over the side in one motion. Edarra turned a little red; she hung her head and remarked, "You're splendid."

"You're a savage," said Alyx.

"But why!" cried Edarra indignantly. "All I said was—"

"Wash up," said Alyx, "and get rid of the other one; he's yours."

"I said you were splendid and I don't see why that's—"

"And set the sail," added the six-fingered pick-lock. She lay down, closed her eyes and fell asleep.

Now it was Alyx who did not speak and Edarra who did; she said, "Good morning," she said, "Why do fish have scales?" she said, "I *like* shrimp; they look funny," and she said (once), "I like you," matter-of-factly, as if she had been thinking about the question and had just then settled it. One afternoon they were eating fish in the cabin—"fish" is a cold, unpleasant, slimy word, but sea trout baked in clay with onion, shrimp and white wine is something else again—when Edarra said:

"What was it like when you lived in the hills?" She said it right out of the blue, like that.

"What?" said Alyx.

"Were you happy?" said Edarra.

"I prefer not to discuss it."

"All right, *madam*," and the girl swept up to the deck with her plate and glass. It isn't easy climbing a rope ladder with a glass (balanced on a plate) in one hand, but she did it without thinking, which shows how accustomed she had become to the ship and how far this tale has advanced. Alyx sat moodily poking at her dinner (which had turned back to slime as far as she was concerned) when she smelled something char and gave a cursory poke into the firebox next to her with a metal broom they kept for the purpose. This ancient firebox served them as a stove. Now it may have been age, or

the carelessness of the previous owner, or just the venomous hatred of inanimate objects for mankind (the religion of Yp stresses this point with great fervor), but the truth of the matter was that the firebox had begun to come apart at the back, and a few flaming chips had fallen on the wooden floor of the cabin. Moreover, while Alyx poked among the coals in the box, its door hanging open, the left front leg of the creature crumpled and the box itself sagged forward, the coals inside sliding dangerously. Alyx exclaimed and hastily shut the door. She turned and looked for the lock with which to fasten the door more securely, and thus it was that until she turned back again and stood up, she did not see what mischief was going on at the other side. The floor, to the glory of Yp, was smoking in half a dozen places. Stepping carefully, Alyx picked up the pail of seawater kept always ready in a corner of the cabin and emptied it onto the smoldering floor, but at that instant—so diabolical are the souls of machines—the second front leg of the box followed the first and the brass door burst open, spewing burning coals the length of the cabin. Ordinarily not even a heavy sea could scatter the fire, for the door was too far above the bed on which the wood rested and the monster's legs were bolted to the floor. But now the boards caught not in half a dozen but in half a hundred places. Alyx shouted for water and grabbed a towel, while a pile of folded blankets against the wall curled and turned black; the cabin was filled with the odor of burning hair. Alyx beat at the blankets and the fire found a cupboard next to them, crept under the door and caught in a sack of sprouting potatoes, which refused to burn. Flour was packed next to them. "Edarra!" yelled Alyx. She overturned a rack of wine, smashing it against the floor regardless of the broken glass; it checked the flames while she beat at the cupboard; then the fire turned and leapt at the opposite wall. It flamed up for an instant in a straw mat hung against the wall, creeping upward, eating

down through the planks of the floor, searching out cracks under the cupboard door, roundabout. The potatoes, dried by the heat, began to wither sullenly; their canvas sacking crumbled and turned black. Edarra had just come tumbling into the cabin, horrified, and Alyx was choking on the smoke of canvas sacking and green, smoking sprouts, when the fire reached the stored flour. There was a concussive bellow and a blast of air that sent Alyx staggering into the stove; white flame billowed from the corner that had held the cupboard. Alyx was burned on one side from knee to ankle and knocked against the wall; she fell, full-length.

When she came to herself, she was half lying in dirty seawater and the fire was gone. Across the cabin Edarra was struggling with a water demon, stuffing half-burnt blankets and clothes and sacks of potatoes against an incorrigible waterspout that knocked her about and burst into the cabin in erratic gouts, making tides in the water that shifted sluggishly from one side of the floor to the other as the ship rolled.

"Help me!" she cried. Alyx got up. Shakily she staggered across the cabin and together they leaned their weight on the pile of stuffs jammed into the hole.

"It's not big," gasped the girl, "I made it with a sword. Just under the waterline."

"Stay here," said Alyx. Leaning against the wall, she made her way to the cold firebox. Two bolts held it to the floor. "No good there," she said. With the same exasperating slowness, she hauled herself up the ladder and stood uncertainly on the deck. She lowered the sail, cutting her fingers, and dragged it to the stern, pushing all loose gear on top of it. Dropping down through the hatch again, she shifted coils of rope and stores of food to the stern; patiently fumbling, she unbolted the firebox from the floor. The waterspout had lessened. Finally, when Alyx had pushed the metal box end over end against the opposite wall of the cabin, the water demon seemed

to lose his exuberance. He drooped and almost died. With a letting-out of breath, Edarra released the mass pressed against the hole: blankets, sacks, shoes, potatoes, all slid to the stern. The water stopped. Alyx, who seemed for the first time to feel a brand against the calf of her left leg and needles in her hand where she had burnt herself unbolting the stove, sat leaning against the wall, too weary to move. She saw the cabin through a milky mist. Ballooning and shrinking above her hung Edarra's face, dirty with charred wood and sea slime; the girl said:

"What shall I do now?"

"Nail boards," said Alyx slowly.

"Yes, then?" urged the girl.

"Pitch," said Alyx. "Bail it out."

"You mean the boat will pitch?" said Edarra, frowning in puzzlement. In answer Alyx shook her head and raised one hand out of the water to point to the storage place on deck, but the air drove the needles deeper into her fingers and distracted her mind. She said, "Fix," and leaned back against the wall, but as she was sitting against it already, her movement only caused her to turn, with a slow, natural easiness, and slide unconscious into the dirty water that ran tidally this way and that within the blackened, sour-reeking, littered cabin.

Alyx groaned. Behind her eyelids she was reliving one of the small contretemps of her life: lying indoors ill and badly hurt, with the sun rising out of doors, thinking that she was dying and hearing the birds sing. She opened her eyes. The sun shone, the waves sang, there was the little girl watching her. The sun was level with the sea and the first airs of evening stole across the deck.

Alyx tried to say, "What happened?" and managed only to croak. Edarra sat down, all of a flop.

"You're *talking!*" she exclaimed with vast relief. Alyx stirred, looking about her, tried to rise and thought better of it. She discovered lumps of bandage on her hand and

her leg; she picked at them feebly with her free hand, for they struck her somehow as irrelevant. Then she stopped.

"I'm alive," she said hoarsely, "for Yp likes to think he looks after me, the bastard."

"I don't know about *that*," said Edarra, laughing. "My!" She knelt on the deck with her hair streaming behind her like a ship's figurehead come to life; she said, "I fixed everything. I pulled you up here. I fixed the boat, though I had to hang by my knees. I pitched it." She exhibited her arms, daubed to the elbow. "Look," she said. Then she added, with a catch in her voice, "I thought you might die."

"I might yet," said Alyx. The sun dipped into the sea. "Long-leggedy thing," she said in a hoarse whisper, "get me some food."

"Here." Edarra rummaged for a moment and held out a piece of bread, part of the ragbag loosened on deck during the late catastrophe. The pick-lock ate, lying back. The sun danced up and down in her eyes, above the deck, below the deck, above the deck. . .

"Creature," said Alyx, "I had a daughter."

"Where is she?" said Edarra.

Silence.

"Praying," said Alyx at last. "Damning me."

"I'm sorry," said Edarra.

"But you," said Alyx, "are—" and she stopped blankly. She said "You—"

"Me what?" said Edarra.

"Are here," said Alyx, and with a bone-cracking yawn, letting the crust fall from her fingers, she fell asleep.

At length the time came (all things must end and Alyx's burns had already healed to barely visible scars—one looking closely at her could see many such faint marks on her back, her arms, her sides, the bodily record of the last rather difficult seven years) when Alyx, empty-

ing overboard the breakfast scraps, gave a yell so loud and triumphant that she inadvertently lost hold of the garbage bucket and it fell into the sea.

"What is it?" said Edarra, startled. Her friend was gripping the rail with both hands and staring over the sea with a look that Edarra did not understand in the least, for Alyx had been closemouthed on some subjects in the girl's education.

"I am thinking," said Alyx.

"Oh!" shrieked Edarra. "Land! Land!" and she capered about the deck, whirling and clapping her hands. "I can change my dress!" she cried. "Just think! We can eat fresh food! Just think!"

"I was not," said Alyx, "thinking about that." Edarra came up to her and looked curiously into her eyes, which had gone as deep and as gray as the sea on a gray day; she said, "Well, what are you thinking about?"

"Something not fit for your ears," said Alyx. The little girl's eyes narrowed. "Oh," she said pointedly. Alyx ducked past her for the hatch, but Edarra sprinted ahead and straddled it, arms wide.

"I want to hear it," she said.

"That's a foolish attitude," said Alyx. "You'll lose your balance."

"Tell me."

"Come, get away."

The girl sprang forward like a red-headed fury, seizing her friend by the hair with both hands. "If it's not fit for my ears, I want to hear it!" she cried.

Alyx dodged around her and dropped below, to retrieve from storage her severe, decent, formal black clothes, fit for a business call. When she reappeared, tossing the clothes on deck, Edarra had a short sword in her right hand and was guarding the hatch very exuberantly.

"Don't be foolish," said Alyx crossly.

"I'll kill you if you don't tell me," remarked Edarra.

"Little one," said Alyx, "the stain of ideals remains on the imagination long after the ideals themselves vanish. Therefore I will tell you nothing."

"Raahh!" said Edarra, in her throat.

"It wouldn't be proper," added Alyx primly. "If you don't know about it, so much the better," and she turned away to sort her clothes. Edarra pinked her in a formal, black shoe.

"Stop it!" snapped Alyx.

"Never!" cried the girl wildly, her eyes flashing. She lunged and fainted and her friend, standing still, wove (with the injured boot) a net of defense as invisible as the cloak that enveloped Aule the Messenger. Edarra, her chest heaving, managed to say, "I'm tired."

"Then stop," said Alyx.

Edarra stopped.

"Do I remind you of your little baby girl?" she said. Alyx said nothing.

"I'm not a little baby girl," said Edarra. "I'm eighteen now and I know more than you think. Did I ever tell you about my first suitor and the cook and the cat?"

"No," said Alyx, busy sorting.

"The cook let the cat in," said Edarra, "though she shouldn't have, and so when I was sitting on my suitor's lap and I had one arm around his neck and the other arm on the arm of the chair, he said, 'Darling, where is your *other* little hand?'"

"Mm hm," said Alyx.

"It was the cat, walking across his lap! But he could only feel one of my hands so he thought—" but here, seeing that Alyx was not listening, Edarra shouted a word used remarkably seldom in Ourdh and for very good reason. Alyx looked up in surprise. Ten feet away (as far away as she could get), Edarra was lying on the planks, sobbing. Alyx went over to her and knelt down, leaning back on her heels. Above, the first sea birds

of the trip—sea birds always live near land—circled and cried in a hard, hungry mew like a herd of aerial cats.

“Someone’s coming,” said Alyx.

“Don’t care.” This was Edarra on the deck, muffled. Alyx reached out and began to stroke the girl’s disordered hair, braiding it with her fingers, twisting it round her wrist and slipping her hand through it and out again.

“Someone’s in a fishing smack coming this way,” said Alyx.

Edarra burst into tears.

“Now, now, now!” said Alyx, “why that? Come!” and she tried to lift the girl up, but Edarra held stubbornly to the deck.

“What’s the matter?” said Alyx.

“You!” cried Edarra, bouncing bolt upright. “You; you treat me like a baby.”

“You are a baby,” said Alyx.

“How’m I ever going to stop if you treat me like one?” shouted the girl. Alyx got up and padded over to her new clothes, her face thoughtful. She slipped into a sleeveless black shift and belted it; it came to just above the knee. Then she took a comb from the pocket and began to comb out her straight, silky black hair. “I was remembering,” she said.

“What?” said Edarra.

“Things.”

“Don’t make fun of me.” Alyx stood for a moment, one blue-green earring on her ear and the other in her fingers. She smiled at the innocence of this red-headed daughter of the wickedest city on earth; she saw her own youth over again (though she had been unnaturally knowing almost from birth), and so she smiled, with rare sweetness.

“I’ll tell you,” she whispered conspiratorially, dropping to her knees beside Edarra, “I was remembering a man.”

“Oh!” said Edarra.

“I remembered,” said Alyx, “one week in spring when

the night sky above Ourdh was hung as brilliantly with stars as the jewelers' trays on the Street of a Thousand Follies. Ah! what a man. A big Northman with hair like yours and a gold-red beard—God, what a beard!—Fafnir—no, Fafh—well, something ridiculous. But he was far from ridiculous. He was amazing.”

Edarra said nothing, rapt.

“He was strong,” said Alyx, laughing, “and hairy, beautifully hairy. And willful! I said to him, ‘Man, if you must follow your eyes into every whorehouse—’ And we fought! At a place called the Silver Fish. Overturned tables. What a fuss! And a week later,” (she shrugged ruefully) “gone. There it is. And I can’t even remember his name.”

“Is that sad?” said Edarra.

“I don’t think so,” said Alyx. “After all, I remember his beard,” and she smiled wickedly. “There’s a man in that boat,” she said, “and that boat comes from a fishing village of maybe ten, maybe twelve families. That symbol painted on the side of the boat—I can make it out; perhaps you can’t; it’s a red cross on a blue circle—indicates a single man. Now the chances of there being two single men between the ages of eighteen and forty in a village of twelve families is not—”

“A man!” exploded Edarra. “That’s why you’re primping like a hen. Can I wear your clothes? Mine are full of salt,” and she buried herself in the piled wearables on deck, humming, dragged out a brush and began to brush her hair. She lay flat on her stomach, catching her underlip between her teeth, saying over and over “Oh—oh—oh—”

“Look here,” said Alyx, back at the rudder, “before you get too free, let me tell you: there are rules.”

“I’m going to wear this white thing,” said Edarra busily.

“Married men are not considered proper. It’s too acquisitive. If I know you, you’ll want to get married inside three weeks, but you must remember—”

"My shoes don't fit!" wailed Edarra, hopping about with one shoe on and one off.

"Horrid," said Alyx briefly.

"My feet have gotten bigger," said Edarra, plumping down beside her. "Do you think they spread when I go barefoot? Do you think that's ladylike? Do you think—"

"For the sake of peace, be quiet!" said Alyx. Her whole attention was taken up by what was far off on the sea; she nudged Edarra and the girl sat still, only emitting little explosions of breath as she tried to fit her feet into her old shoes. At last she gave up and sat—quite motionless—with her hands in her lap.

"There's only one man there," said Alyx.

"He's probably too young for you." (Alyx's mouth twitched.)

"Well?" added Edarra plaintively.

"Well what?"

"Well," said Edarra, embarrassed, "I hope you don't mind."

"Oh! I don't mind," said Alyx.

"I suppose," said Edarra helpfully, "that it'll be dull for you, won't it?"

"I can find some old grandfather," said Alyx.

Edarra blushed.

"And I can always cook," added the pick-lock.

"You must be a *good* cook."

"I am."

"That's nice. You remind me of a cat we once had, a very fierce, black, female cat who was a *very* good mother," (she choked and continued hurriedly) "she was a ripping fighter, too, and we just couldn't keep her in the house whenever she—uh—"

"Yes?" said Alyx.

"Wanted to get out," said Edarra feebly. She giggled. "And she always came back pr—I mean—"

"Yes?"

"She was a popular cat."

"Ah," said Alyx, "but old, no doubt."

"Yes," said Edarra unhappily. "Look here," she added quickly, "I hope you understand that I like you and I esteem you and it's not that I want to cut you out, but I *am* younger and you can't expect—" Alyx raised one hand. She was laughing. Her hair blew about her face like a skein of black silk. Her gray eyes glowed.

"Great are the ways of Yp," she said, "and some men prefer the ways of experience. Very odd of them, no doubt, but lucky for some of us. I have been told—but never mind. Infatuated men are bad judges. Besides, maid, if you look out across the water you will see a ship much closer than it was before, and in that ship a young man. Such is life. But if you look more carefully and shade your red, red brows, you will perceive—" and here she poked Edarra with her toe—"that surprise and mercy share the world between them. Yp is generous." She tweaked Edarra by the nose.

"Praise God, maid, there be two of them!"

So they waved, Edarra scarcely restraining herself from jumping into the sea and swimming to the other craft, Alyx with full sweeps of the arm, standing both at the stern of their stolen fishing boat on that late summer's morning while the fishermen in the other boat wondered—and disbelieved—and then believed—while behind all rose the green land in the distance and the sky was blue as blue. Perhaps it was the thought of her fifteen hundred ounces of gold stowed belowdecks, or perhaps it was an intimation of the extraordinary future, or perhaps it was only her own queer nature, but in the sunlight Alyx's eyes had a strange look, like those of Loh, the first woman, who had kept her own counsel at the very moment of creation, only looking about her with an immediate, intense, serpentine curiosity, already planning secret plans and guessing at who knows what unguessable mysteries. . .

("You old villain!" whispered Edarra, "we made it!")
But that's another story.

R. A. Lafferty, the author of this magnificently loony story, is a 51-year-old bachelor, an ex-drinker, a sports fan, and a collector of languages. Self-taught (except for an International Correspondence Schools degree in electrical engineering), he has a reading knowledge of all the languages of the Latin, German and Slavic families, as well as Gaelic and Greek. The Army sent him to Morotai (Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia), New Guinea and the Philippines, and at one time he could speak pretty good Passar Malay and Tagalog. He turned to writing, about six years ago, as a substitute for serious drinking. The tavernkeepers weep while we rejoice: Lafferty's stories are full of a warm Bacchic glow, recollected in sobriety—euphoria, comradeship, nostalgia, and the ever-renewed belief that something wonderful may happen.

THE HOLE ON THE CORNER

By R. A. Lafferty

Homer Hoose came home that evening to the golden cliché: the un-noble dog who was a personal friend of his; the perfect house where just to live was a happy riot; the loving and unpredictable wife; and the five children—the perfect number (four more would have been too many, four less would have been too few).

The dog howled in terror and bristled up like a hedgehog. Then it got a whiff of Homer and recognized him; it licked his heels and gnawed his knuckles and made him welcome. A good dog, though a fool. Who wants a smart dog!

Homer had a little trouble with the doorknob. They don't have them in all the recensions, you know; and he had that off-the-track feeling tonight. But he figured it out (you don't pull it, you turn it), and opened the door.

"Did you remember to bring what I asked you to bring this morning, Homer?" the loving wife Regina inquired.

"What did you ask me to bring this morning, quick-heat blueberry biscuit of my heart?" Homer asked.

"If *I'd* remembered, I'd have phrased it different when I asked if you remembered," Regina explained. "But I know I told you to bring something, old ketchup of my soul. Homer! Look at me, Homer! You look different tonight! DIFFERENT!! *You're not my Homer, are you!*

Help! Help! There's a monster in my house!! Help, help! Shriek!"

"It's always nice to be married to a wife who doesn't understand you," Homer said. He enfolded her affectionately, bore her down, trod on her with large friendly hooves, and began (as it seemed) to devour her.

"Where'd you get the monster, mama?" son Robert asked as he came in. "What's he got your whole head in his mouth for? Can I have one of the apples in the kitchen? What's he going to do, kill you, mama?"

"Shriek, shriek," said mama Regina. "Just one apple, Robert, there's just enough to go around. Yes, I think he's going to kill me. Shriek!"

Son Robert got an apple and went outdoors.

"Hi, papa, what's you doing to mama?" Daughter Fregona asked as she came in. She was fourteen, but stupid for her age. "Looks to me like you're going to kill her that way. I thought they peeled people before they swallowed them. Why! You're not papa at all, are you? You're some monster. I thought at first you were my papa. You look just like him except for the way you look."

"Shriek, shriek," said mama Regina, but her voice was muffled.

They had a lot of fun at their house.

Homer Hoose came home that evening to the golden cliché: the u.n.d.; the p.h.; the l. and u.w.; and the f.c. (four more would have been too many).

The dog wagged all over him happily, and son Robert was chewing an apple core on the front lawn.

"Hi, Robert," Homer said, "what's new today?"

"Nothing, papa. Nothing ever happens here. Oh yeah, there's a monster in the house. He looks kind of like you. He's killing mama and eating her up."

"Eating her up, you say, son? How do you mean?"

"He's got her whole head in his mouth."

"Droll, Robert, mighty droll," said Homer, and he went in the house.

One thing about the Hoose children: a lot of times they told the bald-headed truth. There *was* a monster there. He *was* killing and eating the wife Regina. This was no mere evening antic. It was something serious.

Homer the man was a powerful and quick-moving fellow. He fell on the monster with judo chops and solid body punches; and the monster let the woman go and confronted the man.

"What's with it, you silly oaf?" the monster snapped. "If you've got a delivery, go to the back door. Come punching people in here, will you? Regina, do you know who this silly simpleton is?"

"Wow, that was a pretty good one, wasn't it, Homer?" Regina gasped as she came from under, glowing and gulping. "Oh, him? Gee, Homer, I think he's my husband. But how can he be, if you are? Now the two of you have got me so mixed up that I don't know which one of you is my Homer."

"Great goofy Gestalten! You don't mean I look like him?" howled Homer the monster, near popping.

"My brain reels," moaned Homer the man. "Reality melts away. Regina! Exorcise this nightmare if you have in some manner called it up! I knew you shouldn't have been fooling around with that book."

"Listen, mister reely-brains," wife Regina began on Homer the man. "You learn to kiss like he does before you tell me which one to exorcise. All I ask is a little affection. And this I didn't find in a book."

"How we going to know which one is papa? They look just alike," daughters Clara-Belle, Anna-Belle, and Maudie-Belle came in like three little chimes.

"Hell-hopping horrors!" roared Homer the man. "How are you going to know—? He's got green skin."

"There's nothing wrong with green skin as long as it's kept neat and oiled," Regina defended.

"He's got tentacles instead of hands," said Homer the man.

"Oh boy, I'll say!" Regina sang out.

"How we going to know which one is papa when they look just alike?" the five Hoose children asked in chorus.

"I'm sure there's a simple explanation to this, old chap," said Homer the monster. "If I were you, Homer—and there's some argument whether I am or not—I believe I'd go to a doctor. I don't believe we both need to go, since our problem's the same. Here's the name of a good one," said Homer the monster, writing it out.

"Oh, I know him," said Homer the man when he read it. "But how did you know him? He isn't an animal doctor. Regina, I'm going over to the doctor to see what's the matter with me, or you. Try to have this nightmare back in whatever corner of your under-id it belongs in when I come back."

"Ask him if I keep taking my pink medicine," Regina said.

"No, not him. It's the head doctor I'm going to."

"Ask him if I have to keep on dreaming those pleasant dreams," Regina said. "I sure do get tired of them. I want to get back to the other kind. Homer, leave the coriander seed when you go." And she took the package out of his pocket. "You did remember to bring it. My other Homer forgot."

"No. I didn't," said Homer the monster. "You couldn't remember what you told me to get. Here, Regina."

"I'll be back in a little while," said Homer the man. "The doctor lives on the corner. And you, fellow, if you're real, keep your plankton-picking polypusses off my wife till I get back."

Homer Hoose went up the street to the house of Dr. Corte on the corner. He knocked on the door, and then

opened it and went in without waiting for an answer. The doctor was sitting there, but he seemed a little bit dazed.

"I've got a problem, Dr. Corte," said Homer the man. "I came home this evening, and I found a monster eating my wife—as I thought."

"Yes, I know," said Dr. Corte. "Homer, we got to fix that hole on the corner."

"I didn't know there was a hole there, doctor. As it happened, the fellow wasn't really swallowing my wife, it was just his way of showing affection. Everybody thought the monster looked like me, and doctor, it has green skin and tentacles. When I began to think it looked like me too, then I came here to see what was wrong with me, or with everybody else."

"I can't help you, Hoose. I'm a psychologist, not a contingent-physicist. Only one thing to do; we got to fix that hole on the corner."

"Doctor, there's no hole in the street on this corner."

"Wasn't talking about a hole in the street. Homer, I just got back from a visit of my own that shook me up. I went to an analyst who analyzes analysts. 'I've had a dozen people come to see me with the same sort of story,' I told him. 'They all come home in the evening; and everything is different, or themselves are different; or they find that they are already there when they get there. What do you do when a dozen people come in with the same nonsense story, Dr. Diebel?' I asked him.

"'I don't know, Corte,' he said to me. 'What do I do when *one* man comes in a dozen times with the same nonsense story, all within one hour, and he a doctor too?' Dr. Diebel asked me.

"'Why, Dr. Diebel?' I asked. 'What doctor came to you like that?'

"'You,' he said. 'You've come in here twelve times in the last hour with the same dish of balderhash; you've come in each time looking a little bit different; and each

time you act as if you hadn't seen me for a month. Dammit, man,' he said, 'you must have passed yourself going out when you come in.'

"'Yes, that *was* me, wasn't it?' I said. 'I was trying to think who he reminded me of. Well, it's a problem, Dr. Diebel,' I said. 'What are you going to do about it?'

"'I'm going to the analyst who analyzes the analysts who analyze the analysts,' he said. 'He's tops in the field.' Dr. Diebel rushed out then; and I came back to my office here. You came in just after that. I'm not the one to help you. But, Homer, we got to do something about that hole on the corner!"

"I don't understand the bit about the hole, doctor," Homer said. "But—has a bunch of people been here with stories like mine?"

"Yes, every man in this block has been in with an idiot story, Homer, except— Why, everybody except old double-domed Diogenes himself! Homer, that man who knows everything has a finger in this up to the humerus. I saw him up on the power poles the other night, but I didn't think anything of it. He likes to tap the lines before they come to his meter. Saves a lot on power that way, and he uses a lot of it in his laboratory. But he was setting up the hole on the corner. That's what he was doing. Let's get him and bring him to your house and make him straighten it out."

"Sure, a man that knows everything ought to know about a hole on the corner, doctor. But I sure don't see any hole anywhere on this corner."

The man who knew everything was named Diogenes Pontifex. He lived next door to Homer Hoose, and they found him in his back yard wrestling with his anaconda.

"Diogenes, come over to Homer's with us," Dr. Corte insisted. "We've got a couple of questions that might be too much even for you."

"You touch my pride there," Diogenes sang out. "When

psychologists start using psychology on you, it's time to give in. Wait a minute till I pin this fellow."

Diogenes put a chancery on the anaconda, punched the thing's face a few times, then pinned it with a double bar-arm and body lock, and left it writhing there. He followed them into the house.

"Hi, Homer," Diogenes said to Homer the monster when they had come into the house. "I see there's two of you here at the same time now. No doubt that's what's puzzling you."

"Doctor Corte, did Homer ask you if I could stop dreaming those pleasant dreams?" wife Regina asked. "I sure do get tired of them. I want to go back to the old flesh-crawlers."

"You should be able to do so tonight, Regina," said Dr. Corte. "Now then, I'm trying to bait Diogenes here into telling us what's going on. I'm sure he knows. And if you would skip the first part, Diogenes, about all the other scientists in the world being like little boys alongside of you, it would speed things up. I believe that this is another of your experiments like— Oh no! Let's not even think about the last one!"

"Tell us, Diogenes, about the hole on the corner, and what falls through it. Tell us how some people come home two or three times within as many minutes, and find themselves already there when they get there. Tell us how a creature that staggers the imagination can seem so like an old acquaintance after a moment or two that one might not know which is which. I am not now sure which of these Homers it was who came to my office several moments ago, and with whom I returned to this house. They look just alike in one way, and in another they do not."

"My Homer always was funny looking," Regina said.

"They appear quite different if you go by the visual index," Diogenes explained. "But nobody goes by the visual index except momentarily. Our impression of a per-

son or a thing is much more complex, and the visual element in our appraisal is small. Well, one of them is Homer in gestalt two, and the other is Homer in gestalt nine. But they are quite distinct. Don't ever get the idea that such are the same persons. That would be silly."

"And Lord spare us that!" said Homer the man. "All right, go into your act, Diogenes."

"First, look at me closely, all of you," Diogenes said. "Handsome, what? But note my clothing and my complexion and my aspect."

"Then to the explanations: It begins with my Corollary to Phelan's Corollary on Gravity. I take the opposite alternate of it. Phelan puzzled that gravity should be so weak on all worlds but one. He said that the gravity of that one remote world was typical, and that the gravity of all other worlds was atypical and the result of a mathematical error. But I, from the same data, deduce that the gravity of our own world is not too weak, but too strong. It is about a hundred times as strong as it should be."

"What do you compare it to when you decide it is too strong?" Dr. Corte wanted to know.

"There's nothing I can compare it to, doctor. The gravity of *every* body that I am able to examine is from eighty to a hundred times too strong. There are two possible explanations: either my calculations or theories are somehow in error—unlikely—or there are, in every case, about a hundred bodies, solid and weighted, occupying the same place at the same time. *Old Ice Cream Store Chairs! Tennis Shoes in October! The Smell of Slippery Elm! County-Fair Barkers with Warts on Their Noses! Horned Toads in June!*"

"I was following you pretty good up to the Ice Cream Store Chairs," said Homer the monster.

"Oh, I tied that part in, and the tennis shoes too," said Homer the man. "I'm pretty good at following this cosmic theory business. What threw me was the slippery

elm. I can't see how it especially illustrates a contingent theory of gravity."

"The last part was an incantation," said Diogenes. "Do you remark anything different about me now?"

"You're wearing a different suit now, of course," said Regina, "but there's nothing remarkable about that. Lots of people change to different clothes in the evening."

"You're darker and stringier," said Dr. Corte. "But I wouldn't have noticed any change if you hadn't told us to look for it. Actually, if I didn't know that you were Diogenes, there wouldn't be any sane way to identify Diogenes in you. You don't look a thing like you, but still I'd know you anywhere."

"I was first a gestalt two. Now I'm a gestalt three for a while," said Diogenes. "Well, first we have the true case that a hundred or so solid and weighty bodies are occupying the same space that our earth occupies, and at the same time. This in itself does violence to conventional physics. But now let us consider the characteristics of all these cohabiting bodies. Are they occupied and peopled? Will it then mean that a hundred or so persons are occupying at all times the same space that each person occupies? Might not this idea do violence to conventional psychology? Well, I have proved that there are at least eight other persons occupying the same space occupied by each of us, and I have scarcely begun proving. *Stark White Sycamore Branches! New-Harrowed Earth! (New harrow, old earth.) Cow Dung Between Your Toes in July! Pitchers'-Mound Clay in the Old Three-Eye League! Sparrow Hawks in August!*"

"I fell off the harrow," said wife Regina. "I got the sycamore branches bit, though."

"I got clear down to the sparrow hawks," said Homer the monster.

"Do you remark anything different about me this time?" Diogenes asked.

"You have little feathers on the backs of your hands

where you used to have little hairs," said Homer the man, "and on your toes. You're barefoot now. But I wouldn't have noticed any of it if I hadn't been looking for something funny."

"I'm a gestalt four now," said Diogenes. "My conduct is likely to become a little extravagant."

"It always was," said Dr. Corte.

"But not so much as if I were a gestalt five," said Diogenes. "As a five, I might take a Pan-like leap onto the shoulders of young Fregona here, or literally walk barefoot through the hair of the beautiful Regina as she stands there. Many normal gestalt twos become gestalt fours or fives in their dreams. It seems that Regina does."

"I found the shadow, but not the substance, of the whole situation in the psychology of Jung. Jung served me as the second element in this, for it was the errors of Phelan and Jung in widely different fields that set me on the trail of the truth. What Jung really says is that each of us is a number of persons in depth. This I consider silly. There is something about such far-out theories that repels me. The truth is that our counterparts enter into our unconsciousness and dreams only by accident, as being most of the time in the same space that we occupy. But we are all separate and independent persons. And we may, two or more of us, be present in the same frame at the same time, and then in a near, but not the same, place. Witness the gestalt two and the gestalt nine Homers here present."

"I've been experimenting to see how far I can go with it, and the gestalt nine is the furthest I have brought it so far. I do not number the gestalten in the order of their strangeness to our own norm, but in the order in which I discovered them. I'm convinced that the concentric and congravitic worlds and people complexes number near a hundred, however."

"Well, there *is* a hole on the corner, isn't there?" Dr. Corte asked.

"Yes, I set it up there by the bus stop as a convenient evening point of entry for the people of this block," said Diogenes. "I've had lots of opportunity to study the results these last two days."

"Well, just how *do* you set up a hole on the corner?" Dr. Corte persisted.

"Believe me, Corte, it took a lot of imagination," Diogenes said. "I mean it literally. I drew so deeply on my own psychic store to construct the thing that it left me shaken, and I have the most manifold supply of psychic images of any person I know. I've also set up magnetic amplifiers on both sides of the street, but it is my original imagery that they amplify. I see a never-ending field of study in this."

"Just what is the incantation stuff that takes you from one gestalt to another?" Homer the monster asked.

"It is only one of dozens of possible modes of entry, but I sometimes find it the easiest," said Diogenes. "It is Immediacy Remembered, or the Verbal Ramble. It is the Evocation—an intuitive or charismatic entry. I often use it in the Bradmont Motif—named by me from two as-aff writers in the twentieth century."

"You speak of it as if—well— isn't *this* the twentieth century?" Regina asked.

"This the twentieth? Why, you're right! I guess it is," Diogenes agreed. "You see, I carry on experiments in other fields also, and sometimes I get my times mixed. All of you, I believe, do sometimes have moments of peculiar immediacy and vividness. It seems then as if the world were somehow fresher in that moment, as though it were a new world. And the explanation is that, to you, it *is* a new world. You have moved, for a moment, into a different gestalt. There are many accidental holes or modes of entry, but mine is the only contrived one I know of."

"There's a discrepancy here," said Dr. Corte. "If the

persons are separate, how can you change from one to another?"

"I do not change from one person to another," said Diogenes. "There have been three different Diogenes' lecturing you here in series. Fortunately, my colleagues and I, being of like scientific mind, work together in close concert. We have made a successful experiment in substitution acceptance on you here this evening. Oh, the ramifications of this thing! The aspects to be studied. I will take you out of your narrow gestalt-two world and show you worlds upon worlds."

"You talk about the gestalt-two complex that we normally belong to," said wife Regina, "and about others up to gestalt nine, and maybe a hundred. Isn't there a gestalt one? Lots of people start counting at one."

"There is a number one, Regina," said Diogenes. "I discovered it first and named it, before I realized that the common world of most of you was of a similar category. But I do not intend to visit gestalt one again. It is turgid and dreary beyond tolerating. One instance of its mediocrity will serve. The people of gestalt one refer to their world as the 'everyday world.' Retch quietly, please. May the lowest of us never fall so low! *Persimmons After First Frost! Old Barbershop Chairs! Pink Dogwood Blossoms in the Third Week of November! Murad Cigarette Advertisements!!*"

Diogenes cried out the last in mild panic, and he seemed disturbed. He changed into another fellow a little bit different, but the new Diogenes didn't like what he saw either.

"*Smell of Wet Sweet Clover!*" he cried out. "*St. Mary's Street in San Antonio! Model Airplane Glue! Moon Crabs in March!* It won't work! The rats have run out on me! Homer and Homer, grab that other Homer there! I believe he's a gestalt six, and they sure are mean."

Homer Hoose wasn't particularly mean. He had just come home a few minutes late and had found two other fellows who looked like him jazzing his wife Regina. And those two mouth men, Dr. Corte and Diogenes Pontifex, didn't have any business in his house when he was gone either.

He started to swing. You'd have done it too.

Those three Homers were all powerful and quick-moving fellows, and they had a lot of blood in them. It was soon flowing, amid the crashing and breaking-up of furniture and people—ocher-colored blood, pearl-gray blood, one of the Homers even had blood of a sort of red color. Those boys threw a real riot!

"Give me that package of coriander seed, Homer," wife Regina said to the latest Homer as she took it from his pocket. "It won't hurt to have three of them. Homer! Homer! Homer! All three of you! Stop bleeding on the rug!"

Homer was always a battler. So was Homer. And Homer.

"Stethoscopes and Moonlight and Memory—ah—in Late March," Dr. Corte chanted. "Didn't work, did it? I'll get out of here a regular way. Homers, boys, come up to my place, one at a time, and get patched up when you're finished. I have to do a little regular medicine on the side nowadays."

Dr. Corte went out the door with the loopy run of a man not in very good condition.

"Old Hairbreadth Harry Comic Strips! Congress Street in Houston! Light Street in Baltimore! Elizabeth Street in Sydney! Varnish on Old Bar-Room Pianos! B-Girls Named Dotty! I believe it's easier just to make a dash for my house next door," Diogenes rattled off. And he did dash out with the easy run of a man who is in good condition.

"I've had it!" boomed one of the Homers—and we don't know which one—as he was flung free from the donnybrook and smashed into a wall. "Peace and quiet is what a man wants when he comes home in the evening, not this. Folks, I'm going out and up to the corner again. Then I'm going to come home all over again. I'm going to wipe my mind clear of all this. When I turn back from the corner I'll be whistling Dixie and I'll be the most peaceful man in the world. But when I get home, I bet neither of you guys had better have happened at all."

And Homer dashed up to the corner.

Homer Hoose came home that evening to the g.c.—everything as it should be. He found his house in order and his wife Regina alone.

"Did you remember to bring the coriander seed, Homer, little gossamer of my fusus?" Regina asked him.

"Ah, I remembered to get it, Regina, but I don't seem to have it in my pocket now. I'd rather you didn't ask me where I lost it. There's something I'm trying to forget. Regina, I didn't come home this evening before this, did I?"

"Not that I remember, little dolomedes sexpunctatus."

"And there weren't a couple other guys here who looked just like me only different?"

"No, no, little cobby. I love you and all that, but nothing else could look like you. Nobody has been here but you. Kids! Get ready for supper! Papa's home!"

"Then it's all right," Homer said. "I was just day-dreaming on my way home, and all that stuff never happened. Here I am in the perfect house with my wife Regina, and the kids'll be underfoot in just a second. I never realized how wonderful it was. AHHHHNNN!!! YOU'RE NOT REGINA!!!"

"But of course I am, Homer. Lycosa Regina is my

species name. Well, come, come, you know how I enjoy our evenings together."

She picked him up, lovingly broke his arms and legs for easier handling, spread him out on the floor, and began to devour him.

"No, no, you're not Regina," Homer sobbed. "You look just like her, but you also look like a giant monstrous arachnid. Dr. Corte was right, we got to fix that hole on the corner."

"That Dr. Corte doesn't know what he's talking about," Regina munched. "He says I'm a compulsive eater."

"What's you eating papa again for, mama?" daughter Fregona asked as she came in. "You know what the doctor said."

"It's the spider in me," said mama Regina. "I wish you'd brought the coriander seed with you, Homer. It goes so good with you."

"But the doctor says you got to show a little restraint, mama," daughter Fregona cut back in. "He says it becomes harder and harder for papa to grow back new limbs so often at his age. He says it's going to end up by making him nervous."

"Help, help!" Homer screamed. "My wife is a giant spider and is eating me up. My legs and arms are already gone. If only I could change back to the first nightmare! *Night-Charleys under the Beds at Grandpa's House on the Farm! Rosined Cord to Make Bull-Roarers on Hallowe'en! Pig Mush in February! Cobwebs on Fruit Jars in the Cellar!* No, no, not that! Things never work when you need them. That Diogenes fools around with too much funny stuff."

"All I want is a little affection," said Regina, talking with her mouth full.

"Help, help," said Homer as she ate him clear up to his head. "Shriek, shriek!"

Kit Reed, a young Connecticut newspaperwoman, received a \$22,000 award from the Abraham Woursell Foundation in 1965. She is the author of two novels, Mother Isn't Dead She's Only Sleeping (Houghton Mifflin) and At War With Children (Farrar, Straus).

The most memorable thing said by anybody at the Milford Writers' Conference a few years ago was Carol Emshwiller's "Inside every fat person is a thin person screaming to be let out." Now Mrs. Reed, who was not there, has unexpectedly inverted this epigram. . . .

THE FOOD FARM

By Kit Reed

So here I am, warden-in-charge, fattening them up for our leader, Tommy Fango; here I am laying on the banana pudding and the milkshakes and the cream-and-brandy cocktails, going about like a technician, gauging their effect on haunch and thigh when all the time it is I who love him, I who could have pleased him eternally if only life had broken differently. But I am scrawny now, I am swept like a leaf around corners, battered by the slightest wind. My elbows rattle against my ribs and I have to spend half the day in bed so a gram or two of what I eat will stay with me, for if I do not, the fats and creams will vanish, burned up in my own insatiable furnace, and what little flesh I have will melt away.

Cruel as it may sound, I know where to place the blame.

It was vanity, all vanity, and I hate them most for that. It was not my vanity, for I have always been a simple soul; I reconciled myself early to reenforced chairs and loose garments, to the spattering of remarks. Instead of heeding them I plugged in, and I would have been happy to let it go at that, going through life with my radio in my bodice, for while I never drew cries of admiration, no one ever blanched and turned away.

But they were vain and in their vanity my frail father,

my pale, scrawny mother saw me not as an entity but a reflection on themselves. I flush with shame to remember the excuses they made for me. "She takes after May's side of the family," my father would say, denying any responsibility. "It's only baby fat," my mother would say, jabbing her elbow into my soft flank. "Nelly is big for her age." Then she would jerk furiously, pulling my voluminous smock down to cover my knees. That was when they still consented to be seen with me. In that period they would stuff me with pies and roasts before we went anywhere, filling me up so I would not gorge myself in public. Even so I had to take thirds, fourths, fifths and so I was a humiliation to them.

In time I was too much for them and they stopped taking me out; they made no more attempts to explain. Instead they tried to think of ways to make me look better; the doctors tried the fool's poor battery of pills; they tried to make me join a club. For a while my mother and I did exercises; we would sit on the floor, she in a black leotard, I in my smock. Then she would do the brisk one-two, one-two and I would make a few passes at my toes. But I had to listen, I had to plug in, and after I was plugged in naturally I had to find something to eat; Tommy might sing and I always ate when Tommy sang, and so I would leave her there on the floor, still going one-two, one-two. For a while after that they tried locking up the food. Then they began to cut into my meals.

That was the cruelest time. They would refuse me bread, they would plead and cry, plying me with lettuce and telling me it was all for my own good. My own good. Couldn't they hear my vitals crying out? I fought, I screamed, and when that failed I suffered in silent obedience until finally hunger drove me into the streets. I would lie in bed, made brave by the Monets and Barry Arkin and the Philadons coming in over the radio, and Tommy (there was never enough; I heard him a hundred

times a day and it was never enough; how bitter that seems now!). I would hear them and then when my parents were asleep I would unplug and go out into the neighborhood. The first few nights I begged, throwing myself on the mercy of passers-by and then plunging into the bakery, bringing home everything I didn't eat right there in the shop. I got money quickly enough; I didn't even have to ask. Perhaps it was my bulk, perhaps it was my desperate subverbal cry of hunger; I found I had only to approach and the money was mine. As soon as they saw me, people would whirl and bolt, hurling a purse or wallet into my path as if to slow me in my pursuit; they would be gone before I could even express my thanks. Once I was shot at. Once a stone lodged itself in my flesh.

At home my parents continued with their tears and pleas. They persisted with their skim milk and their chops, ignorant of the life I lived by night. In the daytime I was complaisant, dozing between snacks, feeding on the sounds which played in my ear, coming from the radio concealed in my dress. Then, when night fell, I unplugged; it gave a certain edge to things, knowing I would not plug in again until I was ready to eat. Some nights this only meant going to one of the caches in my room, bringing forth bottles and cartons and cans. On other nights I had to go into the streets, finding money where I could. Then I would lay in a new supply of cakes and rolls and baloney from the delicatessen and several cans of ready-made frosting and perhaps a flitch of bacon or some ham; I would toss in a basket of oranges to ward off scurvy and a carton of candy bars for quick energy. Once I had enough I would go back to my room, concealing food here and there, rearranging my nest of pillows and comforters. I would open the first pie or the first half-gallon of ice cream and then, as I began, I would plug in.

You had to plug in; everybody that mattered was

plugged in. It was our bond, our solace and our power, and it wasn't a matter of being distracted, or occupying time. The sound was what mattered, that and the fact that fat or thin, asleep or awake, you were important when you plugged in, and you knew that through fire and flood and adversity, through contumely and hard times there was this single bond, this common heritage; strong or weak, eternally gifted or wretched and ill-loved, we were all plugged in.

Tommy, beautiful Tommy Fango, the others paled to nothing next to him. Everybody heard him in those days; they played him two or three times an hour but you never knew when it would be so you were plugged in and listening hard every living moment; you ate, you slept, you drew breath for the moment when they would put on one of Tommy's records, you waited for his voice to fill the room. Cold cuts and cupcakes and game hens came and went during that period in my life, but one thing was constant; I always had a cream pie thawing and when they played the first bars of "When a Widow" and Tommy's voice first flexed and uncurled, I was ready, I would eat the cream pie during Tommy's midnight show. The whole world waited in those days; we waited through endless sunlight, through nights of drumbeats and monotony, we all waited for Tommy Fango's records, and we waited for that whole unbroken hour of Tommy, his midnight show. He came on live at midnight in those days; he sang, broadcasting from the Hotel Riverside, and that was beautiful, but more important, he talked, and while he was talking he made everything all right. Nobody was lonely when Tommy talked; he brought us all together on that midnight show, he talked and made us powerful, he talked and finally he sang. You have to imagine what it was like, me in the night, Tommy, the pie. In a while I would go to a place where I had to live on Tommy and only Tommy, to a time when hearing Tommy would bring back the pie, all the poor lost pies. . .

Tommy's records, his show, the pie . . . that was perhaps the happiest period of my life. I would sit and listen and I would eat and eat and eat. So great was my bliss that it became torture to put away the food at daybreak; it grew harder and harder for me to hide the cartons and the cans and the bottles, all the residue of my happiness. Perhaps a bit of bacon fell into the register; perhaps an egg rolled under the bed and began to smell. All right, perhaps I did become careless, continuing my revels into the morning, or I may have been thoughtless enough to leave a jelly roll unfinished on the rug. I became aware that they were watching, lurking just outside my door, plotting as I ate. In time they broke in on me, weeping and pleading, lamenting over every ice cream carton and crumb of pie; then they threatened. Finally they restored the food they had taken from me in the daytime, thinking to curtail my eating at night. Folly. By that time I needed it all, I shut myself in with it and would not listen. I ignored their cries of hurt pride, their outpourings of wounded vanity, their puny little threats. Even if I had listened, I could not have forestalled what happened next.

I was so happy that last day. There was a Smithfield ham, mine, and I remember a jar of cherry preserves, mine, and I remember bacon, pale and white on Italian bread. I remember sounds downstairs and before I could take warning, an assault, a company of uniformed attendants, the sting of a hypodermic gun. Then the ten of them closed in and grappled me into a sling, or net, and heaving and straining, they bore me down the stairs. I'll never forgive you, I cried, as they bundled me into the ambulance. I'll never forgive you, I bellowed as my mother in a last betrayal took away my radio, and I cried out one last time, as my father removed a hambone from my breast: I'll never forgive you, And I never have.

It is painful to describe what happened next. I remember three days of horror and agony, of being too weak,

finally, to cry out or claw the walls. Then at last I was quiet and they moved me into a sunny, pastel, chintz-bedizened room. I remember that there were flowers on the dresser and someone watching me.

"What are you in for?" she said.

I could barely speak for weakness. "Despair."

"Hell with that," she said, chewing. "You're in for food."

"What are you eating?" I tried to raise my head.

"Chewing. Inside of the mouth. It helps."

"I'm going to die."

"Everybody thinks that at first. I did." She tilted her head in an attitude of grace. "You know, this is a very exclusive school."

Her name was Ramona and as I wept silently, she filled me in. This was a last resort for the few who could afford to send their children here. They prettied it up with a schedule of therapy, exercise, massage; we would wear dainty pink smocks and talk of art and theater; from time to time we would attend classes in elocution and hygiene. Our parents would say with pride that we were away at Faircrest, an elegant finishing school; we knew better—it was a prison and we were being starved.

"It's a world I never made," said Ramona, and I knew that her parents were to blame, even as mine were. Her mother liked to take the children into hotels and casinos, wearing her thin daughters like a garland of jewels. Her father followed the sun on his private yacht, with the pennants flying and his children on the fantail, lithe and tanned. He would pat his flat, tanned belly and look at Ramona in disgust. When it was no longer possible to hide her, he gave in to blind pride. One night they came in a launch and took her away. She had been here six months now, and had lost almost a hundred pounds. She must have been monumental in her prime; she was still huge.

"We live from day to day," she said. "But you don't know the worst."

"My radio," I said in a spasm of fear. "They took away my radio."

"There is a reason," she said. "They call it therapy."

I was mumbling in my throat, in a minute I would scream.

"Wait." With ceremony, she pushed aside a picture and touched a tiny switch and then, like sweet balm for my panic, Tommy's voice flowed into the room.

When I was quiet she said, "You only hear him once a day."

"No."

"But you can hear him any time you want to. You hear him when you need him most."

But we were missing the first few bars and so we shut up and listened, and after "When a Widow" was over we sat quietly for a moment, her resigned, me weeping, and then Ramona threw another switch and the Sound filtered into the room, and it was almost like being plugged in.

"Try not to think about it."

"I'll die."

"If you think about it you *will* die. You have to learn to use it instead. In a minute they will come with lunch," Ramona said and as The Screamers sang sweet background, she went on in a monotone: "A chop. One lousy chop with a piece of lettuce and maybe some gluten bread. I pretend it's a leg of lamb, that works if you eat very, very slowly and think about Tommy the whole time; then if you look at your picture of Tommy you can turn the lettuce into anything you want, Caesar salad or a whole smorgasbord, and if you say his name over and over you can pretend a whole bombe or torte if you want to and. . ."

"I'm going to pretend a ham and kidney pie and a watermelon filled with chopped fruits and Tommy and

I are in the Rainbow Room and we're going to finish up with Fudge Royale . . ." I almost drowned in my own saliva; in the background I could almost hear Tommy and I could hear Ramona saying, "Capon, Tommy would like capon, canard à l'orange, Napoleons, tomorrow we will save Tommy for lunch and listen while we eat . . ." and I thought about that, I thought about listening and imagining whole cream pies and I went on, ". . . lemon pie, rice pudding, a whole Edam cheese. . . I think I'm going to live."

The matron came in the next morning at breakfast, and stood as she would every day, tapping red fingernails on one svelte hip, looking on in revulsion as we fell on the glass of orange juice and the hard-boiled egg. I was too weak to control myself; I heard a shrill sniveling sound and realized only from her expression that it was my own voice: "Please, just some bread, a stick of butter, anything, I could lick the dishes if you'd let me, only please don't leave me like this, please. . ." I can still see her sneer as she turned her back.

I felt Ramona's loyal hand on my shoulder. "There's always toothpaste but don't use too much at once or they'll come and take it away from you."

I was too weak to rise and so she brought it and we shared the tube and talked about all the banquets we had ever known, and when we got tired of that we talked about Tommy, and when that failed, Ramona went to the switch and we heard "When a Widow," and that helped for a while, and then we decided that tomorrow we would put off "When a Widow" until bedtime because then we would have something to look forward to all day. Then lunch came and we both wept.

It was not just hunger: after a while the stomach begins to devour itself and the few grams you toss it at meal-times assuage it so that in time the appetite itself begins to fail. After hunger comes depression. I lay there, still too weak to get about, and in my misery I realized that they

could bring me roast pork and watermelon and Boston cream pie without ceasing; they could gratify all my dreams and I would only weep helplessly, because I no longer had the strength to eat. Even then, when I thought I had reached rock bottom, I had not comprehended the worst. I noticed it first in Ramona. Watching her at the mirror, I said, in fear:

"You're thinner."

She turned with tears in her eyes. "Nelly, I'm not the only one."

I looked around at my own arms and saw that she was right: there was one less fold of flesh above the elbow; there was one less wrinkle at the wrist. I turned my face to the wall and all Ramona's talk of food and Tommy did not comfort me. In desperation she turned on Tommy's voice, but as he sang I lay back and contemplated the melting of my own flesh.

"If we stole a radio we could hear him again," Ramona said, trying to soothe me. "We could hear him when he sings tonight."

Tommy came to Faircrest on a visit two days later, for reasons that I could not then understand. All the other girls lumbered into the assembly hall to see him, thousands of pounds of agitated flesh. It was that morning that I discovered I could walk again, and I was on my feet, struggling into the pink tent in a fury to get to Tommy, when the matron intercepted me.

"Not you, Nelly."

"I have to get to Tommy. I have to hear him sing."

"Next time, maybe." With a look of naked cruelty she added, "You're a disgrace. You're still too gross."

I lunged, but it was too late; she had already shot the bolt. And so I sat in the midst of my diminishing body, suffering while every other girl in the place listened to him sing. I knew then that I had to act; I would regain myself somehow, I would find food and regain my flesh and then I would go to Tommy. I would use force if I

had to, but I would hear him sing. I raged through the room all that morning, hearing the shrieks of five hundred girls, the thunder of their feet, but even when I pressed myself against the wall I could not hear Tommy's voice.

Yet Ramona, when she came back to the room, said the most interesting thing. It was some time before she could speak at all, but in her generosity she played "When a Widow" while she regained herself, and then she spoke:

"He came for something, Nelly. He came for something he didn't find."

"Tell about what he was wearing. Tell what his throat did when he sang."

"He looked at all the *before* pictures, Nelly. The matron was trying to make him look at the *afters* but he kept looking at the *befores* and shaking his head and then he found one and put it in his pocket and if he hadn't found it, he wasn't going to sing."

I could feel my spine stiffen. "Ramona, you've got to help me. I must go to him."

That night we staged a daring break. We clubbed the attendant when he brought dinner, and once we had him under the bed we ate all the chops and gluten bread on his cart and then we went down the corridor, lifting bolts, and when we were a hundred strong we locked the matron in her office and raided the dining hall, howling and eating everything we could find. I ate that night, how I ate, but even as I ate I was aware of a fatal lightness in my bones, a failure in capacity, and so they found me in the frozen food locker, weeping over a chain of link sausage, inconsolable because I understood that they had spoiled it for me, they with their chops and their gluten bread; I could never eat as I once had, I would never be myself again.

In my fury I went after the matron with a ham hock, and when I had them all at bay I took a loin of pork for sustenance and I broke out of that place. I had to get to

Tommy before I got any thinner; I had to try. Outside the gate I stopped a car and hit the driver with the loin of pork and then I drove to the Hotel Riverside, where Tommy always stayed. I made my way up the fire stairs on little cat feet and when the valet went to his suite with one of his velveteen suits I followed, quick as a tigress, and the next moment I was inside. When all was quiet I tiptoed to his door and stepped inside.

He was magnificent. He stood at the window, gaunt and beautiful; his blond hair fell to his waist and his shoulders shriveled under a heartbreaking double-breasted pea-green velvet suit. He did not see me at first; I drank in his image and then, delicately, cleared my throat. In the second that he turned and saw me, everything seemed possible.

"It's you." His voice throbbed.

"I had to come."

Our eyes fused and in that moment I believed that we two could meet, burning as a single, lambent flame, but in the next second his face had crumpled in disappointment; he brought a picture from his pocket, a fingered, cracked photograph, and he looked from it to me and back at the photograph, saying, "My darling, you've fallen off."

"Maybe it's not too late," I cried, but we both knew I would fail.

And fail I did, even though I ate for days, for five desperate, heroic weeks; I threw pies into the breach, fresh hams and whole sides of beef, but those sad days at the food farm, the starvation and the drugs have so upset my chemistry that it cannot be restored; no matter what I eat I fall off and I continue to fall off; my body is a halfway house for foods I can no longer assimilate. Tommy watches, and because he knows he almost had me, huge and round and beautiful, Tommy mourns. He eats less and less now. He eats like a bird and lately he has refused to sing; strangely, his records have begun to disappear.

And so a whole nation waits.

"I almost had her," he says, when they beg him to resume his midnight shows; he will not sing, he won't talk, but his hands describe the mountain of woman he has longed for all his life.

And so I have lost Tommy, and he has lost me, but I am doing my best to make it up to him. I own Faircrest now, and in the place where Ramona and I once suffered I use my skills on the girls Tommy wants me to cultivate. I can put twenty pounds on a girl in a couple of weeks and I don't mean bloat, I mean solid fat. Ramona and I feed them up and once a week we weigh and I poke the upper arm with a special stick and I will not be satisfied until the stick goes in and does not rebound because all resiliency is gone. Each week I bring out my best and Tommy shakes his head in misery because the best is not yet good enough, none of them are what I once was. But one day the time and the girl will be right—would that it were me—the time and the girl will be right and Tommy will sing again. In the meantime, the whole world waits; in the meantime, in a private wing well away from the others, I keep my special cases; the matron, who grows fatter as I watch her. And Mom. And Dad.

Brian Aldiss, who came to America in 1966 to receive a Nebula Award, turned out to be a living rebuttal to the myth of British reserve. If Aldiss can be taken as typical, Englishmen do not talk or behave like David Niven; they are irreverent, earthy, exuberant and outspoken.

None of this, however, goes into Aldiss' fiction, which is classical in tone, spitefully pessimistic, brilliantly polished and ingeniously horrid. Aldiss is one of the half-dozen writers I most wanted to bring you in ORBIT. Here he is, with a disturbing and plausible glimpse into the remote future of Earth.

FULL SUN

By Brian W. Aldiss

The shadows of the endless trees lengthened toward evening and then disappeared, as the sun was consumed by a great pile of cloud on the horizon. Balank was ill at ease, taking his laser rifle from the trundler and tucking it under his arm, although it meant more weight to carry uphill and he was tiring.

The trundler never tired. They had been climbing these hills most of the day, as Balank's thigh muscles informed him, and he had been bent almost double under the oak trees, with the machine always matching his pace beside him, keeping up the hunt.

During much of the wearying day, their instruments told them that the werewolf was fairly close. Balank remained alert, suspicious of every tree. In the last half hour, though, the scent had faded. When they reached the top of this hill, they would rest—or the man would. The clearing at the top was near now. Under Balank's boots, the layer of dead leaves was thinning.

He had spent too long with his head bent toward the brown-gold carpet; even his retinas were tired. Now he stopped, breathing the sharp air deeply, and stared about. The view behind them, across tumbled and almost uninhabited country, was magnificent, but Balank gave it scarcely a glance. The infrared warning on the trundler sounded, and the machine pointed a slender rod at a

man-sized heat source ahead of them. Balank saw the man almost at the same moment as the machine.

The stranger was standing half-concealed behind the trunk of a tree, gazing uncertainly at the trundler and Balank. When Balank raised a hand in tentative greeting, the stranger responded hesitantly. When Balank called out his identification number, the man came cautiously into the open, replying with his own number. The trundler searched in its files, issued an okay, and they moved forward.

As they got level with the man, they saw he had a small mobile hut pitched behind him. He shook hands with Balank, exchanging personal signals, and gave his name as Cyfal.

Balank was a tall slender man, almost hairless, with the closed expression on his face that might be regarded as characteristic of his epoch. Cyfal, on the other hand, was as slender but much shorter, so that he appeared stockier; his thatch of hair covered all his skull and obtruded slightly onto his face. Something in his manner, or perhaps the expression around his eyes, spoke of the rare type of man whose existence was chiefly spent outside the city.

"I am the timber officer for this region," he said, and indicated his wristcaster as he added, "I was notified you might be in this area, Balank."

"Then you'll know I'm after the werewolf."

"*The* werewolf? There are plenty of them moving through this region, now that the human population is concentrated almost entirely in the cities."

Something in the tone of the remark sounded like social criticism to Balank; he glanced at the trundler without replying.

"Anyhow, you've got a good night to go hunting him," Cyfal said.

"How do you mean?"

"Full moon."

Balank gave no answer. He knew better than Cyfal, he thought, that when the moon was at full, the werewolves reached their time of greatest power.

The trundler was ranging about nearby, an antenna slowly spinning. It made Balank uneasy. He followed it. Man and machine stood together on the edge of a little cliff behind the mobile hut. The cliff was like the curl of foam on the peak of a giant Pacific comber, for here the great wave of earth that was this hill reached its highest point. Beyond, in broken magnificence, it fell down into fresh valleys. The way down was clothed in beeches, just as the way up had been in oaks.

"That's the valley of the Pracha. You can't see the river from here." Cyfal had come up behind them.

"Have you seen anyone who might have been the werewolf? His real name is Gondalug, identity number YB-5921 stroke AS25061, City Zagrad."

Cyfal said, "I saw someone this way this morning. There was more than one of them, I believe." Something in his manner made Balank look at him closely. "I didn't speak to any of them, nor them to me."

"You know them?"

"I've spoken to many men out here in the silent forests, and found out later they were werewolves. They never harmed me."

Balank said, "But you're afraid of them?"

The half-question broke down Cyfal's reserve. "Of course I'm afraid of them. They're not human—not real men. They're enemies of men. They are, aren't they? They have powers greater than ours."

"They can be killed. They haven't machines, as we have. They're not a serious menace."

"You talk like a city man! How long have you been hunting after this one?"

"Eight days. I had a shot at him once with the laser, but he was gone. He's a gray man, very hairy, sharp features."

"You'll stay and have supper with me? Please. I need someone to talk to."

For supper, Cyfal ate part of a dead wild animal he had cooked. Privately revolted, Balank ate his own rations out of the trundler. In this and other ways, Cyfal was an anachronism. Hardly any timber was needed nowadays in the cities, or had been for millions of years. There remained some marginal uses for wood, necessitating a handful of timber officers, whose main job was to fix signals on old trees that had fallen dangerously, so that machines could fly over later and extract them like rotten teeth from the jaws of the forest. The post of timber officer was being filled more and more by machines, as fewer men were to be found each generation who would take on such a dangerous and lonely job far from the cities.

Over the eons of recorded history, mankind had raised machines that made his cities places of delight. Machines had replaced man's early inefficient machines; machines had replanned forms of transport; machines had come to replan man's life for him. The old stone jungles of man's brief adolescence were buried as deep in memory as the coal jungles of the Carboniferous.

Far away in the pile of discarded yesterdays, man and machines had found how to create life. New foods were produced, neither meat nor vegetable, and the ancient wheel of the past was broken forever, for now the link between man and the land was severed: agriculture, the task of Adam, was as dead as steamships.

Mental attitudes were molded by physical change. As the cities became self-supporting, so mankind needed only cities and the resources of cities. Communications between city and city became so good that physical travel was no longer necessary; city was separated from city by unchecked vegetation as surely as planet is cut off from planet. Few of the hairless denizens of the cities ever thought of outside; those who went physically outside invariably had some element of the abnormal in them.

"The werewolves grow up in cities as we do," Balank said. "It's only in adolescence they break away and seek the wilds. You knew that, I suppose?"

Cyfal's overhead light was unsteady, flickering in an irritating way. "Let's not talk of werewolves after sunset," he said.

"The machines will hunt them all down in time."

"Don't be so sure of that. They're worse at detecting a werewolf than a man is."

"I suppose you realize that's social criticism, Cyfal?"

Cyfal pulled a long sour face and discourteously switched on his wristphone. After a moment, Balank did the same. The operator came up at once, and he asked to be switched to the news satellite.

He wanted to see something fresh on the current time exploration project, but there was nothing new on the files. He was advised to dial back in an hour. Looking over at Cyfal, he saw the timber officer had tuned to a dance show of some sort; the cavorting figures in the little projection were badly distorted from this angle. He rose and went to the door of the hut.

The trundler stood outside, ever alert, ignoring him. An untrustworthy light lay over the clearing. Deep twilight reigned, shot through by the rays of the newly risen moon; he was surprised how fast the day had drained away.

Suddenly, he was conscious of himself as an entity, living, with a limited span of life, much of which had already drained away unregarded. The moment of introspection was so uncharacteristic of him that he was frightened. He told himself it was high time he traced down the werewolf and got back to the city: too much solitude was making him morbid.

As he stood there, he heard Cyfal come up behind. The man said, "I'm sorry if I was surly when I was so genuinely glad to see you. It's just that I'm not used to the way city people think. You mustn't take offense—"

I'm afraid you might even think I'm a werewolf myself."

"That's foolish! We took a blood spec on you as soon as you were within sighting distance." For all that, he realized that Cyfal made him uneasy. Going to where the trundler guarded the door, he took up his laser gun and slipped it under his arm. "Just in case," he said.

"Of course. You think he's around—Gondalug, the werewolf? Maybe following you instead of you following him?"

"As you said, it's full moon. Besides, he hasn't eaten in days. They won't touch synthfoods once the lycanthropic gene asserts itself, you know."

"That's why they eat humans occasionally?" Cyfal stood silent for a moment, then added, "But they are a part of the human race—that is, if you regard them as men who change into wolves rather than wolves who change into men. I mean, they're nearer relations to us than animals or machines are."

"Not than machines!" Balank said in a shocked voice. "How could we survive without the machines?"

Ignoring that, Cyfal said, "To my mind, humans are turning into machines. Myself, I'd rather turn into a werewolf."

Somewhere in the trees, a cry of pain sounded and was repeated.

"Night owl," Cyfal said. The sound brought him back to the present, and he begged Balank to come in and shut the door. He brought out some wine, which they warmed, salted, and drank together.

"The sun's my clock," he said, when they had been chatting for a while. "I shall turn in soon. You'll sleep too?"

"I don't sleep—I've a fresher."

"I never had the operation. Are you moving on? Look, are you planning to leave me here all alone, the night of the full moon?" He grabbed Balank's sleeve and then withdrew his hand.

"If Gondalug's about, I want to kill him tonight. I must get back to the city." But he saw that Cyfal was frightened and took pity on the little man. "But in fact I could manage an hour's freshing—I've had none for three days."

"You'll take it here?"

"Sure, get your head down—but you're armed, aren't you?"

"It doesn't always do you any good."

While the little man prepared his bunk, Balank switched on his phone again. The news feature was ready and came up almost at once. Again Balank was plunged into a remote and terrible future.

The machines had managed to push their time exploration some eight million million years ahead, and there a deviation in the quanta of the electromagnetic spectrum had halted their advance. The reason for this was so far obscure and lay in the changing nature of the sun, which strongly influenced the time structure of its own minute corner of the galaxy.

Balank was curious to find if the machines had resolved the problem. It appeared that they had not, for the main news of the day was that Platform One had decided that operations should now be confined to the span of time already opened up. Platform One was the name of the machine civilization, many hundreds of centuries ahead in time, which had first pushed through the time barrier and contacted all machine-ruled civilizations before its own epoch.

What a disappointment that only the electronic senses of machines could shuttle in time! Balank would greatly have liked to visit one of the giant cities of the remote future.

The compensation was that the explorers sent back video pictures of that world to their own day. These alien landscapes produced in Balank a tremendous hunger for more; he looked in whenever he could. Even on the trail

of the werewolf, which absorbed almost all his faculties, he had dialed for every possible picture of that inaccessible and terrific reality that lay distantly on the same time stratum which contained his own world.

As the first transmissions took on cubic content, Balank heard a noise outside the hut, and was instantly on his feet. Grabbing the gun, he opened the door and peered out, his left hand on the door jamb, his wristset still working.

The trundler sat outside, its senses ever-functioning, fixing him with an indicator as if in unfriendly greeting. A leaf or two drifted down from the trees; it was never absolutely silent here, as it could be in the cities at night; there was always something living or dying in the unmapped woods. As he turned his gaze through the darkness—but of course the trundler—and the werewolf, it was said—saw much more clearly in this situation than he did—his vision was obscured by the representation of the future palely gleaming at his cuff. Two phases of the same world were in juxtaposition, one standing on its side, promising an environment where different senses would be needed to survive.

Satisfied, although still wary, Balank shut the door and went to sit down and study the transmission. When it was over, he dialed a repeat. Catching his absorption, Cyfal from his bunk dialed the same program.

Above the icy deserts of Earth a blue sun shone, too small to show a disc, and from this chip of light came all terrestrial change. Its light was bright as full-moon's light, and scarcely warmer. Only a few strange and stunted types of vegetation stretched up from the mountains toward it. All the old primitive kinds of flora had vanished long ago. Trees, for so many epochs one of the sovereign forms of Earth, had gone. Animals had gone. Birds had vanished from the skies. In the mountainous seas, very few life-forms protracted their existence.

New forces had inherited this later Earth. This was the

time of the majestic auroras, of the near absolute-zero nights, of the years-long blizzards.

But there were cities still, their lights burning brighter than the chilly sun; and there were the machines.

The machines of this distant age were monstrous and complex things, slow and armored, resembling most the dinosaurs that had filled one hour of the Earth's dawn. They foraged over the bleak landscape on their own ineluctable errands. They climbed into space, building there monstrous webbed arms that stretched far from Earth's orbit, to scoop in energy and confront the poor fish sun with a vast trawler net of magnetic force.

In the natural course of its evolution, the sun had developed into its white dwarf stage. Its phase as a yellow star, when it supported vertebrate life, was a brief one, now passed through. Now it moved toward its prime season, still far ahead, when it would enter the main period of its life and become a red dwarf star. Then it would be mature, then it would itself be invested with an awareness countless times greater than any minor consciousnesses it nourished now. As the machines clad in their horned exoskeletons climbed near it, the sun had entered a period of quiescence to be measured in billions of years, and cast over its third planet the light of a perpetual full moon.

The documentary presenting this image of postiquity carried a commentary that consisted mainly of a run-down of the technical difficulties confronting Platform One and the other machine civilizations at that time. It was too complex for Balank to understand. He looked up from his phone at last, and saw that Cyfal had dropped asleep in his bunk. By his wrist, against his tousled head, a shrunken sun still burned.

For some moments, Balank stood looking speculatively at the timber officer. The man's criticism of the machines disturbed him. Naturally, people were always criticizing the machines, but, after all, mankind depended on them

more and more, and most of the criticism was superficial. Cyfal seemed to doubt the whole role of machines.

It was extremely difficult to decide just how much truth lay in anything. The werewolves, for example. They were and always had been man's enemy, and that was presumably why the machines hunted them with such ruthlessness—for man's sake. But from what he had learnt at the patrol school, the creatures were on the increase. And had they really got magic powers?—Powers, that was to say, that were beyond man's, that enabled them to survive and flourish as man could not, even supported by all the forces of the cities. The Dark Brother: that was what they called the werewolf, because he was like the night side of man. But he was not man—and how exactly he differed, nobody could tell, except that he could survive when man had not.

Still frowning, Balank moved across to the door and looked out. The moon was climbing, casting a pallid and dappled light among the trees of the clearing, and across the trundler. Balank was reminded of that distant day when the sun would shine no more warmly.

The trundler was switched to transmission, and Balank wondered with whom it was in touch. With Headquarters, possibly, asking for fresh orders, sending in their report.

"I'm taking an hour with my fresher," he said. "Okay by you?"

"Go ahead. I shall stand guard," the trundler's speech circuit said.

Balank went back inside, sat down at the table and clipped the fresher across his forehead. He fell instantly into unconsciousness, an unconsciousness that force-fed him enough sleep and dream to refresh him for the next seventy-two hours. At the end of the timed hour, he awoke, annoyingly aware that there had been confusion in his skull.

Before he had lifted his head from the table, the thought

came: we never saw any human beings in that chilly future.

He sat up straight. Of course, it had just been an accidental omission from a brief program. Humans were not so important as the machines, and that would apply even more in the distant time. But none of the news flashes had shown humans, not even in the immense cities. That was absurd; there would be lots of human beings. The machines had covenanted, at the time of the historic Emancipation, that they would always protect the human race.

Well, Balank told himself, he was talking nonsense. The subversive comments Cyfal had uttered had put a load of mischief into his head. Instinctively, he glanced over at the timber officer.

Cyfal was dead in his bunk. He lay contorted with his head lolling over the side of the mattress, his throat torn out. Blood still welled up from the wound, dripping very slowly from one shoulder onto the floor.

Forcing himself to do it, Balank went over to him. In one of Cyfal's hands, a piece of gray fur was gripped.

The werewolf had called! Balank gripped his throat in terror. He had evidently roused in time to save his own life, and the creature had fled.

He stood for a long time staring down in pity and horror at the dead man, before prising the piece of fur from his grasp. He examined it with distaste. It was softer than he had imagined wolf fur to be. He turned the hairs over in his palm. A piece of skin had torn away with the hair. He looked at it more closely.

A letter was printed on the skin.

It was faint, but he definitely picked out an "S" to one edge of the skin. No, it must be a bruise, a stain, anything but a printed letter. That would mean that this was synthetic, and had been left as a fragment of evidence to mislead Balank. . . .

He ran over to the door, grabbing up the laser gun as

he went, and dashed outside. The moon was high now. He saw the trundler moving across the clearing toward him.

"Where have you been?" he called.

"Patrolling. I heard something among the trees and got a glimpse of a large gray wolf, but was not able to destroy it. Why are you frightened? I am registering surplus adrenalin in your veins."

"Come in and look. Something killed the timber man."

He stood aside as the machine entered the hut and extended a couple of rods above the body on the bunk. As he watched, Balank pushed the piece of fur down into his pocket.

"Cyfal is dead. His throat has been ripped out. It is the work of a large animal. Balank, if you are rested, we must now pursue the werewolf Gondalug, identity number YB5921 stroke AS25061. He committed this crime."

They went outside. Balank found himself trembling. He said, "Shouldn't we bury the poor fellow?"

"If necessary, we can return by daylight."

Argument was impossible with trundlers. This one was already off, and Balank was forced to follow.

They moved downhill toward the River Pracha. The difficulty of the descent soon drove everything else from Balank's mind. They had followed Gondalug this far, and it seemed unlikely he would go much farther. Beyond here lay gaunt bleak uplands, lacking cover. In this broken tumbling valley, Gondalug would go to earth, hoping to hide from them. But their instruments would track him down, and then he could be destroyed. With good luck, he would lead them to caves where they would find and exterminate other men and women and maybe children who bore the deadly lycanthropic gene and refused to live in cities.

It took them two hours to get down to the lower part of the valley. Great slabs of the hill had fallen away, and now stood apart from their parent body, forming cubic

hills in their own right, with great sandy cliffs towering up vertically, crowned with unruly foliage. The Pracha itself frequently disappeared down narrow crevices, and the whole area was broken with caves and fissures in the rock. It was ideal country in which to hide.

"I must rest for a moment," Balank gasped. The trundler came immediately to a halt. It moved over any terrain, putting out short legs to help itself when tracks and wheels failed.

They stood together, ill-assorted in the pale night, surrounded by the noise of the little river as it battled over its rocky bed.

"You're sending again, aren't you? Whom to?"

The machine asked, "Why did you conceal the piece of wolf fur you found in the timber officer's hand?"

Balank was running at once, diving for cover behind the nearest slab of rock. Sprawling in the dirt, he saw a beam of heat sizzle above him and slewed himself round the corner. The Pracha ran along here in a steep-sided crevasse. With fear lending him strength, Balank took a run and cleared the crevasse in a mighty jump, and fell among the shadows on the far side of the gulf. He crawled behind a great chunk of rock, the flat top of which was several feet above his head, crowned with a sagging pine tree.

The trundler called to him from the other side of the river.

"Balank, Balank, you have gone wrong in your head!"

Staying firmly behind the rock, he shouted back, "Go home, trundler! You'll never find me here!"

"Why did you conceal the piece of wolf fur from the timber officer's hand?"

"How did you know about the fur unless you put it there? You killed Cyfal because he knew things about machines I did not, didn't you? You wanted me to believe the werewolf did it, didn't you? The machines are grad-

ually killing off the humans, aren't they? There are no such things as werewolves, are there?"

"You are mistaken, Balank. There are werewolves, all right. Because man would never really believe they existed, they have survived. But we believe they exist, and to us they are a greater menace than mankind can be now. So surrender and come back to me. We will continue looking for Gondalug."

He did not answer. He crouched and listened to the machine growling on the other side of the river.

Crouching on the top of the rock above Balank's head was a sinewy man with a flat skull. He took more than human advantage of every shade of cover as he drank in the scene below, his brain running through the possibilities of the situation as efficiently as his legs could take him through wild grass. He waited without stirring, and his face was gray and grave and alert.

The machine came to a decision. Getting no reply from the man, it came gingerly round the rock and approached the edge of the crevasse through which the river ran. Experimentally, it sent a blast of heat across to the opposite cliff, followed by a brief hail of armored pellets.

"Balank?" it called.

Balank did not reply, but the trundler was convinced it had not killed the man. It had somehow to get across the brink Balank had jumped. It considered radioing for aid, but the nearest city, Zagrad, was a great distance away.

It stretched out its legs, extending them as far as possible. Its clawed feet could just reach the other side, but there the edge crumbled slightly and would not support its full weight. It shuffled slowly along the crevasse, seeking out the ideal place.

From shelter, Balank watched it glinting with a murderous dullness in the moonlight. He clutched a great shard of rock, knowing what he had to do. He had presented to him here the best—probably the only—

chance he would get to destroy the machine. When it was hanging across the ravine, he would rush forward. The trundler would be momentarily too preoccupied to burn him down. He would hurl the boulder at it, knock the vile thing down into the river.

The machine was quick and clever. He would have only a split second in which to act. Already his muscles bulged over the rock, already he gritted his teeth in effort, already his eyes glared ahead at the hated enemy. His time would come at any second now. It was him or it. . .

Gondalug alertly stared down at the scene, involved with it and yet detached. He saw what was in the man's mind, knew that he looked a scant second ahead to the encounter.

His own kind, man's Dark Brother, worked differently. They looked farther ahead just as they had always done, in a fashion unimaginable to homo sapiens. To Gondalug, the outcome of this particular little struggle was immaterial. He knew that his kind had already won their battle against mankind. He knew that they still had to enter into their real battle against the machines.

But that time would come. And then they would defeat the machines. In the long days when the sun shone always over the blessed Earth like a full moon—in those days, his kind would finish their age of waiting and enter into their own savage kingdom.

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