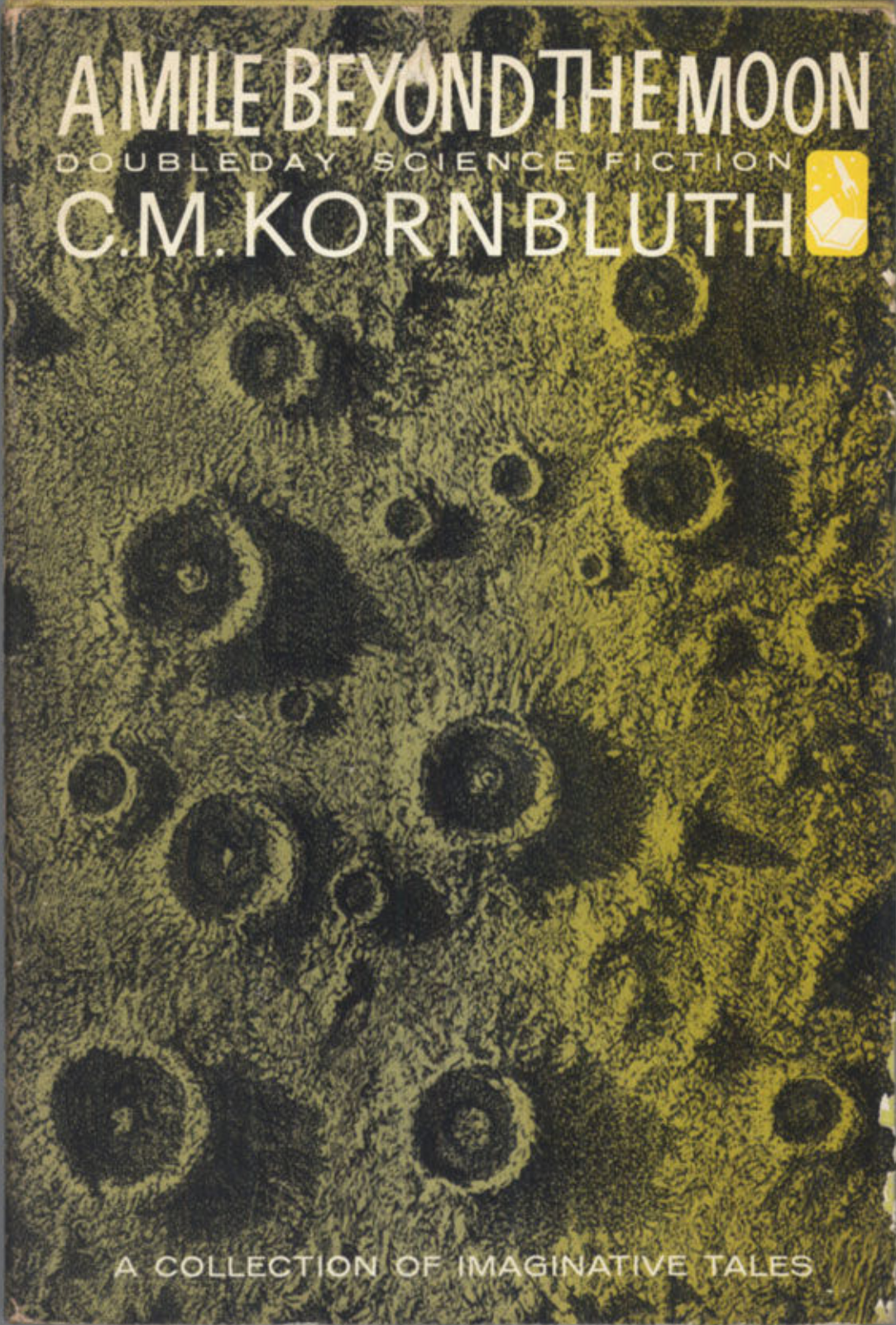
A MILE BEYOND THE MOON

DOUBLEDAY SCIENCE FICTION

C. M. KORNBLUTH



A COLLECTION OF IMAGINATIVE TALES

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A MILE BEYOND THE MOON

A MILE BEYOND THE MOON

C. M. Kornbluth

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All of the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Contents

Make Mine Mars

"X is for the ecstasy she ga-a-ave me;
E is for her eyes—one, two, and three-ee;
T is for the teeth with which she'd sha-a-ave me;
S is for her scales of i-vo-ree-ee-ee . . ."

Somebody was singing, and my throbbing head objected. I seemed to have a mouthful of sawdust.

"T is for her tentacles ah-round me;
J is for her jowls—were none soo-oo fair;
H is for the happy day she found me;
Fe is for the iron in her hair . . ."

I ran my tongue around inside my mouth. It *was* full of sawdust —spruce and cedar, rocketed in from Earth.

"Put them all to-gether, they spell Xetstjhfe . . ."

My eyes snapped open, and I sat up, cracking my head on the underside of the table beneath which I was lying. I lay down and waited for the pinwheels to stop spinning. I tried to think it out. Spruce and cedar . . . Honest Blogri's Olde Earthe Saloon . . . eleven stingers with a Sirian named Wenjtkpli . . .

"A worrud that means the wur-r-l-l-d too-oo mee-ee-ee!"

Through the fading pinwheels I saw a long and horrid face, a Sirian face, peering at me with kindly interest under the table. It was Wenjtkpli.

"Good morning, little Earth chum," he said. "You feel not so tired now?"

"Morning?" I yelled, sitting up again and cracking my head again and lying down again to wait for the pinwheels to fade again.

"You sleep," I heard him say, "fourteen hours—so happy, so peaceful!"

"I gotta get out of here," I mumbled, scrambling about on the imported sawdust for my hat. I found I was wearing it, and climbed

out, stood up, and leaned against the table, swaying and spitting out the last of the spruce and cedar.

"You like another stinger?" asked Wenjtkpli brightly. I retched feebly.

"Fourteen hours," I mumbled. "That makes it 0900 Mars now, or exactly ten hours past the time I was supposed to report for the nightside at the bureau."

"But last night you talk different," the Sirian told me in surprise. "You say many times how bureau chief McGillicuddy can take lousy job and jam—"

"That was last night," I moaned. "This is this morning."

"Relax, little Earth chum. I sing again song you taught me:

X is for the ecstasy she ga-a-ave me;
E is for—"

My throbbing head still objected. I flapped good-by at him and set a course for the door of Blogri's joint. The quaint period mottoes:

"QUAFFE YE NUT-BROWN AYLE"
"DROPPE DEAD TWYCE"

and so on—didn't look so quaint by the cold light of the Martian dawn.

An unpleasant little character, Venusian or something, I'd seen around the place oozed up to me. "Head hurt plenty, huh?" he simpered.

"This is no time for sympathy," I said. "Now one side or a flipper off—I gotta go to work."

"No sympathy," he said, his voice dropping to a whisper. He fumbled oddly in his belt, then showed me a little white capsule. "Clear your head, huh? Work like lightning, you bet!"

I was interested. "How much?"

"For you, friend, nothing. Because I hate seeing fellows suffer with big head."

"Beat it," I told him, and shoved past through the door. That pitch of his with a free sample meant he was pushing J-K-B. I was in enough trouble without adding an unbreakable addiction to the stuff. If I'd taken his free sample, I would have been back to see him in 12 hours, sweating blood for more. And that time he would have named his own price.

I fell into an eastbound chair and fumbled a quarter into the slot. The thin, cold air of the pressure dome was clearing my head already. I was sorry for all the times I'd cussed a skinflint dome

administration for not supplying a richer air mix or heating the outdoors more lavishly. I felt good enough to shave, and luckily had my razor in my wallet. By the time the chair was gliding past the building where Interstellar News had a floor, I had the whiskers off my jaw and most of the sawdust out of my hair.

The floater took me up to our floor while I tried not to think of what McGillicuddy would have to say.

The newsroom was full of noise as usual. McGillicuddy was in the copydesk slot chewing his way through a pile of dispatches due to be filed on the pressure dome split for A.M. newscasts in four minutes by the big wall clock. He fed his copy, without looking, to an operator battering the keys of the old-fashioned radioteletype that was good enough to serve our local clients.

"Two minutes short!" he yelled at one of the men on the rim. "Gimme a brightener! Gimme a god-damned brightener!" The rim man raced to the receiving ethertypes from Gammadion, Betelgeuse, and the other Interstellar bureaus. He yanked an item from one of the clicking machines and scaled it at McGillicuddy, who slashed at it with his pencil and passed it to the operator. The tape the operator was cutting started through the transmitter-distributor, and on all local clients' radioteletypes appeared:

"FIFTEEN-MINUTE INTERSTELLAR NEWSCAST AM MARS PRESSURE DOMES."

Everybody leaned back and lit up. McGillicuddy's eye fell on me, and I cleared my throat.

"Got a cold?" he asked genially.

"Nope. No cold."

"Touch of indigestion? Flu, maybe? You're tardy today."

"I know it."

"Bright boy." He was smiling. That was bad.

"Spencer," he told me. "I thought long and hard about you. I thought about you when you failed to show up for the nightside. I thought about you intermittently through the night as I took your shift. Along about 0300 I decided what to do with you. It was as though Providence had taken a hand. It was as though I prayed 'Lord, what shall I do with a drunken, no-good son of a space-cook who ranks in my opinion with the boils of Job as an affliction to man?' Here's the answer, Spencer."

He tossed me a piece of ethertype paper, torn from one of our interstellar-circuit machines. On it was the following dialogue:

ANYBODY TTHURE I MEAN THERE
THIS MARSBUO ISN GA PLS
WOT TTHUT I MEAN WOT THAT MEAN PLEASE

THIS IS THE MARS BUREAU OF INTERSTELLAR NEWS. WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING HORSING AROUND ON OUR KRUEGER 60-B CIRCUIT TELETYPE QUESTIONMARK. WHERE IS REGULAR STAFFER. GO AHEAD

THATIS WOT I AM CALLING YOU ABBOUUT. KENNEDY DIED THIS MORNINGPNEUMONIA. I AM WEEMS EDITOR PHOENIX. U SENDING REPLLACEMENT KENNEDY PLEAS

THIS MCGILLICUDDY, MARSBUO ISN CHIEF. SENDING REPLACEMENT KENNEDY SOONEST. HAVE IDEAL MAN FOR JOB. END.

That was all. It was enough.

"Chief," I said to McGillicuddy. "Chief, you can't. You wouldn't —*would* you?"

"Better get packed," he told me, busily marking up copy. "Better take plenty of nice, warm clothing. I understand Krueger 60-B is about one thousand times dimmer than the sun. That's absolute magnitude, of course—Frostbite's in quite close. A primitive community, I'm told. Kennedy didn't like it. But of course the poor old duffer wasn't good enough to handle anything swifter than a one-man bureau on a one-planet split. Better take *lots* of warm clothing."

"I quit," I said.

"Sam," said somebody, in a voice that always makes me turn to custard inside.

"Hello, Ellie," I said. "I was just telling Mr. McGillicuddy that he isn't going to shoot me off to Frostbite to rot."

"Freeze," corrected McGillicuddy with relish. "Freeze. Good morning, Miss Masters. Did you want to say a few parting words to your friend?"

"I do," she told him, and drew me aside to no man's land where the ladies of the press prepared strange copy for the gentler sex. "Don't quit, Sam," she said in that voice. "I could never love a quitter. What if it *is* a minor assignment?"

"Minor," I said. "What a gem of understatement *that* is!"

"It'll be good for you," she insisted. "You can show him what you've got on the ball. You'll be on your own except for the regular

dispatches to the main circuit and your local split. You could dig up all sorts of cute feature stories that'd get your name known." And so on. It was partly her logic, partly that voice and partly her promise to kiss me good-by at the port.

"I'll take it," I told McGillicuddy. He looked up with a pleased smile and murmured: "The power of prayer . . ."

The good-by kiss from Ellie was the only thing about the journey that wasn't nightmarish. ISN's expense account stuck me on a rusty bucket that I shared with glamorous freight like yak kids and tenpenny nails. The little yaks blatted whenever we went into overdrive to break through the speed of light. The Greenhough Effect—known to readers of the science features as "supertime"—scared hell out of them. On ordinary rocket drive, they just groaned and whimpered to each other the yak equivalent of "Thibet was never like this!"

The Frostbite spaceport wasn't like the South Pole, but it was like Greenland. There was a bunch of farmers waiting for their yaks, beating their mittened hands together and exhaling long plumes of vapor. The collector of customs, a rat-faced city boy, didn't have the decency to turn them over and let the hayseeds get back to the administration building. I watched through a porthole and saw him stalling and dawdling over a sheaf of papers for each of the farmers. Oddly enough, the stalling and dawdling stopped as soon as the farmers caught on and passed over a few dollars. Nobody even bothered to slip it shamefacedly from one hand to another. They just handed it over, not caring who saw—Rat-Face sneering, the farmers dumbly accepting the racket.

My turn came. Rat-Face came aboard and we were introduced by the chief engineer. "Harya," he said. "Twenny bucks."

"What for?"

"Landing permit. Later at the administration you can pay your visitor's permit. That's twenny bucks too."

"I'm not a visitor. I'm coming here to work."

"Work, schmurk. So you'll need a work permit—twenny bucks." His eyes wandered. "Whaddaya got there?"

"Ethertype parts. May need them for replacements."

He was on his knees in front of the box, crooning, "Triple ad valorem plus twenny dollars security bond for each part plus twenny dollars inspection fee plus twenny dollars for decontamination plus twenny dollars for failure to declare plus—"

"Break it up, Joe," said a new arrival—a grey-mustached little

man, lost in his parka. "He's a friend of mine. Extend the courtesies of the port."

Rat-Face—Joe—didn't like it, but he took it. He muttered about doing his duty and gave me a card.

"Twenny bucks?" I asked, studying it.

"Nah," he said angrily. "You're free-loading." He got out.

"Looks as if you saved ISN some money," I said to the little man. He threw back the hood of his parka in the relative warmth of the ship.

"Why not? We'll be working together. I'm Chenery from the *Phoenix*."

"Oh, yeah—the client."

"That's right," he agreed, grinning. "*The* client. What exactly did you do to get banished to Frostbite?"

Since there was probably a spacemail aboard from McGillicuddy telling him exactly what I did, I told him. "Chief thought I was generally shiftless."

"You'll do here," he said. "It's a shiftless, easy-going kind of place. I have the key to your bureau. Want me to lead the way?"

"What about my baggage?"

"Your stuff's safe. Port officers won't loot it when they know you're a friend of the *Phoenix*."

That wasn't exactly what I'd meant; I'd always taken it for granted that port officers didn't loot anybody's baggage, no matter whose friends they were or weren't. As Chenery had said, it seemed to be a shiftless, easy-going place. I let him lead the way; he had a jeep waiting to take us to the administration building, a musty, too-tight hodgepodge of desks. A lot of them were vacant, and the dowdy women and fattish men at the others didn't seem to be very busy. The women were doing their nails or reading; the men mostly were playing blotto with pocket-size dials for small change. A couple were sleeping.

From the administration building a jet job took us the 20 kilos to town. Frostbite, the capital of Frostbite, housed maybe 40,000 people. No pressure dome. Just the glorious outdoors, complete with dust, weather, insects, and a steady, icy wind. Hick towns seem to be the same the universe over. There was a main street called Main Street with clothing shops and restaurants, gambling houses, and more or less fancy saloons, a couple of vaudeville theaters, and dance halls. At the unfashionable end of Main Street were some farm implement shops, places to buy surveying instruments and geologic detectors and the building that housed the Interstellar News

Service Frostbite Bureau. It was a couple of front rooms on the second floor, with a mechanical dentist below, an osteopath above, and a "ride-up-and-save" parka emporium to the rear.

Chenery let me in, and it was easy to see at once why Kennedy had died of pneumonia. Bottles. The air conditioning must have carried away every last sniff of liquor, but it still seemed to me that I could smell the rancid, home-brew stuff he'd been drinking. They were everywhere, the relics of a shameless, hopeless alcoholic who'd been good for nothing better than Frostbite. Sticky glasses and bottles everywhere told the story.

I slid open the hatch of the incinerator and started tossing down bottles and glasses from the copy desk, the morgue, the ethertype. Chenery helped, and decently kept his mouth shut. When we'd got the place kind of cleaned up I wanted to know what the daily routine was like.

Chenery shrugged. "Anything you make it, I guess. I used to push Kennedy to get more low-temperature agriculture stories for us. And those yaks that landed with you started as a civic-betterment stunt the *Phoenix* ran. It was all tractors until our farm editor had a brainstorm and brought in a pair. It's a hell of a good idea—you can't get milk, butter and meat out of a tractor. Kennedy helped us get advice from some Earthside agronomy station to set it up and helped get clearance for the first pair too. I don't have much idea of what copy he filed back to ISN. Frankly, we used him mostly as a contact man."

I asked miserably: "What the hell kind of copy *can* you file from a hole like this?" He laughed and cheerfully agreed that things were pretty slow.

"Here's today's *Phoenix,*" he said, as the faxer began to hum. A neat, 16-page tabloid, stapled, pushed its way out in a couple of seconds. I flipped through it and asked: "No color at *all?*"

Chenery gave me a wink. "What the subscribers and advertisers don't know won't hurt them. Sometimes we break down and give them a page-one color pic."

I studied the *Phoenix*. Very conservative layout—naturally. It's competition that leads to circus makeup, and the *Phoenix* was the only sheet on the planet. The number-one story under a modest two-column head was an ISN farm piece on fertilizers for high-altitude agriculture, virtually unedited. The number-two story was an ISN piece on the current United Planets assembly.

"Is Frostbite in the UP, by the way?" I asked.

"No. It's the big political question here. The *Phoenix* is against

applying. We figure the planet can't afford the assessment in the first place, and if it could there wouldn't be anything to gain by joining."

"Um." I studied the ISN piece closer and saw that the *Phoenix* was very much opposed indeed. The paper had doctored our story plenty. I hadn't seen the original, but ISN is—in fact and according to its charter—as impartial as it's humanly possible to be. But our story, as it emerged in the *Phoenix,* consisted of: a paragraph about an undignified, wrangling debate over the Mars-excavation question; a fistfight between a Titanian and an Earth delegate in a corridor; a Sirian's red-hot denunciation of the UP as a power-politics instrument of the old planets; and a report of UP administrative expenses—without a corresponding report of achievements.

"I suppose," I supposed, "that the majority of the planet is stringing along with the *Phoenix?*"

"Eight to one, the last time a plebiscite was run off," said Chenery proudly.

"You amaze me." I went on through the paper. It was about 70 per cent ads, most of them from the Main Street stores we'd passed. The editorial page had an anti-UP cartoon showing the secretary-general of the UP as the greasy, affable conductor of a jetbus jammed to the roof with passengers. A sign on the bus said "Fare, $15,000,000 and up per year." A road sign pointing in the direction the bus was heading said, "To Nowhere." The conductor was saying to a small, worried-looking man in a parka labeled "New Agricultural Planets" that, "There's always room for one more!!" The outline said: "But is there—and is it worth it?"

The top editorial was a glowing tribute from the *Phoenix* to the *Phoenix* for its pioneering work in yaks, pinned on the shipment that arrived today. The second editorial was anti-UP, echoing the cartoon and quoting from the Sirian in the page-one ISN piece.

It was a good, efficient job of the kind that turns a working newsman's stomach while he admires the technique.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Chenery proudly.

I was saved from answering by a *brrp* from the ethertype.

"GPM FRB GA PLS" it said. "Good-afternoon, Frostbite Bureau—go ahead, please." What with? I hunted around and found a typed schedule on the wall that Kennedy had evidently once drawn up in a spasm of activity.

"MIN PLS" I punched out on the ethertype, and studied the sked.

It was quite a document.

WEEKDAYS

0900–1030: BREAKFAST
1030–1100: PHONE WEEMS FOR BITCHES RE SVS
1100–1200: NOTE MARSBUO RE BITCHES
1200–1330: LUNCH
1330–1530: RUN DROPS TO WEEMS: GAB WITH CHENERY
1530–1700: CLIP PHOENIX, REWRITE PUNCH & FILE

SUNDAYS

0900–1700: WRITE AND FILE ENTERPRISERS.

Chenery spared my blushes by looking out the window as I read the awful thing. I hadn't quite realized how low I'd sunk until then.

"Think it's funny?" I asked him—unfairly, I knew. He was being decent. It was decent of him not to spit in my eye and shove me off the sidewalk for that matter. I had hit bottom.

He didn't answer. He was embarrassed, and in the damn-fool way people have of finding a scapegoat I tried to make him feel worse. Maybe if I rubbed it in real hard he'd begin to feel almost as bad as I did. "I see," I told him, "that I've wasted a morning. Do you or Weems have any bitches for me to messenger-boy to Mars?"

"Nothing special," he said. "The way I said, we always like low-temperature and high-altitude agriculture stuff. And good farm-and-home material."

"You'll get it," I told him. "And now I see I'm behind in clipping and rewriting and filing stories from your paper."

"Don't take it so hard," he said unhappily. "It's not such a bad place. I'll have them take your personal stuff to the Hamilton House and the bureau stuff here. It's the only decent hotel in town except the *Phoenix* and that's kind of high—" He saw that I didn't like him jumping to such accurate conclusions about my pay check and beat it with an apologetic grimace of a smile.

The ethertype went *brrp* again and said "GB FRB CU LTR" "Good-by, Frostbite. See you later." There must have been many days when old Kennedy was too sick or too sick at heart to rewrite pieces from the lone client. Then the machine began beating out news items which I'd tear off eventually and run over to the *Phoenix*.

"Okay, sweetheart," I told the clattering printer. "You'll get copy from Frostbite. You'll get copy that'll make the whole damned ISN sit up and take notice—" and I went on kidding myself in that vein for a couple of minutes but it went dry very soon.

Good God, but they've got me! I thought. If I'm no good on the

job they'll keep me here because there's nothing lower. And if I'm good on the job they'll keep me here because I'm good at it. Not a chance in a trillion to *do* anything that'll get noticed—just plain stuck on a crummy planet with a crummy political machine that'll never make news in a million years!

I yanked down Kennedy's library—"YOUR FUTURE ON FROSTBITE," which was a C. of C. recruiting pamphlet, "MANUAL OF ETHERTYPE MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR," an ISN house handbook and "THE UNITED PLANETS ORGANIZATION SECRETARIAT COMMITTEE INTERIM REPORT ON HABIT-FORMING DRUGS IN INTERPLANETARY COMMERCE," a grey-backed UP monograph that got to Frostbite God knew how. Maybe Kennedy had planned to switch from home brew to something that would kill him quicker.

The Chamber of Commerce job gave a thumbnail sketch of my new home. Frostbite had been colonized about five generations ago for the usual reason. Somebody had smelled money. A trading company planted a power reactor—still going strong—at the South Pole in exchange for choice tracts of land which they'd sold off to homesteaders, all from Earth and Earth-colonized planets. In fine print the pamphlet gave lip service to the UP ideal of interspecific brotherhood, *but*— So Frostbite, in typical hick fashion, thought only genus homo was good enough for its sacred soil and that all non-human species were more or less alarming monsters.

I looked at that editorial-page cartoon in the *Phoenix* again and really noticed this time that there were Sirians, Venusians, Martians, Lyrans, and other non-human beings jammed into the jetbus, and that they were made to look sinister. On my first glance, I'd taken them in casually, the way you would on Earth or Mars or Vega's Quembrill, but here they were supposed to scare me stiff and I was supposed to go around saying, "Now, don't get me wrong, some of my best friends are Martians, *but—*"

Back to the pamphlet. The trading company suddenly dropped out of the chronology. By reading between the lines I could figure out that it was one of the outfits which had over-extended itself planting colonies so it could have a monopoly hauling to and from the new centers. A lot of them had gone smash when the Greenhough Effect took interstellar flight out of the exclusive hands of the supergiant corporations and put it in the reach of medium-sized operators like the rusty-bucket line that had hauled in me, the yaks, and the tenpenny nails.

In a constitutional convention two generations back the colonists

had set up a world government of the standard type, with a president, a unicameral house, and a three-step hierarchy of courts. They'd adopted the United Planets model code of laws except for the bill of rights—to keep the slimy extra-terrestrials out—with no thanks to the UP.

And that was it, except for the paean of praise to the independent farmer, the backbone of his planet, beholden to no man, etc.

I pawed through the ethertype handbook. The introduction told me that the perfection of instantaneous transmission had opened the farthest planets to the Interstellar News Service, which I knew; that it was knitting the colonized universe together with bonds of understanding, which I doubted; and that it was a boon to all human and non-human intelligences, which I thought was a barefaced lie. The rest of it was "see Fig. 76 3b," "Wire 944 will slip easily through orifice 459j," "if Knob 545 still refuses to turn, take Wrench 31 and gently, without forcing—" Nothing I couldn't handle.

The ethertype was beating out:

> FARM—NOTE FROSTBITE
> NOME, ALASKA, EARTH—ISN—HOUSEWIVES OF THE COLDER FARM PLANETS WOULD DO WELL TO TAKE A LEAF FROM THE BOOK OF THE PRIMITIVE AMERINDIAN SEAMSTRESS. SO SAYS PROFESSOR OF DOMESTIC SCIENCE MADGE MCGUINESS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NOME'S SCHOOL OF LOW-TEMPERATURE AGRONOMY. THE INDIAN MAID BY SEWING LONG, NARROW STRIPS OF FUR AND BASKET-WEAVING THEM INTO A BLANKET TURNED OUT COVERINGS WITH TWICE THE WARMTH AND HALF THE WEIGHT OF FUR ROBES SIMPLY SEWED EDGE TO EDGE—

That was my darling, with her incurable weakness for quote leads and the unspeakable "so says." Ellie Masters, I thought, you're a lousy writer but I love you and I'd like to wring your neck for helping McGillicuddy con me into this. "Dig up all sorts of cute feature stories," you told me and you made it sound sensible. Better I should be under the table at Blogri's with a hangover and sawdust in my hair than writing little by-liners about seventeen tasty recipes for yak manure, which is all that's ever going to come out of this God-forsaken planet.

Rat-Face barged in without knocking; a moronic-looking boy was with him toting the box of ethertype spare parts.

"Just set it anywhere," I said. "Thanks for getting it right over here. Uh, Joe, isn't it?—Joe, where could I get me a parka like that? I like those lines. Real mink?"

It was the one way to his heart. "You betcha. Only plaid mink lining on Frostbite. Ya notice the lapels? Look!" He turned them forward and showed me useless little hidden pockets with zippers that looked like gold.

"I can see you're a man with taste."

"Yeah. Not like some of these bums. If a man's Collector of the Port he's got a position to live up to. Look, I hope ya didn't get me wrong there at the field. Nobody told me you were coming. If you're right with the *Phoenix* you're right with the Organization. If you're right with the Organization, you're right with Joe Downing. I'm regular."

He said that last word the way a new bishop might say: "I am consecrated."

"Glad to hear that. Joe, when could I get a chance to meet some of the other regular Boys?"

"Ya wanna get In, huh?" he asked shrewdly. "There's been guys here a lot longer than you, Spencer."

"In, Out," I shrugged. "I want to play it smart. It won't do me any harm."

He barked with laughter. "Not a bit," he said. "Old man Kennedy didn't see it that way. You'll get along here. Keep ya nose clean and we'll see about The Boys." He beckoned the loutish porter and left me to my musings.

That little rat had killed his man, I thought—but where, why, and for whom?

I went out into the little corridor and walked into the "ride-up-and-save" parka emporium that shared the second floor with me. Leon Portwanger, said the sign on the door. He was a fat old man sitting cross-legged, peering through bulging shell-rimmed glasses at his needle as it flashed through fur.

"Mr. Portwanger? I'm the new ISN man, Sam Spencer."

"So?" he grunted, not looking up.

"I guess you knew Kennedy pretty well."

"Never. Never."

"But he was right in front there—"

"Never," grunted the old man. He stuck himself with the needle, swore, and put his finger in his mouth. "Now see what you made me do?" he said angrily and indistinctly around the finger. "You

shouldn't bother me when I'm working. Can't you see when a man's working?"

"I'm sorry," I said, and went back into the newsroom. A man as old as Leon, tailoring as long as Leon, didn't stick himself. He didn't even wear a thimble—the forefinger was calloused enough to be a thimble itself. He didn't stick himself unless he was very, very excited—or unless he wanted to get rid of somebody. I began to wish I hadn't fired those bottles of Kennedy's home brew down to the incinerator so quickly.

At that point I began a thorough shakedown of the bureau. I found memos torn from the machine concerning overfiling or failure to file, clippings from the *Phoenix,* laundry lists, style memos from ISN, paid bills, blacksheets of letters to Marsbuo requesting a transfer to practically anywhere but Frostbite, a list of phone numbers and a nasty space-mailed memo from McGillicuddy.

It said: "Re worldshaker, wll blv whn see. Meanwhile sggst keep closer sked avoid wastage costly wiretime. Reminder guppy's firstest job offhead orchidbitches three which bypassed u yestermonth. How? McG"

It was typical of McGillicuddy to memo in cablese. Since news bureaus began—as "wire services"; see his archaic "wiretime"—their executives have been memoing underlings in cablese as part of one-of-the-working-press-Jones-boys act that they affect. They also type badly so they can slash up their memo with copyreader symbols. This McGillicuddy did too, of course. The cablese, the bad typing, and the copyreading made it just about unintelligible to an outsider.

To me it said that McGillicuddy doubted Kennedy's promise to file a worldshaking story, that he was sore about Kennedy missing his scheduled times for filing on the ethertype, and that he was plenty sore about Kennedy failing to intercept complaints from the client *Phoenix,* three of which McGillicuddy had been bothered by during the last month.

So old Kennedy had dreamed of filing a worldshaker. I dug further into the bureau files and the desk drawers, finding only an out of date "WHO'S WHO IN THE GALAXY." No notes, no plans, no lists of interviewees, no tipsters—no blacksheet, I realized, of the letter to which McGillicuddy's cutting memo was a reply.

God only knew what it all meant. I was hungry, sleepy and sick at heart. I looked up the number of the Hamilton House and found that helpful little Chenery had got me a reservation and that my luggage had arrived from the field. I headed for a square meal and

my first night in bed for a week without yaks blatting at me through a thin bulkhead.

It wasn't hard to fit in. Frostbite was a swell place to lose your ambition and acquire a permanent thirst. The sardonic sked posted on the bureau wall—I had been planning to tear it down for a month, but the inclination became weaker and weaker. It was so true to life.

I would wake up at the Hamilton House, have a skimpy breakfast and get down to the bureau. Then there'd be a phone conversation with Weems during which he'd nag me for more and better Frostbite-slant stories. In an hour of "wiretime" I'd check in with Marsbuo. At first I risked trying to sneak a chat with Ellie, but the jokers around Marsbuo cured me of that. One of them pretended he was Ellie on the other end of the wire and before I caught on had me believing that she was six months pregnant with a child by McGillicuddy and was going to kill herself for betraying me. Good clean fun, and after that I stuck to spacemail for my happy talk.

After lunch, at the Hamilton House or more often in a tavern, I'd tear up the copy from the printer into neat sheets and deliver them to the *Phoenix* building on the better end of Main Street. (If anything big had come up, I would have phoned them to hold the front page open. If not, local items filled it, and ISN copy padded out the rest of their sheet.) As in Kennedy's sked, I gabbed with Chenery or watched the compositors or proof pullers or transmittermen at work, and then went back to the office to clip my copy rolling out of the faxer. On a good day I'd get four or five items—maybe a human interester about a yak mothering an orphaned baby goat, a new wrinkle on barn insulation with native materials that the other cold-farming planets we served could use, a municipal election or a murder trial verdict to be filed just for the record.

Evenings I spent at a tavern talking and sopping up home brew, or at one of the two-a-day vaudeville houses, or at the Clubhouse. I once worked on the Philadelphia *Bulletin,* so the political setup was nothing new to me. After Joe Downing decided I wouldn't get pushy, he took me around to meet The Boys.

The Clubhouse was across the street from the three-story capitol building of Frostbite's World Government. It was a little bigger than the capitol and in much better repair. Officially it was the headquarters of the Frostbite Benevolent Society, a charitable, hence tax-free, organization. Actually it was the headquarters of the Frostbite Planetary Party, a standard gang of brigands. Down on the wrong

end of Main Street somewhere was an upper room where the Frostbite Interplanetary Party, made up of liberals, screwballs, and disgruntled ex-members of the Organization but actually run by stooges of that Organization, hung out.

The Boys observed an orderly rotation of officers based on seniority. If you got in at the age of 18, didn't bolt and didn't drop dead you'd be president some day. To the party you had to bring loyalty, hard work—not on your payroll job, naturally, but on your electioneering—and cash. You kept bringing cash all your life; salary kickbacks, graft kickbacks, contributions for gold dinner services, tickets to testimonial banquets, campaign chest assignments, widows' and orphans' fund contributions, burial insurance, and dues, dues, dues.

As usual, it was hard to learn who was who. The President of Frostbite was a simple-minded old boy named Witherspoon, so far gone in senile decay that he had come to believe the testimonial-banquet platitudes he uttered. You could check him off as a wheelhorse. He was serving the second and last year of his second and last term, and there was a mild battle going on between his Vice-President and the Speaker of the House as to who would succeed him. It was a traditional battle and didn't mean much; whoever lost would be next in line. When one of the contestants was so old or ill that he might not live to claim his term if he lost, the scrap would be waived in a spirit of good sportsmanship that the voters would probably admire if they ever heard of it.

Joe Downing was a comer. His sponsorship of me meant more than the friendship of Witherspoon would have. He was Chenery's ally; they were the leadership of the younger, sportier element. Chenery's boss Weems was with the older crowd that ate more, talked more, and drank less.

I had to join a committee before I heard of George, though. That's the way those things work.

It was a special committee for organizing a testimonial banquet for Witherspoon on his 40th year in the party. I wound up in the subcommittee to determine a testimonial gift for the old buffer. I knew damned well that we'd be expected to start the subscription for the gift rolling, so I suggested a handsome—and—inexpensive—illuminated scroll with a sentiment lettered on it. The others were scandalized. One fat old woman called me "cheap" and a fat male payroller came close to accusing me of irregularity, at which I was supposed to tremble and withdraw my suggestion. I stood on my rights, and wrote a minority report standing up for the scroll while

the majority of the subcommittee agreed on an inscribed sterling tea service.

At the next full committee meeting we delivered our reports and I thought it would come to a vote right away. But it seemed they weren't used to there being two opinions about anything. They were flustered, and the secretary slipped out with both reports during a five-minute adjournment. He came back and told me, beaming, "Chenery says George liked your idea." The committee was reconvened and because George liked my idea my report was adopted and I was appointed a subcommittee of one to procure the scroll.

I didn't learn any more about George after the meeting except that some people who liked me were glad I'd been favorably noticed and others were envious about the triumph of the Johnny-come-lately.

I asked Chenery in the bar. He laughed at my ignorance and said, "George *Parsons.*"

"Publisher of the *Phoenix?* I thought he was an absentee owner."

"He doesn't spend a lot of time on Frostbite. At least I don't think he does. As a matter of fact, I don't know a lot about his comings and goings. Maybe Weems does."

"He swings a lot of weight in the Organization."

Chenery looked puzzled. "I guess he does at that. Every once in a while he does speak up and you generally do what he says. It's the paper, I suppose. He could wreck any of the boys." Chenery wasn't being irregular: newsmen are always in a special position.

I went back to the office and, late as it was, sent a note to the desk to get the one man subcommittee job cleaned up:

> ATTN MCGILLICUDDY RE CLIENT RELATIONS NEED SOONEST ILLUMINATED SCROLL PRESENT HOMER WITHERSPOON PRESIDENT FROSTBITE HONORING HIM 40 YEARS MEMBERSHIP FROSTBITE PLANETARY PARTY USUAL SENTIMENTS NOTE MUST BE TERRESTRIAL STYLE ART IF NOT ACTUAL WORK EARTHER ACCOUNT ANTIBEM PREJUDICE HERE FRBBUO END.

That happened on one of those Sundays which, according to Kennedy's sardonic sked, was to be devoted to writing and filing enterprisers.

The scroll came through with a memo from McGillicuddy: "Fyi ckng w/ clnt etif this gag wll hv ur hide. Reminder guppy's firstest job offheading orchidbitches one which bypassed u yesterweek. How? McG"

There was a sadly sweet letter from Ellie aboard the same rust-bucket. She wanted me to come back to her, but not a broken man. She wanted me to do something really big on Frostbite to show what I had in me. She was sure that if I really looked there'd be something more to file than the copy I'd been sending in. Yeah.

Well, the big news that week would be the arrival of a loaded immigrant ship from Thetis of Procyon, a planet whose ecology had been wrecked beyond repair in a few short generations by DDT, hydraulic mining, unrestricted logging, introduction of rabbits and house cats and the use of poison bait to kill varmints. In a few thousand years maybe the planet would have topsoil, cover crops, forests, and a balanced animal population again, but Thetis as of now was a ruin whose population was streaming away to whatever havens it could find.

Frostbite had agreed to take 500 couples provided they were of terrestrial descent and could pass a means test—that is, provided they had money to be fleeced of. They were arriving on a bottom called *Esmeralda.* According to my year-old "LLOYDS' SHIPPING INDEX"—"exclusive accurate and up-to-date, being the result of daily advices from every part of the galaxy"—*Esmeralda* was owned by the Frimstedt Atomic Astrogation Company, Gammadion, gross tonnage 830,000, net tonnage 800,000, class GX—"freighter/steerage passengers"—insurance rating: hull A, atomics A. The tonnage difference meant real room for only about 850. If she took the full 1,000 she'd be jammed. She was due to arrive at Frostbite in the very early morning. Normally I would have kept a deathwatch, but the AA rating lulled me and I went to the Hamilton House to sleep.

At 4:30, the bedside phone chimed. "This Willie Egan," a frightened voice said. "You remember—on the desk at the *Phoenix.*" Desk, hell—he was a 17-year-old copyboy I'd tipped to alert me on any hot breaks.

"There's some kind of trouble with the *Esmeralda,*" he said. "That big immigrant ship. They had a welcoming committee out, but the ship's overdue. I thought there might be a story in it. You got my home address? You better send the check there. Mr. Weems doesn't like us to do string work. How much do I get?"

"Depends," I said, waking up abruptly. "Thanks, kid." I was into my clothes and down the street in five minutes. It looked good; mighty good.

The ship was overcrowded, the AA insurance rating I had was a year old—maybe it had gone to pot since then and we'd have a major disaster on our hands.

I snapped on the newsroom lights and grabbed the desk phone, knocked down one toggle on the key box and demanded: "Space operator! Space operator!"

"Yes, sir. Let me have your call, please?"

"Gimme the bridge of the *Esmeralda* due to dock at the Frostbite spaceport today. While you're setting up the call gimme interplanetary and break in when you get the *Esmeralda*."

"Yes, sir." Click-click-click.

"Interplanetary operator."

"Gimme Planet Gammadion. Person-to-person, to the public relations officer of the Frimstedt Atomic Astrogation Company. No, I don't know his name. No, I *don't* know the Gammadion routing. While you're setting up the call gimme the local operator and break in when you get my party."

"Yes, sir." Click-click-click.

"Your call, please."

"Person-to-person, captain of the spaceport."

"Yes, sir."

Click-click-click. "Here is *Esmeralda,* sir."

"Who's calling?" yelled a voice. "This is the purser's office, who's calling?"

"Interstellar News, Frostbite Bureau. What's up about the ship being late?"

"I can't talk now! Oh, my God! I can't talk now! They're going crazy in the steerage—" He hung up and I swore a little.

"Space operator!" I yelled. "Get me *Esmeralda* again—if you can't get the bridge get the radio shack, the captain's cabin, anything inboard!"

"Yes, sir."

Click-click-click. "Here is your party, sir."

"Captain of the port's office," said the phone.

"This is Interstellar News. What's up about *Esmeralda?* I just talked to the purser in space and there's some trouble aboard."

"I don't know anything more about it than you boys," said the captain of the port. But his voice didn't sound right.

"How about those safety-standard stories?" I fired into the dark.

"That's a tomfool rumor!" he exploded. "Her atomics are perfectly safe!"

"Still," I told him, fishing, "it *was* an engineer's report—"

"Eh? What was? I don't know what you're talking about." He realized he'd been had. "Other ships have been an hour late before

and there are always rumors about shipping. That's absolutely all I have to say—absolutely all!" He hung up.

Click-click-click. "Interplanetary operator. I am trying to place your call, sir." She must be too excited to plug in the right hole on her switchboard. A Frostbite Gammadion call probably cost more than her annual salary, and it was a gamble at that on the feeble and mysteriously erratic subradiation that carried voices across segments of the galaxy.

But there came a faint harumph from the phone. "This is Captain Gulbransen. Who is calling, please?"

I yelled into the phone respectfully: "Captain Gulbransen, this is Interstellar News Service on Frostbite." I knew the way conservative shipping companies have of putting ancient, irritable astrogators into public-relations berths after they are ripe to retire from space. "I was wondering, sir," I shouted, "if you'd care to comment on the fact that *Esmeralda* is overdue at Frostbite with 1,000 immigrants."

"Young man," wheezed Gulbransen dimly, "it is clearly stated in our tariffs filed with the ICC that all times of arrival are to be read as plus or minus eight Terrestrial Hours, and that the company assumes no liability in such cases as—"

"Excuse me, sir, but I'm aware that the eight-hour leeway is traditional. But isn't it a fact that the average voyage hits, the E.T.A. plus or minus only fifteen minutes T.H.?"

"That's so, but—"

"Please excuse me once more, sir—I'd like to ask just one more question. There is, of course, no reason for alarm in the lateness of *Esmeralda,* but wouldn't you consider a ship as much as one hour overdue as possibly in danger? And wouldn't the situation be rather alarming?"

"Well, one full hour, perhaps you would. Yes, I suppose so—but the eight-hour leeway, you understand—" I laid the phone down quietly on the desk and ripped through the *Phoenix* for yesterday. In the business section it said *"Esmeralda* due 0330." And the big clock on the wall said 0458.

I hung up the phone and sprinted for the ethertype, with the successive stories clear in my head, ready to be punched and fired off to Marsbuo for relay on the galactic trunk. I would beat out 15 clanging bells on the printer and follow them with

INTERSTELLAR FLASH
IMMIGRANT SHIP ESMERALDA SCHEDULED TO LAND FROSTBITE WITH 1,000 FROM THETIS PRO-

CYON ONE AND ONE HALF HOURS OVERDUE: OWNER ADMITS SITUATION "ALARMING," CRAFT "IN DANGER."

And immediately after that a five-bell bulletin:

INTERSTELLAR BULLETIN
FROSTBITE–THE IMMIGRANT SHIP ESMERALDA, DUE TODAY AT FROSTBITE FROM THETIS PROCYON WITH 1,000 STEERAGE PASSENGERS ABOARD IS ONE AND ONE HALF HOURS OVERDUE. A SPOKESMAN FOR THE OWNERS, THE FRIMSTEDT ATOMIC ASTROGATION COMPANY, SAID SUCH A SITUATION IS "ALARMING" AND THAT THE CRAFT MIGHT BE CONSIDERED "IN DANGER." ESMERALDA IS AN 830 THOUSAND-TON FREIGHTER-STEERAGE PASSENGER CARRIER.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE PORT AT FROSTBITE ADMITTED THAT THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS CIRCULATING ABOUT THE CONDITION OF THE CRAFT'S ATOMICS THOUGH THESE WERE RATED "A" ONE YEAR AGO.

THE PURSER OF THE SPACESHIP, CONTACTED IN SPACE, WAS AGITATED AND INCOHERENT WHEN QUESTIONED. HE SAID–

"Get up, Spencer, get away from the machine."

It was Joe Downing, with a gun in his hand.

"I've got a story to file," I said blankly.

"Some other time." He stepped closer to the ethertype and let out a satisfied grunt when he saw the paper was clean. "Port captain called me," he said. "Told me you were nosing around."

"Will you get out of here?" I asked, stupefied. "Man, I've flash and bulletin matter to clear. Let me alone!"

"I said to get away from that machine or I'll cut ya down, boy."

"But why? *Why?*"

"George don't want any big stories out of Frostbite."

"You're crazy. Mr. Parsons is a newsman himself. Put that damnfool gun away and let me get this out!"

I turned to the printer when a new voice said, "No! Don't do it, Mr. Spencer. He is a Nietzschean. He'll kill you, all right. He'll kill you, all right."

It was Leon Portwanger, the furrier, my neighbor, the man who claimed he never knew Kennedy. His fat, sagging face, his drooping white mustache, his sad black eyes enormous behind the bull's-eye

spectacles were very matter-of-fact. He meant what he said. I got up and backed away from the ethertype.

"I don't understand it," I told them.

"You don't have to understand it," said the rat-faced collector of the port. "All you have to understand is that George don't like it." He fired one bullet through the printer and I let out a yelp. I'd felt that bullet going right through me.

"Don't," the steady voice of the furrier cautioned. I hadn't realized that I was walking toward Downing and that his gun was now on my middle. I stopped.

"That's better," said Downing. He kicked the phone connection box off the baseboard, wires snapping and trailing. "Now go to the Hamilton House and stay there for a couple of days."

I couldn't get it through my head. "But *Esmeralda's* a cinch to blow up," I told him. "It'll be a major space disaster. *Half of them are women!* I've got to get it out!"

"I'll take him back to his hotel, Mr. Downing," said Portwanger. He took my arm in his flabby old hand and led me out while that beautiful flash and bulletin and the first lead disaster and the new lead disaster went running through my head to a futile obbligato of: "They can't *do* this to me!" But they did it.

Somebody gave me a drink at the hotel and I got sick and a couple of bellboys helped me to bed. The next thing I knew I was feeling very clear-headed and wakeful and Chenery was hovering over me looking worried.

"You've been out cold for forty-eight hours," he said. "You had a high fever, chills, the works. What happened to you and Downing?"

"How's *Esmeralda?*" I demanded.

"Huh? Exploded about half a million miles off. The atomics went."

"Did anybody get it to ISN for me?"

"Couldn't. Interplanetary phones are out again. You seem to have got the last clear call through to Gammadion. And you put a bullet through your ethertype—"

"*I* did? Like hell—Downing did!"

"Oh? Well, that makes better sense. The fact is, Downing's dead. He went crazy with that gun of his and Chief Selig shot him. But old Portwanger said you broke the ethertype when you got the gun away from Downing for a minute—no, that doesn't make sense. What's the old guy up to?"

"I don't give a damn. You see my pants anywhere? I want to get that printer fixed."

He helped me dress. I was a little weak on my pins and he insisted on pouring expensive eggnog into me before he'd let me go to the bureau.

Downing hadn't done much of a job, or maybe you can't do much of a job on an ethertype without running it through an induction furnace. Everything comes apart, everything's replaceable. With a lot of thumbing through the handbook I had all the busted bits and pieces out and new ones in. The adjustment was harder, needing two pairs of eyes. Chenery watched the meters while I turned the screws. In about four hours I was ready to call. I punched out:

> NOTE MARSBUO ISN. FRBBUO RESTORED TO SVC AFTR MECHNCL TRBL ETILLNESS.

The machine spat back:

> NOTE FRBBUO. HW ILLNSS COINCDE WTH MJR DISSTR YR TRRTRY? FYI GAMMADION BUO ISN OUTRCHD FR ESMERALDA AFTR YR INXPLCBL SLNCE ETWS BDLY BTN GAMMADION BUOS COMPTSHN. MCG END.

He didn't want to hear any more about it. I could see him stalking away from the printer to the copydesk slot to chew his way viciously through wordage for the major splits. I wished I could see in my mind's eye Ellie slipping over to the Krueger 60-B circuit sending printer and punching out a word or two of kindness—the machine stirred again. It said: "JOE JOE HOW COULD YOU? ELLIE"

Oh, God.

"Leave me alone, will you?" I asked Chenery.

"Sure—sure. Anything you say," he humored me, and slipped out.

I sat for a while at the desk, noticing that the smashed phone connection had been installed again, that the place had been policed up.

Leon Portwanger came waddling in with a bottle in his hand. "I have here some prune brandy," he said.

Things began to clear up. "*You* gave me that mickey," I said slowly. "And you've been lying about me. You said I wrecked the ethertype."

"You are a determinist and I was trying to save your life," he said, setting down two glasses and filling them. "Take your choice and I will have the other. No mickeys." I picked one and gulped it down—nasty, too-sweet stuff that tasted like plum peelings. He sipped his and seemed to enjoy it.

"I thought," he said, "that you were in with their gang. What *was* I to think? They got rid of poor Kennedy. Pneumonia! You too would have pneumonia if they drenched you with water and put you on the roof in your underwear overnight. The bottles were planted here. He used to drink a little with me, he used to get drunk now and then—so did I—nothing bad."

"You thought I was in their gang," I said. "What gang are you in?"

"The Frostbite Interplanetary Party," he said wryly. "I would smile with you if the joke were not on me. I know, I know—we are Outs who want to be Ins, we are neurotic youngsters, we are led by stooges of the Planetary Party. So what should I do—start a one-man party alone on a mountaintop, so pure that I must blackball everybody except myself from membership? I am an incorrigible reformer and idealist whether I like it or not—and sometimes, I assure you, I don't like it very well.

"Kennedy was no reformer and idealist. He was a pragmatist, a good man who wanted a good news story that would incidentally blow the present administration up. He used me, I used him. He got his story and they killed him and burglarized the bureau to remove all traces of it. Or did they?"

"I don't know," I muttered. "Why did you dope me? Did Downing really go crazy?"

"I poisoned you a little because Downing did *not* go crazy. Downing was under orders to keep you from sending out that story. Probably after he had got you away from the ethertype he would have killed you if I had not poisoned you with some of my heart medicine. They realized while you were ill and feverish that it might as well be one as another. If they killed you, there would only be another newsman sent out to be inveigled into their gang. If they killed Downing, they could blame everything on him, you would never be able to have anything more than suspicions, and—there are a lot more Downings available, are there not?"

My brain began to click. "So your mysterious 'they' didn't want a top-drawer story to center around Frostbite. If it did, there'd be follow-ups, more reporters, ICC people investigating the explosion. Since the news break came from Gammadion, that's where the reporters would head and that's where the ICC investigation would be based. But what have they got to hide? The political setup here smells to high heaven, but it's no worse than on fifty other planets. Graft, liquor, vice, drugs, gambling—"

"No drugs," said the furrier.

"That's silly," I told him. "Of course they have drugs. With everything else, why not drugs?"

He shrugged apologetically. "Excuse me," he said. "I told you I was a reformer and an idealist. I did not mention that I used to be an occasional user of narcotics. A little something to take the pressure off—those very small morphine sulphate tablets. You can imagine my horror when I emigrated to this planet twenty-eight years ago and found that there were no drugs—literally. Believe me when I tell you that I—*looked hard. Now,* of course, I am grateful. But I had a few very difficult weeks." He shuddered, finished his prune brandy and filled both our glasses again.

He tossed down his glass.

"Damn it all!" he exploded. "Must I rub your nose in it? Are you going to figure it out for yourself? And are you going to get killed like my poor friend, Kennedy? Look here! And here!" He lurched to his feet and yanked down "WHO'S WHO IN THE GALAXY" and the United Planets Drug Committee Report.

His pudgy finger pointed to:

"PARSONS, George Warmerdam, organic chemist, newsppr pubr, b. Gammadion 172, s. Henry and Dolores (Warmerdam) P., studied Gammadion Chem. Inst. B.Ch 191, M.Ch 193, D.Ch 194; empl. dir research Hawley Mfg Co. (Gammadion) 194–198; founded Parsons Chem Mfg Labs (Gammadion) 198, headed same 198–203; removed Frostbite 203; founded newspaper Frostbite *Phoenix* 203. Author, tech papers organ chem 193–196. Mem Univ Organ Chem Soc. Address c/o Frostbite *Phoenix,* Frostbite."

And in the other book:

"—particular difficulty encountered with the stupefiant known as 'J-K-B.' It was first reported on Gammadion in the year 197, when a few isolated cases presented themselves for medical treatment. The problem rapidly worsened through the year 203, by which time the drug was in widespread illicit interplanetary commerce. The years 203–204 saw a cutting-off of the supply of J-K-B for reasons unknown. Prices soared to fantastic levels, unnumbered robberies and murders were committed by addicts to obtain possession of the minute quantities remaining on the market, and other addicts, by the hundreds of thousands presented themselves to the authorities hoping more or less in vain for a 'cure.' J-K-B appeared again in the year 205, not confined to any segment of the inhabited galaxy. Supplies have since remained at a constant level—enough to brutalize, torment, and shorten the lives of the several score million terrestrial and extra-terrestrial beings who have come into its grip.

Interrogation of peddlers intercepted with J-K-B has so far only led back through a seemingly endless chain of middlemen. The nature of the drug is such that it cannot be analyzed and synthesized—"

My head spun over the damning parallel trails. Where Parsons tried his wings in chemistry, J-K-B appeared. When he went on his own, the quantity increased. When he moved to another planet, the supply was cut off. When he was established, the supply grew to a constant level and stayed there.

And what could be sweeter than a thoroughly corrupt planet to take over with his money and his newspaper? Dominate a machine and the members' "regularity" will lead them to kill for you—or to kill killers if need be. Encourage planetary ignorance and isolationism; keep the planet unattractive and depressed by letting your freebooters run wild—that'll discourage intelligent immigration. Let token parties in, fleece them fast and close, let them spread the word that Frostbite's no place for anybody with brains.

"A reformer and idealist I am," said Portwanger calmly. "Not a man of action. What should be done next?"

I thought it over and told him; "If it kills me, and it might, I am going to send a rash of flashes and bulletins from this Godforsaken planet. My love life depends on it. Leon, do you know anybody on Mars?"

"A Sirian fellow named Wenjtkpli—a philosophical anarchist. An unreal position to take. This is the world we are in, there are certain social leverages to apply. Who is he to say—?"

I held up my hand. "I know him too." I could taste that eleventh stinger again; by comparison the prune brandy was mellow. I took a gulp. "Do you think you could go to Mars without getting bumped off?"

"A man could try."

The next two weeks were agonizing. Those Assyrian commissars or Russian belshazzars or whatever they were who walked down prison corridors waiting to be shot in the back of the head never went through what I did. I walked down the corridor for fourteen days.

First Leon got off all right on a bucket of bolts. I had no guarantee that he wouldn't be plugged by a crew member who was in on the party. Then there was a period of waiting for the first note that I'd swap you for a mad tarantula.

It came:

NOTE FRBBUO HOW HELL XPCT KP CLNT IF UNABL DROP COPY? MCG MARSBUO.

I'd paved the way for that one by drinking myself into a hangover on home brew and lying in bed and groaning when I should have been delivering the printer copy to the *Phoenix*. I'd been insulting as possible to Weems to insure that he'd phone a squawk to McGillicuddy—I hoped. The tipoff was "hell." Profanity was never, ever used on our circuits—I hoped. "Hell" meant "Portwanger contacted me, I got the story, I am notifying United Planets Patrol in utmost secrecy."

Two days later came:

NOTE FRBBUO BD CHMN WNTS KNO WHT KIND DAMN KNUCKLHED FILING ONLY FOURFIVE ITMS DAILY FM XPNSVE ONEMAN BUO. XPCT UPSTEP PRDCTN IMMY, RPT IMMY MCG MARSBUO.

"Damn" meant "Patrol contacted, preparing to raid Frostbite." "Fourfive" meant "fourfive"—days from message.

The next note would have got ISN in trouble with the Interplanetary Communications Commission if it hadn't been in a good cause. I'm unable to quote it. But it came as I was in the bureau about to leave for the Honorable Homer Witherspoon's testimonial banquet. I locked the door, took off my parka and rolled up my sleeves. I was going to sweat for the next few hours.

When I heard the multiple roar of the Patrol ships on rockets I very calmly beat out fifteen bells and sent:

INTERSTELLAR FLASH
UNITED PLANETS PATROL DESCENDING ON FROSTBITE, KRUEGER 60-B'S ONLY PLANET, IN UNPRECEDENTED MASS RAID ON TIP OF INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE THAT WORLD IS SOLE SOURCE OF DEADLY DRUG J-K-B.

INTERSTELLAR BULLETIN
THE MASSED PATROL OF THE UNITED PLANETS ORGANIZATION DESCENDED ON THE ONLY PLANET OF KRUEGER 60-B, FROSTBITE, IN AN UNPRECEDENTED MASS RAID THIS EVENING. ON INFORMATION FURNISHED BY INTERSTELLAR NEWS REPORTER JOE SPENCER THE PATROL HOPES TO WIPE OUT THE SOURCE OF THE DEADLY DRUG J-K-B, WHICH HAS PLAGUED THE GALAXY FOR 20 YEARS. THE CHEMICAL GENIUS SUSPECTED OF IN-

VENTING AND PRODUCING THE DRUG IS GEORGE PARSONS, RESPECTED PUBLISHER OF FROSTBITE'S ONLY NEWSPAPER.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH
FIRST UNITED PLANETS PATROL SHIP LANDS IN FROSTBITE CAPITAL CITY OF PLANET.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH
PATROL COMMANDER PHONES EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW TO INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE FROSTBITE BUREAU REPORTING ROUND-UP OF PLANETARY GOVERNMENT LEADERS AT TESTIMONIAL DINNER

(WITH FROSTBITE)
FROSTBITE–ISN–ONE INTERSTELLAR NEWS REPORTER HAS ALREADY GIVEN HIS LIFE IN THE CAMPAIGN TO EXPOSE THE MAKER OF J-K-B. ED KENNEDY, ISN BUREAU CHIEF, WAS ASSASSINATED BY AGENTS OF DRUGMAKER GEORGE PARSONS THREE MONTHS AGO. AGENTS OF PARSONS STRIPPED KENNEDY AND EXPOSED HIM OVERNIGHT TO THE BITTER COLD OF THIS PLANET, CAUSING HIS DEATH BY PNEUMONIA. A SECOND INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE REPORTER, JOE SPENCER, NARROWLY ESCAPED DEATH AT THE HANDS OF A DRUG-RING MEMBER WHO SOUGHT TO PREVENT HIM FROM SENDING NEWS OVER THE CIRCUITS OF THE INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH
PATROL SEIZES PARSONS

INTERSTELLAR BULLETIN
FROSTBITE–IN A TELEPHONE MESSAGE TO INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE A PATROL SPOKESMAN SAID GEORGE PARSONS HAD BEEN TAKEN INTO CUSTODY AND UNMISTAKABLY IDENTIFIED. PARSONS HAD BEEN LIVING A LIE ON FROSTBITE, USING THE NAME CHENERY AND THE GUISE OF A COLUMNIST FOR PARSONS' NEWSPAPER. SAID THE PATROL SPOKESMAN;–"IT IS A TYPICAL MANEUVER. WE NEVER GOT SO FAR ALONG THE CHAIN OF J-K-B PEDDLERS THAT WE NEVER FOUND ONE MORE. APPARENTLY THE SOURCE OF THE DRUG HIMSELF THOUGHT HE COULD PUT HIMSELF OUT OF THE REACH OF INTERPLANETARY JUSTICE BY

ASSUMING A FICTITIOUS PERSONALITY. HOWEVER, WE HAVE ABSOLUTELY IDENTIFIED HIM AND EXPECT A CONFESSION WITHIN THE HOUR. PARSONS APPEARS TO BE A J-K-B ADDICT HIMSELF.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH
PARSONS CONFESSES

(FIRST LEAD FROSTBITE)
FROSTBITE–ISN–THE UNITED PLANETS PATROL AND THE INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE JOINED HANDS TODAY IN TRIUMPH AFTER WIPING OUT THE MOST VICIOUS NEST OF DRUGMAKERS IN THE GALAXY. J-K-B, THE INFAMOUS NARCOTIC WHICH HAS MENACED–

I ground out nearly thirty thousand words of copy that night. Bleary-eyed at the end of the run, I could barely read a note that came across:

NOTE FRBBUO: WELL DONE. RETURN MARS IMMY: SNDNG REPLCEMNT. MARSBUO MCG.

The Patrol flagship took me back in a quick, smooth trip with lots of service and no yaks.

After a smooth landing I took an eastbound chair from the field and whistled as the floater lifted me to the ISN floor. The newsroom was quiet for a change and the boys and girls stood up for me.

McGillicuddy stepped out from the copy table slot to say: "Welcome back. Frankly, I didn't think you had it in you, but you proved me wrong. You're a credit to the profession and the ISN." Portwanger was there, too. "A pragmatist, your McGillicuddy," he muttered. "But you did a good job."

I didn't pay very much attention; my eyes were roving over no man's land. Finally I asked McGillicuddy: "Where's Miss Masters? Day off?"

"How do you like that?" laughed McGillicuddy. "I forgot to tell you. She's your replacement on Frostbite. Fired her off yesterday. I thought the woman's angle–where do you think *you're* going?"

"Honest Blogri's Olde Earthe Saloon," I told him with dignity. "If you want me, I'll be under the third table from the left as you come in. With sawdust in my hair."

The Meddlers

REEV MARKON, Continental Weather Chief, swore one of his affected archaic oaths as his pocket transceiver beeped. "By my lousy halidom!" he muttered, turning the signal off and putting the pint-sized set to his face.

"How's that again, chief?" asked the puzzled voice of his assistant Moron Slobb.

"I didn't mean you, Slobb," Markon snapped. "Go ahead. What is so by-our-lady important that I must be dragged from the few pitiful hours of leisure I'm allowed?"

"Meddling," Moron Slobb said in a voice of deepest gloom.

"Ding-bust the consarned villains!" Markon shrieked. "I'll be right down."

He cast a bilious eye over the workshop where he had hoped to relax over the monthend, using his hands, forgetting the wild complexities of modern life while he puttered with his betatron planer, his compact little thermonuclear forming reactor and transmutron. "I'll meddle them," he growled, and stepped through his Transmitter.

There were wild screeches around him.

"I'm sorry, ladies!" he yelled. "It was completely—completely—" One of the ladies hit him with a chair. He abandoned explanations and ducked back through the Transmitter with a rapidly swelling eye. Through the other he read the setting on the Transmitter frame. His wives' athletic club, as he had suspected. Nor had they bothered to clear the setting after using the Transmitter.

"Lollygagging trumpets," he muttered, setting his office combination on the frame and stepping through.

Moron Slobb tactfully avoided staring at the discolored eye. "Glad you're here, chief," he burbled. "Somebody seems to have gimmicked up a private tractor beam in the Mojave area and they're pulling in rainclouds assigned to the Rio Grande eye—I mean Rio Grande Valley."

Reev Markon glared at him and decided to let it pass. "Triangu-

late for it," he said. "Set up the unilateral Transmitter. We'll burst in and catch them wet-handed."

He went to his private office and computed while the mechanical work was being done outside. A moderately efficient tractor beam, however haywire, could pull down five acre-feet of water a day. Rio Grande was a top-priority area drawing an allotment of eighty acre-feet for the growing season, plus sunships as needed. Plancom had decided that what the Continent needed was natural citrus and that Rio Grande was the area to supply it. Lowest priority for the current season had been assigned to the Idaho turnip acreage. He could divert rainfall from Idaho to Rio Grande. If that wasn't enough, he could seize the precipitation quota of Aspen Recreational with no difficulty since three Plancomembers had broken respectively a leg, a pelvis, and seven ribs on Aspen's beginner's ski trail. . . .

Slobb told him: "Chief, we're on it and the Transmitter's set up."

Reev Markon said: "Take a visual first. Those wittold jerks aren't going to booby-trap *me*."

He watched as a camera was thrust through the Transmitter, exposed and snatched back in a thousandth of a second.

The plate showed an improvised-looking tractor-beam generator surrounded by three rustic types in bowler hats and kilts. They obviously hadn't noticed the split-second appearance of the camera and they obviously were unarmed.

"I'm going in," Reev Markon said, cold and courageous. "Slobb, arm yourself and bring me a dazzle gun."

In two minutes the weapons had been signed out of the arsenal. Reev Markon and Moron Slobb walked steadily through the Transmitter, guns at the ready. To the astounded, gaping farmers Reev Markon said: "You're under arrest for meddling. Step through this—"

The rustics stopped gaping and went into action. One of them began ripping at the generator, trying to destroy evidence. The other uncorked an uppercut at Slobb, who intercepted it neatly with his chin. Reev Markon shut his eyes and pulled the trigger of the dazzle gun. When he opened his eyes the farmers and his assistant were all lying limply on the floor. Puffing a good deal, he pitched them one by one through the invisible portal of the unilateral Transmitter. He surveyed the generator, decided it would do as evidence and pitched it through also before he stepped back into the Continental Weather office himself.

When the farmers had recovered, a matter of twenty minutes or so, he tried to interrogate them but got nowhere. "Don't you realize," he asked silkily, "that there are regular channels through which you can petition for heavier rainfall or a changed barometric pressure or more sunlight hours? Don't you realize that you're disrupting continental economy when you try to free-lance?"

They were sullen and silent, only muttering something about their spinach crop needing more water than the damn bureaucrats realized.

"Take them away," Reev Markon sighed to his assistant, and Slobb did. But Slobb rushed back with a new and alarming advisory.

"Chief," he said, "Somebody on Long Island's seeding clouds without a license—"

"The cutpurse crumb!" Reev Markon snarled. Two in a row! He leaned back wearily for a moment. "By cracky, Slobb," he said, "you'd think people would speak up and let us know if they think they've been unjustly treated by Plancom. You'd think they'd tell us instead of haywiring their rise in private and screwing the works."

Slobb mumbled sympathetically, and Reev Markon voiced the ancient complaint of his department: "The trouble with this job is, everybody does things about the weather, but nobody talks about it!"

The Events Leading Down to the Tragedy

DOCUMENT ONE

Being the First Draft of a Paper to be Read before the Tuscaro[illegible] Township Historical Society by Mr. Hardeign Spoynte, B.A.

Madame President, members, guests:

It is with unabashed pride that I stand before you this evening. You will recall from your perusal of our Society's *Bulletin* (Vol. XLII, No. 3, Fall, 1955, pp. 7–8) [pp. correct? check before making fair copy. HS] that I had undertaken a research into the origins

of that event so fraught with consequences to the development of our township, the Watling-Fraskell duel. I virtually promised that the cause of the fatal strife would be revealed by, so to speak, the spotlight of science [metaphor here suff. graceful? perh. "magic" better? HS]. I am here to carry out that promise.

Major Watling *did* [tell a lie] prevaricate. Colonel Fraskell *rightly* reproached him with mendacity. Perhaps from this day the breach between Watlingist and Fraskellite may begin to heal, the former honestly acknowledging themselves in error and the latter magnanimous in victory.

My report reflects great credit on a certain modest resident of historic old Northumberland County who, to my regret, is evidently away on a well-earned vacation from his arduous labors [perh. cliché? No. Fine phrase. *Stet!* HS]. Who he is you will learn in good time.

I shall begin with a survey of known facts relating to the Watling-Fraskell duel, and as we are all aware, there is for such a quest no starting point better than the monumental work of our late learned county historian, Dr. Donge. Donge states (*Old Times on the Oquanantic,* 2nd ed., 1873, pp. 771–2): "No less to be deplored than the routing of the West Brance Canal to bypass Eleusis was the duel in which perished miserably Major Elisha Watling and Colonel Hiram Fraskell, those two venerable pioneers of the Oquanantic Valley. Though in no way to be compared with the barbarous *blood feuds* of the benighted Southern States of our Union, there has persisted to our own day a certain division of loyalty among residents of Tuscarora Township and particularly the borough of Eleusis. Do we not see elm-shaded Northumberland Street adorned by *two* gracefully pillared bank buildings, one the stronghold of the Fraskellite and the other of the Watlingist? Is not the debating society of Eleusis Academy sundered annually by the proposition, 'Resolved: that Major Elisha Watling (on alternate years, Colonel Hiram Fraskell) was no gentleman'? And did not the Watlingist propensities of the Eleusis Colonial Dames and the Fraskellite inclination of the Eleusis Daughters of the American Revolution 'clash' in September, 1869, at the storied Last Joint Lawn Fête during which éclairs and (some say) tea cups were hurled?" [Dear old Donge! Prose equal Dr. Johnson!]

If I may venture to follow those stately periods with my own faltering style, it is of course known to us all that the controversy has scarcely diminished to the present time. Eleusis Academy, famed *alma mater* (*i.e.,* "foster mother") of the immortal Hoving-

ton[1] is, alas, no more. It expired in flames on the tragic night of August 17, 1901, while the Watlingist members of that Eleusis Hose Company Number One which was stabled in Northumberland Street battled for possession of the fire hydrant which might have saved the venerable pile against the members of the predominantly Fraskellite Eleusis Hose Company Number One which was then stabled in Oquanantic Street. (The confusion of the nomenclature is only a part of the duel's bitter heritage.) Nevertheless, though the Academy and its Debating Society be gone, the youth of Eleusis still carries on the fray in a more modern fashion which rises each November to a truly disastrous climax during "Football Pep Week" when the "Colonels" of Central High School meet in sometimes gory combat with the "Majors" of North Side High. I am privately informed by our borough's Supervising Principal, George Croud, Ph.B., that last November's bill for replacement of broken window panes in both school buildings amounted to $231.47, exclusive of state sales tax; and that the two school nurses are already "stock-piling" gauze, liniment, disinfectants and splints in anticipation of the seemingly inevitable autumnal crop of abrasions, lacerations and fractures. [*mem.* Must ask Croud whether willing be publ. quoted or "informed source." HS] And the adults of Eleusis no less assiduously prosecute the controversy by choice of merchants, the granting of credit, and social exclusiveness.

The need for a determination of the rights and wrongs in the *affaire* Fraskell-Watling is, clearly, no less urgent now than it has ever been.

Dr. Donge, by incredible, indeed almost impossible, labor has proved that the issue was one of *veracity*. Colonel Fraskell intimated to Joseph Cooper, following a meeting of the Society of the Cincinnati, that Major Watling had been, in the words of Cooper's letter of July 18, 1789, to his brother Puntell in Philadelphia, "drauin [drawing] the long Bow."[2]

O fatal indiscretion! For Puntell Cooper delayed not a week to "relay" the intelligence to Major Watling by post, as a newsy appendix to his order for cordwood from the major's lot!

The brief, fatally terminated correspondence between the major and the colonel then began; I suppose most of us have it [better

[1] *vide* Spoynte, H.: "Egney Hovington, Nineteenth-Century American Nature Poet, and his career at Eleusis Academy, October 4—October 28, 1881" (art.) in *Bull. of the Tuscarora Township Hist. Soc.*, Vol. XVI, No. 4, Winter, 1929, pp. 4–18.

[2] DONGE, Dr. J.: *supra*, p. 774, *n.*

change to "at least key passages of corresp." HS] committed to memory.

The first letter offers a tantalizing glimpse. Watling writes to Fraskell, *inter alia:* "I said I seen it at the Meetin the Night before Milkin Time by my Hoss Barn and I seen it are you a Atheist Colonel?" It has long been agreed that the masterly conjectural emendation of this passage proposed by Miss Stolp in her epoch-making paper[3] is the correct one, *i.e.:* "I said at the meeting [of the Society of the Cincinnati] that I saw it the night before [the meeting] at milking time, by my horse barn; and I [maintain in the face of your expressions of disbelief that I] saw it. Are you an atheist, colonel?"

There thus appears to have been at the outset of the correspondence a clear-cut issue: did or did not Major Watling see "it"? The reference to atheism suggests that "it" may have been some apparition deemed supernatural by the major, but we know absolutely nothing more of what "it" may have been.

Alas, but the correspondents at once lost sight of the "point." The legendary Watling Temper and the formidable Fraskell Pride made it certain that one would sooner or later question the gentility of the other as they wrangled by post. The fact is that both did so simultaneously, on August 20, in letters that crossed. Once this stone was hurled [say "these stones"? HS] there was in those days no turning back. The circumstance that both parties were simultaneously offended and offending perplexed their seconds, and ultimately the choice of weapons had to be referred to a third party mutually agreeable to the duelists, Judge E. Z. C. Mosh.

Woe that he chose the deadly Pennsylvania Rifle![4] Woe that the two old soldiers knew that dread arm as the husbandman his sickle! At six o'clock on the morning of September 1, 1789, the major and the colonel expired on the sward behind Brashear's Creek, each shot through the heart. The long division of our beloved borough into Fraskellite and Watlingist had begun.

After this preamble, I come now to the modern part of my tale. It begins in 1954, with the purchase of the Haddam property by our respected fellow-townsman, that adoptive son of Eleusis, Dr.

[3] STOLP, A. DeW.: "Some Textual Problems Relating to the Correspondence between Major Elisha Watling and Colonel Hiram Fraskell, Eleusis, Pennsylvania, July 27–September 1, 1789" (art.) in *Bull. of the Tuscarora Township Hist. Soc.*, Vol. IV, No. 1, Spring, 1917.

[4] Amusingly known to *hoi polloi* and some who should know better as the "Kentucky" Rifle.

Gaspar Mord. I much regret that Dr. Mord is apparently on an extended vacation [where *can* the man be? HS]; since he is not available [confound it! HS] to grant permission, I must necessarily "skirt" certain topics, with a plea that to do otherwise might involve a violation of confidence. [Positively, there are times when one wishes that one were *not* a gentleman! HS]

I am quite aware that there was an element in our town which once chose to deprecate Dr. Mord, to question his degree, to inquire suspiciously into matters which are indubitably his own business and no one else's, such as his source of income. This element of which I speak came perilously close to sullying the hospitable name of Eleusis by calling on Dr. Mord in a delegation afire with the ridiculous rumor that the doctor had been "hounded out of Peoria in 1929 for vivisection."

Dr. Mord, far from reacting with justified wrath, chose the way of the true scientist. He showed this delegation through his laboratory to demonstrate that his activities were innocent, and it departed singing his praises, so to speak. They were particularly enthusiastic about two "phases" of his work which he demonstrated: some sort of "waking anaesthesia" gas, and a mechanical device for the induction of the hypnotic state.

I myself called on Dr. Mord as soon as he had settled down, in my capacity as President of the Eleusis Committee for the Preservation of Local Historical Buildings and Sites. I explained to the good doctor that in the parlor of the Haddam house had been formed in 1861 the Oquanantic Zouaves, that famed regiment of daredevils who with zeal and dash guarded the Boston (Massachusetts) Customs House through the four sanguinary years of conflict. I expressed the hope that the intricate fretsaw work, the stained glass, the elegant mansard roof and the soaring central tower would remain mute witnesses to the martial glory of Eleusis, and not fall victim to the "remodeling" craze.

Dr. Mord, with his characteristic smile (its first effect is unsettling, I confess, but when one later learns of the kindly intentions behind it, one grows accustomed to his face) replied somewhat irrelevantly by asking whether I had any dependents. He proceeded to a rather searching inquiry, explaining that as a man of science he liked to be sure of his facts. I advised him that I understood, diffidently mentioning that I was no stranger to scientific rigor, my own grandfather having published a massive *Evidences for the*

Phlogiston Theory of Heat.[5] Somehow the interview concluded with Dr. Mord asking: "Mr. Spoynte, what do you consider your greatest contribution to human knowledge and welfare, and do you suppose that you will ever surpass that contribution?"

I replied after consideration that no doubt my "high water mark" was my discovery of the 1777 Order Book of the Wyalusing Militia Company in the basement of the Spodder Memorial Library, where it had been lost to sight for thirty-eight years after being misfiled under "Indian Religions (Local)." To the second part of his question I could only answer that it was given to few men twice to perform so momentous a service to scholarship.

On this odd note we parted; it occurred to me as I wended my way home that I had not succeeded in eliciting from the doctor a reply as to his intentions of preserving intact the Haddam house! But he "struck" me as an innately conservative person, and I had little real fear of the remodeler's ruthless hammer and saw.

This impression was reinforced during the subsequent month, for the doctor intimated that he would be pleased to have me call on him Thursday evenings for a chat over the coffee cups.

These chats were the customary conversations of two learned men of the world, skimming lightly over knowledge's whole domain. Once, for example, Dr. Mord amusingly theorized that one of the most difficult things in the world for a private person to do was to find a completely useless human being. The bad men were in prison or hiding, he explained, and when one investigated the others it always turned out that they had some redeeming quality or usefulness to somebody. "Almost always," he amended with a laugh. At other times he would question me deeply about my life and activities, now and then muttering: "I must be sure; I must be *sure*"—typical of his scientist's passion for precision. Yet again, he would speak of the glorious Age of Pericles, saying fervently: "Spoynte, I would give anything, do anything, to look upon ancient Athens in its flower!"

Now, I claim no genius inspired my rejoinder. I was merely "the right man in the right place." I replied: "Dr. Mord, your wish to visit ancient Athens could be no more fervent than mine to visit

[5] Generally considered the last word on the subject though, as I understand it, somewhat eclipsed at present by the flashy and mystical "molecular theory" of the notorious Tory sympathizer and renegade Benjamin Thompson, styled "Count" Rumford. "A fool can always find a bigger fool to admire him." [Quote in orig. French? Check source and exact text. HS]

Major Watling's horse barn at milking time the evening of July 17, 1789."

I must, at this point, [confound it! I am *sure* Dr. M. would give permission to elaborate if he were only here! HS] drop an impenetrable veil of secrecy over certain episodes, for reasons which I have already stated.

I am, however, in a position to state with absolute authority *that there was* NO *apparition at Major Watling's horse barn at milking time the evening of—*

[Steady on, Hardeign. Think. Think. Major W. turned. I looked about. No apparitions, spooks, goblins. Just Major W. and myself. He looked at me and made a curious sort of face. No. Nonono. Can't be. Oh, my God! *I* was the—Fault all mine. Duel, feud. Traitor to dear Eleusis. Feel *sick*. . . . HS]

DOCUMENT TWO

Being a note delivered by Mrs. Irving McGuinness, Domestic, to Miss Agnes DeW. Stolp, President, the Tuscarora Township Historical Society

"The Elms"
Wednesday

Dear Miss Stolp,

Pray forgive my failure to attend the last meeting of the Society to read my paper. I was writing the last words when—I can tell you no more. Young Dr. Scantt has been in constant attendance at my bedside, and my temperature has not fallen below 99.8 degrees in the past 48 hours. I have been, I am, a sick and suffering man. I abjectly hope that you and everybody in Eleusis will bear this in mind if certain facts should come to your attention.

I cannot close without a warning against that rascal, "Dr." Gaspar Mord. A pledge prevents me from entering into details, but I urge you, should he dare to rear his head in Eleusis again, to hound him out of town as he was hounded out of Peoria in 1929. *Verbum sapientibus satis.*

Hardeign Spoynte

The Little Black Bag

OLD DR. FULL felt the winter in his bones as he limped down the alley. It was the alley and the back door he had chosen rather than the sidewalk and the front door because of the brown paper bag under his arm. He knew perfectly well that the flat-faced, stringy-haired women of his street and their gap-toothed, sour-smelling husbands did not notice if he brought a bottle of cheap wine to his room. They all but lived on the stuff themselves, varied with whiskey when pay checks were boosted by overtime. But Dr. Full, unlike them, was ashamed. A complicated disaster occurred as he limped down the littered alley. One of the neighborhood dogs—a mean little black one he knew and hated, with its teeth always bared and always snarling with menace—hurled at his legs through a hole in the board fence that lined his path. Dr. Full flinched, then swung his leg in what was to have been a satisfying kick to the animal's gaunt ribs. But the winter in his bones weighed down the leg. His foot failed to clear a half-buried brick, and he sat down abruptly, cursing. When he smelled unbottled wine and realized his brown paper package had slipped from under his arm and smashed, his curses died on his lips. The snarling black dog was circling him at a yard's distance, tensely stalking, but he ignored it in the greater disaster.

With stiff fingers as he sat on the filth of the alley, Dr. Full unfolded the brown paper bag's top, which had been crimped over, grocer-wise. The early autumnal dusk had come; he could not see plainly what was left. He lifted out the jug-handled top of his half gallon, and some fragments, and then the bottom of the bottle. Dr. Full was far too occupied to exult as he noted that there was a good pint left. He had a problem, and emotions could be deferred until the fitting time.

The dog closed in, its snarl rising in pitch. He set down the bottom of the bottle and pelted the dog with the curved triangular glass fragments of its top. One of them connected, and the dog ducked back through the fence, howling. Dr. Full then placed a razor-like

edge of the half-gallon bottle's foundation to his lips and drank from it as though it were a giant's cup. Twice he had to put it down to rest his arms, but in one minute he had swallowed the pint of wine.

He thought of rising to his feet and walking through the alley to his room, but a flood of well-being drowned the notion. It was, after all, inexpressibly pleasant to sit there and feel the frost-hardened mud of the alley turn soft, or seem to, and to feel the winter evaporating from his bones under a warmth which spread from his stomach through his limbs.

A three-year-old girl in a cut-down winter coat squeezed through the same hole in the board fence from which the black dog had sprung its ambush. Gravely she toddled up to Dr. Full and inspected him with her dirty forefinger in her mouth. Dr. Full's happiness had been providentially made complete; he had been supplied with an audience.

"Ah, my dear," he said hoarsely. And then: "Preposserous accusation. 'If that's what you call evidence,' I should have told them, 'you better stick to your doctoring.' I should have told them: 'I was here before your County Medical Society. And the License Commissioner never proved a thing on me. So, gennulmen, doesn't it stand to reason? I appeal to you as fellow memmers of a great profession—'"

The little girl, bored, moved away, picking up one of the triangular pieces of glass to play with as she left. Dr. Full forgot her immediately, and continued to himself earnestly: "But so help me, they *couldn't* prove a thing. Hasn't a man got any *rights?*" He brooded over the question, of whose answer he was so sure, but on which the Committee on Ethics of the County Medical Society had been equally certain. The winter was creeping into his bones again, and he had no money and no more wine.

Dr. Full pretended to himself that there was a bottle of whiskey somewhere in the fearful litter of his room. It was an old and cruel trick he played on himself when he simply had to be galvanized into getting up and going home. He might freeze there in the alley. In his room he would be bitten by bugs and would cough at the moldy reek from his sink, but he would not freeze and be cheated of the hundreds of bottles of wine that he still might drink, the thousands of hours of glowing content he still might feel. He thought about that bottle of whiskey—was it back of a mounded heap of medical journals? No; he had looked there last time. Was it under the sink, shoved well to the rear, behind the rusty drain? The cruel

trick began to play itself out again. Yes, he told himself with mounting excitement, yes, it might be! Your memory isn't so good nowadays, he told himself with rueful good-fellowship. You know perfectly well you might have bought a bottle of whiskey and shoved it behind the sink drain for a moment just like this.

The amber bottle, the crisp snap of the sealing as he cut it, the pleasurable exertion of starting the screw cap on its threads, and then the refreshing tangs in his throat, the warmth in his stomach, the dark, dull happy oblivion of drunkenness—they became real to him. You *could* have, you know! You *could* have! he told himself. With the blessed conviction growing in his mind—It *could* have happened, you know! It *could* have!—he struggled to his right knee. As he did, he heard a yelp behind him, and curiously craned his neck around while resting. It was the little girl, who had cut her hand quite badly on her toy, the piece of glass. Dr. Full could see the rilling bright blood down her coat, pooling at her feet.

He almost felt inclined to defer the image of the amber bottle for her, but not seriously. He knew that it was there, shoved well to the rear under the sink, behind the rusty drain where he had hidden it. He would have a drink and then magnanimously return to help the child. Dr. Full got to his other knee and then his feet, and proceeded at a rapid totter down the littered alley toward his room, where he would hunt with calm optimism at first for the bottle that was not there, then with anxiety, and then with frantic violence. He would hurl books and dishes about before he was done looking for the amber bottle of whiskey, and finally would beat his swollen knuckles against the brick wall until old scars on them opened and his thick old blood oozed over his hands. Last of all, he would sit down somewhere on the floor, whimpering, and would plunge into the abyss of purgative nightmare that was his sleep.

After twenty generations of shilly-shallying and "we'll cross that bridge when we come to it," genus homo had bred himself into an impasse. Dogged biometricians had pointed out with irrefutable logic that mental subnormals were outbreeding mental normals and supernormals, and that the process was occurring on an exponential curve. Every fact that could be mustered in the argument proved the biometricians' case, and led inevitably to the conclusion that genus homo was going to wind up in a preposterous jam quite soon. If you think that had any effect on breeding practices, you do not know genus homo.

There was, of course, a sort of masking effect produced by that other exponential function, the accumulation of technological de-

vices. A moron trained to punch an adding machine seems to be a more skillful computer than a medieval mathematician trained to count on his fingers. A moron trained to operate the twenty-first century equivalent of a linotype seems to be a better typographer than a Renaissance printer limited to a few fonts of movable type. This is also true of medical practice.

It was a complicated affair of many factors. The supernormals "improved the product" at greater speed than the subnormals degraded it, but in smaller quantity because elaborate training of their children was practiced on a custom-made basis. The fetish of higher education had some weird avatars by the twentieth generation: "colleges" where not a member of the student body could read words of three syllables; "universities" where such degrees as "Bachelor of Typewriting," "Master of Shorthand" and "Doctor of Philosophy (Card Filing)" were conferred with the traditional pomp. The handful of supernormals used such devices in order that the vast majority might keep some semblance of a social order going.

Some day the supernormals would mercilessly cross the bridge; at the twentieth generation they were standing irresolutely at its approaches wondering what had hit them. And the ghosts of twenty generations of biometricians chuckled malignantly.

It is a certain Doctor of Medicine of this twentieth generation that we are concerned with. His name was Hemingway—John Hemingway, B.Sc., M.D. He was a general practitioner, and did not hold with running to specialists with every trifling ailment. He often said as much, in approximately these words: "Now, uh, what I mean is you got a good old G.P. See what I mean? Well, uh, now a good old G.P. don't claim he knows all about lungs and glands and them things, get me? But you got a G.P., you got, uh, you got a, well, you got a . . . *all-around man!* That's what you got when you got a G.P.—you got a all-around man."

But from this, do not imagine that Dr. Hemingway was a poor doctor. He could remove tonsils or appendixes, assist at practically any confinement and deliver a living, uninjured infant, correctly diagnose hundreds of ailments, and prescribe and administer the correct medication or treatment for each. There was, in fact, only one thing he could not do in the medical line, and that was, violate the ancient canons of medical ethics. And Dr. Hemingway knew better than to try.

Dr. Hemingway and a few friends were chatting one evening when the event occurred that precipitates him into our story. He had been through a hard day at the clinic, and he wished his physi-

cist friend Walter Gillis, B.Sc., M.Sc., Ph.D., would shut up so he could tell everybody about it. But Gillis kept rambling on, in his stilted fashion: "You got to hand it to old Mike; he don't have what we call the scientific method, but you got to hand it to him. There this poor little dope is, puttering around with some glassware and I come up and I ask him, kidding of course, 'How's about a time-travel machine, Mike?' "

Dr. Gillis was not aware of it, but "Mike" had an I.Q. six times his own, and was—to be blunt—his keeper. "Mike" rode herd on the pseudo-physicists in the pseudo-laboratory, in the guise of a bottle-washer. It was a social waste—but as has been mentioned before, the supernormals were still standing at the approaches to a bridge. Their irresolution led to many such preposterous situations. And it happens that "Mike," having grown frantically bored with his task, was malevolent enough to—but let Dr. Gillis tell it:

"So he gives me these here tube numbers and says, 'Series circuit. Now stop bothering me. Build your time machine, sit down at it and turn on the switch. That's all I ask, Dr. Gillis—that's all I ask.' "

"Say," marveled a brittle and lovely blond guest, "you remember real good, don't you, doc?" She gave him a melting smile.

"Heck," said Gillis modestly, "I always remember good. It's what you call an inherent facility. And besides I told it quick to my secretary, so she wrote it down. I don't read so good, but I sure remember good, all right. Now, where was I?"

Everybody thought hard, and there were various suggestions:

"Something about bottles, doc?"

"You was starting a fight. You said 'time somebody was traveling.' "

"Yeah—you called somebody a swish. Who did you call a swish?"

"Not swish—*switch.*"

Dr. Gillis' noble brow grooved with thought, and he declared: "Switch is right. It was about time travel. What we call travel through time. So I took the tube numbers he gave me and I put them into the circuit-builder; I set it for 'series' and there it is—my time-traveling machine. It travels things through time real good." He displayed a box.

"What's in the box?" asked the lovely blonde.

Dr. Hemingway told her: "Time travel. It travels things through time."

"Look," said Gillis, the physicist. He took Dr. Hemingway's little black bag and put it on the box. He turned on the switch and the little black bag vanished.

"Say," said Dr. Hemingway, "that was, uh, swell. Now bring it back."

"Huh?"

"Bring back my little black bag."

"Well," said Dr. Gillis, "they don't come back. I tried it backwards and they don't come back. I guess maybe that dummy Mike give me a bum steer."

There was wholesale condemnation of "Mike" but Dr. Hemingway took no part in it. He was nagged by a vague feeling that there was something he would have to do. He reasoned: "I am a doctor, and a doctor has got to have a little black bag. I ain't got a little black bag—so ain't I a doctor no more?" He decided that this was absurd. He *knew* he was a doctor. So it must be the bag's fault for not being there. It was no good, and he would get another one tomorrow from that dummy Al, at the clinic. Al could find things good, but he was a dummy—never liked to talk sociable to you.

So the next day Dr. Hemingway remembered to get another little black bag from his keeper—another little black bag with which he could perform tonsillectomies, appendectomies and the most difficult confinements, and with which he could diagnose and cure his kind until the day when the supernormals could bring themselves to cross that bridge. Al was kinda nasty about the missing little black bag, but Dr. Hemingway didn't exactly remember what had happened, so no tracer was sent out, so—

Old Dr. Full awoke from the horrors of the night to the horrors of the day. His gummy eyelashes pulled apart convulsively. He was propped against a corner of his room, and something was making a little drumming noise. He felt very cold and cramped. As his eyes focused on his lower body, he croaked out a laugh. The drumming noise was being made by his left heel, agitated by fine tremors against the bare floor. It was going to be the D.T.'s again, he decided dispassionately. He wiped his mouth with his bloody knuckles, and the fine tremor coarsened; the snare-drum beat became louder and slower. He was getting a break this fine morning, he decided sardonically. You didn't get the horrors until you had been tightened like a violin string, just to the breaking point. He had a reprieve, if a reprieve into his old body with the blazing, endless headache just back of the eyes and the screaming stiffness in the joints were anything to be thankful for.

There was something or other about a kid, he thought vaguely. He was going to doctor some kid. His eyes rested on a little black

bag in the center of the room, and he forgot about the kid. "I could have sworn," said Dr. Full, "I hocked that two years ago!" He hitched over and reached the bag, and then realized it was some stranger's kit, arriving here he did not know how. He tentatively touched the lock and it snapped open and lay flat, rows and rows of instruments and medications tucked into loops in its four walls. It seemed vastly larger open than closed. He didn't see how it could possibly fold up into that compact size again, but decided it was some stunt of the instrument makers. Since his time—that made it worth more at the hock shop, he thought with satisfaction.

Just for old times' sake, he let his eyes and fingers rove over the instruments before he snapped the bag shut and headed for Uncle's. More than a few were a little hard to recognize—exactly that is. You could see the things with blades for cutting, the forceps for holding and pulling, the retractors for holding fast, the needles and gut for suturing, the hypos—a fleeting thought crossed his mind that he could peddle the hypos separately to drug addicts.

Let's go, he decided, and tried to fold up the case. It didn't fold until he happened to touch the lock, and then it folded all at once into a little black bag. Sure have forged ahead, he thought, almost able to forget that what he was primarily interested in was its pawn value.

With a definite objective, it was not too hard for him to get to his feet. He decided to go down the front steps, out the front door and down the sidewalk. But first—

He snapped the bag open again on his kitchen table, and pored through the medication tubes. "Anything to sock the autonomic nervous system good and hard," he mumbled. The tubes were numbered, and there was a plastic card which seemed to list them. The left margin of the card was a run-down of the systems—vascular, muscular, nervous. He followed the last entry across to the right. There were columns for "stimulant," "depressant," and so on. Under "nervous system" and "depressant" he found the number 17, and shakily located the little glass tube which bore it. It was full of pretty blue pills and he took one.

It was like being struck by a thunderbolt.

Dr. Full had so long lacked any sense of well-being except the brief glow of alcohol that he had forgotten its very nature. He was panic-stricken for a long moment at the sensation that spread through him slowly, finally tingling in his fingertips. He straightened up, his pains gone and his leg tremor stilled.

That was great, he thought. He'd be able to *run* to the hock shop,

pawn the little black bag and get some booze. He started down the stairs. Not even the street, bright with mid-morning sun, into which he emerged made him quail. The little black bag in his left hand had a satisfying, authoritative weight. He was walking erect, he noted, and not in the somewhat furtive crouch that had grown on him in recent years. A little self-respect, he told himself, that's what I need. Just because a man's down doesn't mean—

"Docta, please-a come wit'!" somebody yelled at him, tugging his arm. "Da litt-la girl, she's-a burn' up!" It was one of the slum's innumerable flat-faced, stringy-haired women, in a slovenly wrapper.

"Ah, I happen to be retired from practice—" he began hoarsely, but she would not be put off.

"In by here, Docta!" she urged, tugging him to a doorway. "You come look-a da litt-la girl. I got two dolla, you come look!" That put a different complexion on the matter. He allowed himself to be towed through the doorway into a mussy, cabbage-smelling flat. He knew the woman now, or rather knew who she must be—a new arrival who had moved in the other night. These people moved at night, in motorcades of battered cars supplied by friends and relations, with furniture lashed to the tops, swearing and drinking until the small hours. It explained why she had stopped him: she did not yet know he was old Dr. Full, a drunken reprobate whom nobody would trust. The little black bag had been his guarantee, outweighing his whiskery face and stained black suit.

He was looking down on a three-year-old girl who had, he rather suspected, just been placed in the mathematical center of a freshly changed double bed. God knew what sour and dirty mattress she usually slept on. He seemed to recognize her as he noted a crusted bandage on her right hand. Two dollars, he thought— An ugly flush had spread up her pipe-stem arm. He poked a finger into the socket of her elbow, and felt little spheres like marbles under the skin and ligaments roll apart. The child began to squall thinly; beside him, the woman gasped and began to weep herself.

"Out," he gestured briskly at her, and she thudded away, still sobbing.

Two dollars, he thought— Give her some mumbo jumbo, take the money and tell her to go to a clinic. Strep, I guess, from that stinking alley. It's a wonder any of them grow up. He put down the little black bag and forgetfully fumbled for his key, then remembered and touched the lock. It flew open, and he selected a bandage shears, with a blunt wafer for the lower jaw. He fitted the lower

jaw under the bandage, trying not to hurt the kid by its pressure on the infection, and began to cut. It was amazing how easily and swiftly the shining shears snipped through the crusty rag around the wound. He hardly seemed to be driving the shears with fingers at all. It almost seemed as though the shears were driving his fingers instead as they scissored a clean, light line through the bandage.

Certainly have forged ahead since my time, he thought—sharper than a microtome knife. He replaced the shears in their loop on the extraordinarily big board that the little black bag turned into when it unfolded, and leaned over the wound. He whistled at the ugly gash, and the violent infection which had taken immediate root in the sickly child's thin body. Now what can you do with a thing like that? He pawed over the contents of the little black bag, nervously. If he lanced it and let some of the pus out, the old woman would think he'd done something for her and he'd get the two dollars. But at the clinic they'd want to know who did it and if they got sore enough they might send a cop around. Maybe there was something in the kit—

He ran down the left edge of the card to "lymphatic" and read across to the column under "infection." It didn't sound right at all to him; he checked again, but it still said that. In the square to which the line and column led were the symbols: "IV-g-3cc." He couldn't find any bottles marked with Roman numerals, and then noticed that that was how the hypodermic needles were designated. He lifted number IV from its loop, noting that it was fitted with a needle already and even seemed to be charged. What a way to carry those things around! So—three cc. of whatever was in hypo number IV ought to do something or other about infections settled in the lymphatic system—which, God knows, this one was. What did the lower-case "g" mean, though? He studied the glass hypo and saw letters engraved on what looked like a rotating disk at the top of the barrel. They ran from "a" to "i," and there was an index line engraved on the barrel on the opposite side from the calibrations.

Shrugging, old Dr. Full turned the disk until "g" coincided with the index line, and lifted the hypo to eye level. As he pressed in the plunger he did not see the tiny thread of fluid squirt from the tip of the needle. There was a sort of dark mist for a moment about the tip. A closer inspection showed that the needle was not even pierced at the tip. It had the usual slanting cut across the bias of the shaft, but the cut did not expose an oval hole. Baffled, he tried pressing the plunger again. Again *something* appeared around

the tip and vanished. "We'll settle this," said the doctor. He slipped the needle into the skin of his forearm. He thought at first that he had missed—that the point had glided over the top of his skin instead of catching and slipping under it. But he saw a tiny blood-spot and realized that somehow he just hadn't felt the puncture. Whatever was in the barrel, he decided, couldn't do him any harm if it lived up to its billing—and if it could come out through a needle that had no hole. He gave himself three cc. and twitched the needle out. There was the swelling—painless, but otherwise typical.

Dr. Full decided it was his eyes or something, and gave three cc. of "g" from hypodermic IV to the feverish child. There was no interruption to her wailing as the needle went in and the swelling rose. But a long instant later, she gave a final gasp and was silent.

Well, he told himself, cold with horror, you did it that time. You killed her with that stuff.

Then the child sat up and said: "Where's my mommy?"

Incredulously, the doctor seized her arm and palpated the elbow. The gland infection was zero, and the temperature seemed normal. The blood-congested tissues surrounding the wound were subsiding as he watched. The child's pulse was stronger and no faster than a child's should be. In the sudden silence of the room he could hear the little girl's mother sobbing in her kitchen, outside. And he also heard a girl's insinuating voice:

"She gonna be O.K., doc?"

He turned and saw a gaunt-faced, dirty-blond sloven of perhaps eighteen leaning in the doorway and eying him with amused contempt. She continued: "I heard about you, *Doc-tor* Full. So don't go try and put the bite on the old lady. You couldn't doctor up a sick cat."

"Indeed?" he rumbled. This young person was going to get a lesson she richly deserved. "Perhaps you would care to look at my patient?"

"Where's my mommy?" insisted the little girl, and the blonde's jaw fell. She went to the bed and cautiously asked: "You O.K. now, Teresa? You all fixed up?"

"Where's my mommy?" demanded Teresa. Then, accusingly, she gestured with her wounded hand at the doctor. "You *poke* me!" she complained, and giggled pointlessly.

"Well—" said the blond girl, "I guess I got to hand it to you, doc. These loud-mouth women around here said you didn't know your . . . I mean, didn't know how to cure people. They said you ain't a real doctor."

"I *have* retired from practice," he said. "But I happened to be taking this case to a colleague as a favor, your good mother noticed me, and—" a deprecating smile. He touched the lock of the case and it folded up into the little black bag again.

"You stole it," the girl said flatly.

He sputtered.

"Nobody'd trust you with a thing like that. It must be worth plenty. You stole that case. I was going to stop you when I come in and saw you working over Teresa, but it looked like you wasn't doing her any harm. But when you give me that line about taking that case to a colleague I know you stole it. You gimme a cut or I go to the cops. A thing like that must be worth twenty-thirty dollars."

The mother came timidly in, her eyes red. But she let out a whoop of joy when she saw the little girl sitting up and babbling to herself, embraced her madly, fell on her knees for a quick prayer, hopped up to kiss the doctor's hand, and then dragged him into the kitchen, all the while rattling in her native language while the blond girl let her eyes go cold with disgust. Dr. Full allowed himself to be towed into the kitchen, but flatly declined a cup of coffee and a plate of anise cakes and St. John's Bread.

"Try him on some wine, ma," said the girl sardonically.

"Hyass! Hyass!" breathed the woman delightedly. "You like-a wine, docta?" She had a carafe of purplish liquid before him in an instant, and the blond girl snickered as the doctor's hand twitched out at it. He drew his hand back, while there grew in his head the old image of how it would smell and then taste and then warm his stomach and limbs. He made the kind of calculation at which he was practiced; the delighted woman would not notice as he downed two tumblers, and he could overawe her through two tumblers more with his tale of Teresa's narrow brush with the Destroying Angel, and then—why, then it would not matter. He would be drunk.

But for the first time in years, there was a sort of counter-image: a blend of the rage he felt at the blond girl to whom he was so transparent, and of pride at the cure he had just effected. Much to his own surprise, he drew back his hand from the carafe and said, luxuriating in the words: "No, thank you. I don't believe I'd care for any so early in the day." He covertly watched the blond girl's face, and was gratified at her surprise. Then the mother was shyly handing him two bills and saying: "Is no much-a money, docta—but you come again, see Teresa?"

"I shall be glad to follow the case through," he said. "But now excuse me—I really must be running along." He grasped the little

black bag firmly and got up; he wanted very much to get away from the wine and the older girl.

"Wait up, doc," said she, "I'm going your way." She followed him out and down the street. He ignored her until he felt her hand on the black bag. Then old Dr. Full stopped and tried to reason with her:

"Look, my dear. Perhaps you're right. I might have stolen it. To be perfectly frank, I don't remember how I got it. But you're young and you can earn your own money—"

"Fifty-fifty," she said, "or I go to the cops. And if I get another word outta you, it's sixty-forty. And you know who gets the short end, don't you, doc?"

Defeated, he marched to the pawnshop, her impudent hand still on the handle with his, and her heels beating out a tattoo against his stately tread.

In the pawnshop, they both got a shock.

"It ain't stendard," said Uncle, unimpressed by the ingenious lock. "I ain't nevva seen one like it. Some cheap Jap stuff, maybe? Try down the street. This I nevva could sell."

Down the street they got an offer of one dollar. The same complaint was made: "I ain't a collecta, mista—I buy stuff that got resale value. Who could I sell this to, a Chinaman who don't know medical instruments? Every one of them looks funny. You sure you didn't make these yourself?" They didn't take the one-dollar offer.

The girl was baffled and angry; the doctor was baffled too, but triumphant. He had two dollars, and the girl had a half-interest in something nobody wanted. But, he suddenly marveled, the thing had been all right to cure the kid, hadn't it?

"Well," he asked her, "do you give up? As you see, the kit is practically valueless."

She was thinking hard. "Don't fly off the handle, doc. I don't get this but something's going on all right . . . would those guys know good stuff if they saw it?"

"They would. They make a living from it. Wherever this kit came from—"

She seized on that, with a devilish faculty she seemed to have of eliciting answers without asking questions. "I thought so. You don't know either, huh? Well, maybe I can find out for you. C'mon in here. I ain't letting go of that thing. There's money in it—some way, I don't know how, there's money in it." He followed her into a cafeteria and to an almost-empty corner. She was oblivious to stares and snickers from the other customers as she opened the little black

bag—it almost covered a cafeteria table—and ferreted through it. She picked out a retractor from a loop, scrutinized it, contemptuously threw it down, picked out a speculum, threw it down, picked out the lower half of an O.B. forceps, turned it over, close to her sharp young eyes—and saw what the doctor's dim old ones could not have seen.

All old Dr. Full knew was that she was peering at the neck of the forceps and then turned white. Very carefully, she placed the half of the forceps back in its loop of cloth and then replaced the retractor and the speculum. "Well?" he asked. "What did you see?"

"'Made in U.S.A.,'" she quoted hoarsely. "'Patent Applied for July 2450.'"

He wanted to tell her she must have misread the inscription, that it must be a practical joke, that—

But he knew she had read correctly. Those bandage shears: they *had* driven his fingers, rather than his fingers driving them. The hypo needle that had no hole. The pretty blue pill that had struck him like a thunderbolt.

"You know what I'm going to do?" asked the girl, with sudden animation. "I'm going to go to charm school. You'll like that, won't ya, doc? Because we're sure going to be seeing a lot of each other."

Old Dr. Full didn't answer. His hands had been playing idly with that plastic card from the kit on which had been printed the rows and columns that had guided him twice before. The card had a slight convexity; you could snap the convexity back and forth from one side to the other. He noted, in a daze, that with each snap a different text appeared on the cards. *Snap*. "The knife with the blue dot in the handle is for tumors only. Diagnose tumors with your Instrument Seven, the Swelling Tester. Place the Swelling Tester—" *Snap*. "An overdose of the pink pills in Bottle 3 can be fixed with one white pill from Bottle—" *Snap*. "Hold the suture needle by the end without the hole in it. Touch it to one end of the wound you want to close and let go. After it has made the knot, touch it—" *Snap*. "Place the top half of the O.B. Forceps near the opening. Let go. After it has entered and conformed to the shape of—" *Snap*.

The slot man saw "FLANNERY 1—MEDICAL" in the upper left corner of the hunk of copy. He automatically scribbled "trim to .75" on it and skimmed it across the horseshoe-shaped copy desk to Piper, who had been handling Edna Flannery's quack-exposé series. She was a nice youngster, he thought, but like all youngsters she over-wrote. Hence, the "trim."

Piper dealt back a city hall story to the slot, pinned down Flannery's feature with one hand and began to tap his pencil across it, one tap to a word, at the same steady beat as a teletype carriage traveling across the roller. He wasn't exactly reading it this first time. He was just looking at the letters and words to find out whether, as letters and words, they conformed to *Herald* style. The steady tap of his pencil ceased at intervals as it drew a black line ending with a stylized letter "d" through the word "breast" and scribbled in "chest" instead, or knocked down the capital "E" in "East" to lower case with a diagonal, or closed up a split word—in whose middle Flannery had bumped the space bar of her typewriter—with two curved lines like parentheses rotated through ninety degrees. The thick black pencil zipped a ring around the "30" which, like all youngsters, she put at the end of her stories. He turned back to the first page for the second reading. This time the pencil drew lines with the stylized "d's" at the end of them through adjectives and whole phrases, printed big "L's" to mark paragraphs, hooked some of Flannery's own paragraphs together with swooping recurved lines.

At the bottom of "FLANNERY ADD 2—MEDICAL" the pencil slowed down and stopped. The slot man, sensitive to the rhythm of his beloved copy desk, looked up almost at once. He saw Piper squinting at the story, at a loss. Without wasting words, the copy reader skimmed it back across the Masonite horseshoe to the chief, caught a police story in return and buckled down, his pencil tapping. The slot man read as far as the fourth add, barked at Howard, on the rim: "Sit in for me," and stumped through the clattering city room toward the alcove where the managing editor presided over his own bedlam.

The copy chief waited his turn while the make-up editor, the pressroom foreman and the chief photographer had words with the M.E. When his turn came, he dropped Flannery's copy on his desk and said: "She says this one isn't a quack."

The M.E. read:

"FLANNERY 1—MEDICAL, by Edna Flannery, *Herald* Staff Writer.

"The sordid tale of medical quackery which the *Herald* has exposed in this series of articles undergoes a change of pace today which the reporter found a welcome surprise. Her quest for the facts in the case of today's subject started just the same way that her exposure of one dozen shyster M.D.'s and faith-healing phonies did. But she can report for a change that Dr. Bayard Full is, despite unorthodox practices which have drawn the suspicion of the rightly

hypersensitive medical associations, a true healer living up to the highest ideals of his profession.

"Dr. Full's name was given to the *Herald's* reporter by the ethical committee of a county medical association, which reported that he had been expelled from the association on July 18, 1941 for allegedly 'milking' several patients suffering from trivial complaints. According to sworn statements in the committee's files, Dr. Full had told them they suffered from cancer, and that he had a treatment which would prolong their lives. After his expulsion from the association, Dr. Full dropped out of their sight—until he opened a midtown 'sanitarium' in a brownstone front which had for years served as a rooming house.

"The *Herald's* reporter went to that sanitarium, on East 89th Street, with the full expectation of having numerous imaginary ailments diagnosed and of being promised a sure cure for a flat sum of money. She expected to find unkempt quarters, dirty instruments and the mumbo-jumbo paraphernalia of the shyster M.D. which she had seen a dozen times before.

"She was wrong.

"Dr. Full's sanitarium is spotlessly clean, from its tastefully furnished entrance hall to its shining, white treatment rooms. The attractive, blond receptionist who greeted the reporter was soft-spoken and correct, asking only the reporter's name, address and the general nature of her complaint. This was given, as usual, as 'nagging backache.' The receptionist asked the *Herald's* reporter to be seated, and a short while later conducted her to a second-floor treatment room and introduced her to Dr. Full.

"Dr. Full's alleged past, as described by the medical society spokesman, is hard to reconcile with his present appearance. He is a clear-eyed, white-haired man in his sixties, to judge by his appearance—a little above middle height and apparently in good physical condition. His voice was firm and friendly, untainted by the ingratiating whine of the shyster M.D. which the reporter has come to know too well.

"The receptionist did not leave the room as he began his examination after a few questions as to the nature and location of the pain. As the reporter lay face down on a treatment table the doctor pressed some instrument to the small of her back. In about one minute he made this astounding statement: 'Young woman, there is no reason for you to have any pain where you say you do. I understand they're saying nowadays that emotional upsets cause pains like that. You'd better go to a psychologist or psychiatrist if the

pain keeps up. There is no physical cause for it, so I can do nothing for you.'

"His frankness took the reporter's breath away. Had he guessed she was, so to speak, a spy in his camp? She tried again: 'Well, doctor, perhaps you'd give me a physical checkup, I feel run-down all the time, besides the pains. Maybe I need a tonic.' This is never-failing bait to shyster M.D.'s—an invitation for them to find all sorts of mysterious conditions wrong with a patient, each of which 'requires' an expensive treatment. As explained in the first article of this series, of course, the reporter underwent a thorough physical checkup before she embarked on her quack-hunt, and was found to be in one hundred percent perfect condition, with the exception of a 'scarred' area at the bottom tip of her left lung resulting from a childhood attack of tuberculosis and a tendency toward 'hyperthyroidism'—overactivity of the thyroid gland which makes it difficult to put on weight and sometimes causes a slight shortness of breath.

"Dr. Full consented to perform the examination, and took a number of shining, spotlessly clean instruments from loops in a large board literally covered with instruments—most of them unfamiliar to the reporter. The instrument with which he approached first was a tube with a curved dial in its surface and two wires that ended on flat disks growing from its ends. He placed one of the disks on the back of the reporter's right hand and the other on the back of her left. 'Reading the meter,' he called out some number which the attentive receptionist took down on a ruled form. The same procedure was repeated several times, thoroughly covering the reporter's anatomy and thoroughly convincing her that the doctor was a complete quack. The reporter had never seen any such diagnostic procedure practiced during the weeks she put in preparing for this series.

"The doctor then took the ruled sheet from the receptionist, conferred with her in low tones and said: 'You have a slightly overactive thyroid, young woman. And there's something wrong with your left lung—not seriously, but I'd like to take a closer look.'

"He selected an instrument from the board which, the reporter knew, is called a 'speculum'—a scissorlike device which spreads apart body openings such as the orifice of the ear, the nostril and so on, so that a doctor can look in during an examination. The instrument was, however, too large to be an aural or nasal speculum but too small to be anything else. As the *Herald's* reporter was about to ask further questions, the attending receptionist told her: 'It's

customary for us to blindfold our patients during lung examinations —do you mind?' The reporter, bewildered, allowed her to tie a spotlessly clean bandage over her eyes, and waited nervously for what would come next.

"She still cannot say exactly what happened while she was blindfolded—but X rays confirm her suspicions. She felt a cold sensation at her ribs on the left side—a cold that seemed to enter inside her body. Then there was a snapping feeling, and the cold sensation was gone. She heard Dr. Full say in a matter-of-fact voice: 'You have an old tubercular scar down there. It isn't doing any particular harm, but an active person like you needs all the oxygen she can get. Lie still and I'll fix it for you.'

"Then there was a repetition of the cold sensation, lasting for a longer time. 'Another batch of alveoli and some more vascular glue,' the *Herald's* reporter heard Dr. Full say, and the receptionist's crisp response to the order. Then the strange sensation departed and the eye-bandage was removed. The reporter saw no scar on her ribs, and yet the doctor assured her: 'That did it. We took out the fibrosis —and a good fibrosis it was, too; it walled off the infection so you're still alive to tell the tale. Then we planted a few clumps of alveoli —they're the little gadgets that get the oxygen from the air you breathe into your blood. I won't monkey with your thyroxin supply. You've got used to being the kind of person you are, and if you suddenly found yourself easygoing and all the rest of it, chances are you'd only be upset. About the backache: just check with the county medical society for the name of a good psychologist or psychiatrist. And look out for quacks; the woods are full of them.'

"The doctor's self-assurance took the reporter's breath away. She asked what the charge would be, and was told to pay the receptionist fifty dollars. As usual, the reporter delayed paying until she got a receipt signed by the doctor himself, detailing the services for which it paid. Unlike most, the doctor cheerfully wrote: 'For removal of fibrosis from left lung and restoration of alveoli,' and signed it.

"The reporter's first move when she left the sanitarium was to head for the chest specialist who had examined her in preparation for this series. A comparison of X rays taken on the day of the 'operation' and those taken previously would, the *Herald's* reporter then thought, expose Dr. Full as a prince of shyster M.D.'s and quacks.

"The chest specialist made time on his crowded schedule for the reporter, in whose series he has shown a lively interest from the planning stage on. He laughed uproariously in his staid Park Ave-

nue examining room as she described the weird procedure to which she had been subjected. But he did not laugh when he took a chest X ray of the reporter, developed it, dried it, and compared it with the ones he had taken earlier. The chest specialist took six more X rays that afternoon, but finally admitted that they all told the same story. The *Herald's* reporter has it on his authority that the scar she had eighteen days ago from her tuberculosis is now gone and has been replaced by healthy lung-tissue. He declares that this is a happening unparalleled in medical history. He does not go along with the reporter in her firm conviction that Dr. Full is responsible for the change.

"The *Herald's* reporter, however, sees no two ways about it. She concludes that Dr. Bayard Full—whatever his alleged past may have been—is now an unorthodox but highly successful practitioner of medicine, to whose hands the reporter would trust herself in any emergency.

"Not so is the case of 'Rev.' Annie Dimsworth—a female harpy who, under the guise of 'faith' preys on the ignorant and suffering who come to her sordid 'healing parlor' for help and remain to feed 'Rev.' Annie's bank account, which now totals up to $53,238.64. Tomorrow's article will show, with photostats of bank statements and sworn testimony that—"

The managing editor turned down "FLANNERY LAST ADD —MEDICAL" and tapped his front teeth with a pencil, trying to think straight. He finally told the copy chief: "Kill the story. Run the teaser as a box." He tore off the last paragraph—the "teaser" about "Rev." Annie—and handed it to the desk man, who stumped back to his Masonite horseshoe.

The make-up editor was back, dancing with impatience as he tried to catch the M.E.'s eye. The interphone buzzed with the red light which indicated that the editor and publisher wanted to talk to him. The M.E. thought briefly of a special series on this Dr. Full, decided nobody would believe it and that he probably was a phony anyway. He spiked the story on the "dead" hook and answered his interphone.

Dr. Full had become almost fond of Angie. As his practice had grown to engross the neighborhood illnesses, and then to a corner suite in an uptown taxpayer building, and finally to the sanitarium, she seemed to have grown with it. Oh, he thought, we have our little disputes—

The girl, for instance, was too much interested in money. She

had wanted to specialize in cosmetic surgery—removing wrinkles from wealthy old women and whatnot. She didn't realize, at first, that a thing like this was in their trust, that they were the stewards and not the owners of the little black bag and its fabulous contents.

He had tried, ever so cautiously, to analyze them, but without success. All the instruments were slightly radioactive, for instance, but not quite so. They would make a Geiger-Mueller counter indicate, but they would not collapse the leaves of an electroscope. He didn't pretend to be up on the latest developments, but as he understood it, that was just plain *wrong*. Under the highest magnification there were lines on the instruments' superfinished surfaces: incredibly fine lines, engraved in random hatchments which made no particular sense. Their magnetic properties were preposterous. Sometimes the instruments were strongly attracted to magnets, sometimes less so, and sometimes not at all.

Dr. Full had taken X rays in fear and trembling lest he disrupt whatever delicate machinery worked in them. He was *sure* they were not solid, that the handles and perhaps the blades must be mere shells filled with busy little watch-works—but the X rays showed nothing of the sort. Oh, yes—and they were always sterile, and they wouldn't rust. Dust *fell* off them if you shook them: now, that was something he understood. They ionized the dust, or were ionized themselves, or something of the sort. At any rate, he had read of something similar that had to do with phonograph records.

She wouldn't know about that, he proudly thought. She kept the books well enough, and perhaps she gave him a useful prod now and then when he was inclined to settle down. The move from the neighborhood slum to the uptown quarters had been her idea, and so had the sanitarium. Good, good, it enlarged his sphere of usefulness. Let the child have her mink coats and her convertible, as they seemed to be calling roadsters nowadays. He himself was too busy and too old. He had so much to make up for.

Dr. Full thought happily of his Master Plan. She would not like it much, but she would have to see the logic of it. This marvelous thing that had happened to them must be handed on. She was herself no doctor; even though the instruments practically ran themselves, there was more to doctoring than skill. There were the ancient canons of the healing art. And so, having seen the logic of it, Angie would yield; she would assent to his turning over the little black bag to all humanity.

He would probably present it to the College of Surgeons, with as little fuss as possible—well, perhaps a *small* ceremony, and he

would like a souvenir of the occasion, a cup or a framed testimonial. It would be a relief to have the thing out of his hands, in a way; let the giants of the healing art decide who was to have its benefits. No, Angie would understand. She was a goodhearted girl.

It was nice that she had been showing so much interest in the surgical side lately—asking about the instruments, reading the instruction card for hours, even practicing on guinea pigs. If something of his love for humanity had been communicated to her, old Dr. Full sentimentally thought, his life would not have been in vain. Surely she would realize that a greater good would be served by surrendering the instruments to wiser hands than theirs, and by throwing aside the cloak of secrecy necessary to work on their small scale.

Dr. Full was in the treatment room that had been the brownstone's front parlor; through the window he saw Angie's yellow convertible roll to a stop before the stoop. He liked the way she looked as she climbed the stairs; neat, not flashy, he thought. A sensible girl like her, she'd understand. There was somebody with her—a fat woman, puffing up the steps, overdressed and petulant. Now, what could she want?

Angie let herself in and went into the treatment room, followed by the fat woman. "Doctor," said the blond girl gravely, "may I present Mrs. Coleman?" Charm school had not taught her everything, but Mrs. Coleman, evidently *noveau riche,* thought the doctor, did not notice the blunder.

"Miss Aquella told me *so* much about you, doctor, and your remarkable system!" she gushed.

Before he could answer, Angie smoothly interposed: "Would you excuse us for just a moment, Mrs. Coleman?"

She took the doctor's arm and led him into the reception hall. "Listen," she said swiftly, "I know this goes against your grain, but I couldn't pass it up. I met this old thing in the exercise class at Elizabeth Barton's. Nobody else'll talk to her there. She's a widow. I guess her husband was a black marketeer or something, and she has a pile of dough. I gave her a line about how you had a system of massaging wrinkles out. My idea is, you blindfold her, cut her neck open with the Cutaneous Series knife, shoot some Firmol into the muscles, spoon out some of that blubber with an Adipose Series curette and spray it all with Skintite. When you take the blindfold off she's got rid of a wrinkle and doesn't know what happened. She'll pay five hundred dollars. Now, don't say 'no,' doc. Just this

once, let's do it my way, can't you? I've been working on this deal all along too, haven't I?"

"Oh," said the doctor, "very well." He was going to have to tell her about the Master Plan before long anyway. He would let her have it her way this time.

Back in the treatment room, Mrs. Coleman had been thinking things over. She told the doctor sternly as he entered: "Of course, your system is permanent, isn't it?"

"It is, madam," he said shortly. "Would you please lie down there? Miss Aquella, get a sterile three-inch bandage for Mrs. Coleman's eyes." He turned his back on the fat woman to avoid conversation, and pretended to be adjusting the lights. Angie blindfolded the woman, and the doctor selected the instruments he would need. He handed the blond girl a pair of retractors, and told her: "Just slip the corners of the blades in as I cut—" She gave him an alarmed look, and gestured at the reclining woman. He lowered his voice: "Very well. Slip in the corners and rock them along the incision. I'll tell you when to pull them out."

Dr. Full held the Cutaneous Series knife to his eyes as he adjusted the little slide for three centimeters depth. He sighed a little as he recalled that its last use had been in the extirpation of an "inoperable" tumor of the throat.

"Very well," he said, bending over the woman. He tried a tentative pass through her tissues. The blade dipped in and flowed through them, like a finger through quicksilver, with no wound left in the wake. Only the retractors could hold the edges of the incision apart.

Mrs. Coleman stirred and jabbered: "Doctor, that felt so peculiar! Are you sure you're rubbing the right way?"

"Quite sure, madam," said the doctor wearily. "Would you please try not to talk during the massage?"

He nodded at Angie, who stood ready with the retractors. The blade sank in to its three centimeters, miraculously cutting only the dead horny tissues of the epidermis and the live tissue of the dermis, pushing aside mysteriously all major and minor blood vessels and muscular tissue, declining to affect any system or organ except the one it was—tuned to, could you say? The doctor didn't know the answer, but he felt tired and bitter at this prostitution. Angie slipped in the retractor blades and rocked them as he withdrew the knife, then pulled to separate the lips of the incision. It bloodlessly exposed an unhealthy string of muscle, sagging in a dead-looking loop from blue-gray ligaments. The doctor took a hypo. Number IX, pre-set

to "g" and raised it to his eye level. The mist came and went; there probably was no possibility of an embolus with one of these gadgets, but why take chances? He shot one cc. of "g"—identified as "Firmol" by the card—into the muscle. He and Angie watched as it tightened up against the pharynx.

He took the Adipose Series curette, a small one, and spooned out yellowish tissue, dropping it into the incinerator box, and then nodded to Angie. She eased out the retractors and the gaping incision slipped together into unbroken skin, sagging now. The doctor had the atomizer—dialed to "Skintite"—ready. He sprayed, and the skin shrank up into the new firm throat line.

As he replaced the instruments, Angie removed Mrs. Coleman's bandage and gayly announced: "We're finished! And there's a mirror in the reception hall—"

Mrs. Coleman didn't need to be invited twice. With incredulous fingers she felt her chin, and then dashed for the hall. The doctor grimaced as he heard her yelp of delight, and Angie turned to him with a tight smile. "I'll get the money and get her out," she said. "You won't have to be bothered with her any more."

He was grateful for that much.

She followed Mrs. Coleman into the reception hall, and the doctor dreamed over the case of instruments. A ceremony, certainly—he was *entitled* to one. Not everybody, he thought, would turn such a sure source of money over to the good of humanity. But you reached an age when money mattered less, and when you thought of these things you had done that *might* be open to misunderstanding if, just if, there chanced to be any of that, well, that judgment business. The doctor wasn't a religious man, but you certainly found yourself thinking hard about some things when your time drew near—

Angie was back, with a bit of paper in her hands. "Five hundred dollars," she said matter-of-factly. "And you realize, don't you, that we could go over her an inch at a time—at five hundred dollars an inch?"

"I've been meaning to talk to you about that," he said.

There was bright fear in her eyes, he thought—but why?

"Angie, you've been a good girl and an understanding girl, but we can't keep this up forever, you know."

"Let's talk about it some other time," she said flatly. "I'm tired now."

"No—I really feel we've gone far enough on our own. The instruments—"

"Don't say it, doc!" she hissed. "Don't say it, or you'll be sorry!" In her face there was a look that reminded him of the hollow-eyed, gaunt-faced, dirty-blond creature she had been. From under the charm-school finish there burned the guttersnipe whose infancy had been spent on a sour and filthy mattress, whose childhood had been play in the littered alley and whose adolescence had been the sweatshops and the aimless gatherings at night under the glaring street lamps.

He shook his head to dispel the puzzling notion. "It's this way," he patiently began. "I told you about the family that invented the O.B. forceps and kept them a secret for so many generations, how they could have given them to the world but didn't?"

"They knew what they were doing," said the guttersnipe flatly.

"Well, that's neither here nor there," said the doctor, irritated. "My mind is made up about it. I'm going to turn the instruments over to the College of Surgeons. We have enough money to be comfortable. You can even have the house. I've been thinking of going to a warmer climate, myself." He felt peeved with her for making the unpleasant scene. He was unprepared for what happened next.

Angie snatched the little black bag and dashed for the door, with panic in her eyes. He scrambled after her, catching her arm, twisting it in a sudden rage. She clawed at his face with her free hand, babbling curses. Somehow, somebody's finger touched the little black bag, and it opened grotesquely into the enormous board, covered with shining instruments, large and small. Half a dozen of them joggled loose and fell to the floor.

"*Now* see what you've done!" roared the doctor, unreasonably. Her hand was still viselike on the handle, but she was standing still, trembling with choked-up rage. The doctor bent stiffly to pick up the fallen instruments. Unreasonable girl! he thought bitterly. Making a scene—

Pain drove in between his shoulderblades and he fell face-down. The light ebbed. "Unreasonable girl!" he tried to croak. And then: "They'll know I tried, anyway—"

Angie looked down on his prone body, with the handle of the Number Six Cautery Series knife protruding from it. "—will cut through all tissues. Use for amputations before you spread on the Re-Gro. Extreme caution should be used in the vicinity of vital organs and major blood vessels or nerve trunks—"

"I didn't mean to do that," said Angie, dully, cold with horror. Now the detective would come, the implacable detective who would reconstruct the crime from the dust in the room. She would run and

turn and twist, but the detective would find her out and she would be tried in a courtroom before a judge and jury; the lawyer would make speeches, but the jury would convict her anyway, and the headlines would scream: "BLOND KILLER GUILTY!" and she'd maybe get the chair, walking down a plain corridor where a beam of sunlight struck through the dusty air, with an iron door at the end of it. Her mink, her convertible, her dresses, the handsome man she was going to meet and marry—

The mist of cinematic clichés cleared, and she knew what she would do next. Quite steadily, she picked the incinerator box from its loop in the board—a metal cube with a different-textured spot on one side. "—to dispose of fibroses or other unwanted matter, simply touch the disk—" You dropped something in and touched the disk. There was a sort of soundless whistle, very powerful and unpleasant if you were too close, and a sort of lightless flash. When you opened the box again, the contents were gone. Angie took another of the Cautery Series knives and went grimly to work. Good thing there wasn't any blood to speak of— She finished the awful task in three hours.

She slept heavily that night, totally exhausted by the wringing emotional demands of the slaying and the subsequent horror. But in the morning, it was as though the doctor had never been there. She ate breakfast, dressed with unusual care—and then undid the unusual care. Nothing out of the ordinary, she told herself. Don't do one thing different from the way you would have done it before. After a day or two, you can phone the cops. Say he walked out spoiling for a drunk, and you're worried. But don't rush it, baby—*don't rush it.*

Mrs. Coleman was due at 10:00 a.m. Angie had counted on being able to talk the doctor into at least one more five-hundred-dollar session. She'd have to do it herself now—but she'd have to start sooner or later.

The woman arrived early. Angie explained smoothly: "The doctor asked me to take care of the massage today. Now that he has the tissue-firming process beginning, it only requires somebody trained in his methods—" As she spoke, her eyes swiveled to the instrument case—open! She cursed herself for the single flaw as the woman followed her gaze and recoiled.

"What are those things!" she demanded. "Are you going to cut me with them? I *thought* there was something fishy—"

"Please, Mrs. Coleman," said Angie, "please, *dear* Mrs. Coleman —you don't understand about the . . . the massage instruments!"

"Massage instruments, my foot!" squabbled the woman shrilly. "That doctor *operated* on me. Why, he might have killed me!"

Angie wordlessly took one of the smaller Cutaneous Series knives and passed it through her forearm. The blade flowed like a finger through quicksilver, leaving no wound in its wake. *That* should convince the old cow!

It didn't convince her, but it did startle her. "What did you do with it? The blade folds up into the handle—that's it!"

"Now look closely, Mrs. Coleman," said Angie, thinking desperately of the five hundred dollars. "Look very closely and you'll see that the, uh, the sub-skin massager simply slips beneath the tissues without doing any harm, tightening and firming the muscles themselves instead of having to work through layers of skin and adipose tissue. It's the secret of the doctor's method. Now, how can outside massage have the effect that we got last night?"

Mrs. Coleman was beginning to calm down. "It *did* work, all right," she admitted, stroking the new line of her neck. But your arm's one thing and my neck's another! Let me see you do that with your neck!"

Angie smiled—

Al returned to the clinic after an excellent lunch that had almost reconciled him to three more months he would have to spend on duty. And then, he thought, and then a blessed year at the blessedly super-normal South Pole working on his specialty—which happened to be telekinesis exercises for ages three to six. Meanwhile, of course, the world had to go on and of course he had to shoulder his share in the running of it.

Before settling down to desk work he gave a routine glance at the bag board. What he saw made him stiffen with shocked surprise. A red light was on next to one of the numbers—the first since he couldn't think when. He read off the number and murmured "O.K., 674,101. That fixes *you*." He put the number on a card sorter and in a moment the record was in his hand. Oh, yes—Hemingway's bag. The big dummy didn't remember how or where he had lost it; none of them ever did. There were hundreds of them floating around.

Al's policy in such cases was to leave the bag turned on. The things practically ran themselves, it was practically impossible to do harm with them, so whoever found a lost one might as well be allowed to use it. You turn it off, you have a social loss—you leave it on, it may do some good. As he understood it, and not very well at

that, the stuff wasn't "used up." A temporalist had tried to explain it to him with little success that the prototypes in the transmitter *had been transducted* through a series of point-events of transfinite cardinality. Al had innocently asked whether that meant prototypes had been stretched, so to speak, through all time, and the temporalist had thought he was joking and left in a huff.

"Like to see him do this," thought Al darkly, as he telekinized himself to the combox, after a cautious look to see that there were no medics around. To the box he said: "Police chief," and then to the police chief: "There's been a homicide committed with Medical Instrument Kit 674,101. It was lost some months ago by one of my people, Dr. John Hemingway. He didn't have a clear account of the circumstances."

The police chief groaned and said: "I'll call him in and question him." He was to be astonished by the answers, and was to learn that the homicide was well out of his jurisdiction.

Al stood for a moment at the bag board by the glowing red light that had been sparked into life by a departing vital force giving, as its last act, the warning that Kit 674,101 was in homicidal hands. With a sigh, Al pulled the plug and the light went out.

"Yah," jeered the woman. "You'd fool around with my neck, but you wouldn't risk your own with that thing!"

Angie smiled with serene confidence a smile that was to shock hardened morgue attendants. She set the Cutaneous Series knife to three centimeters before drawing it across her neck. Smiling, knowing the blade would cut only the dead horny tissue of the epidermis and the live tissue of the dermis, mysteriously push aside all major and minor blood vessels and muscular tissue—

Smiling, the knife plunging in and its microtomesharp metal shearing through major and minor blood vessels and muscular tissue and pharynx, Angie cut her throat.

In the few minutes it took the police, summoned by the shrieking Mrs. Coleman, to arrive, the instruments had become crusted with rust, and the flasks which had held vascular glue and clumps of pink, rubbery alveoli and spare gray cells and coils of receptor nerves held only black slime, and from them when opened gushed the foul gases of decomposition.

Everybody Knows Joe

JOE HAD QUITE A DAY for himself Thursday, and as usual I had to tag along. If I had a right arm to give, I'd give it for a day off now and then. Like on Thursday. On Thursday he really outdid himself.

He woke up in the hotel room and had a shower. He wasn't going to shave until I told him he looked like a bum. So he shaved and then he stood for a whole minute admiring his beauty in the mirror, forgetting whose idea it was in the first place.

So down to the coffee shop for breakfast. A hard-working man needs a good breakfast. So getting ready for a backbreaking day of copying references at the library, he had tomato juice, two fried eggs, three sausages, a sugared doughnut, and coffee—with cream and sugar.

He couldn't work that off his pot in a week of ditch-digging under a July sun, but a hard-working man needs a good breakfast. I was too disgusted to argue with him. He's hopeless when he smells that short-order smell of smoking grease, frying bacon and coffee.

He wanted to take a taxi to the library—eight blocks!

"Walk, you jerk!" I told him. He started to mumble about pulling down six hundred bucks for this week's work and then he must have thought I was going to mention the high-calory breakfast. To him that's hitting below the belt. He thinks he's an unfortunate man with an affliction—about twenty pounds of it. He walked and arrived at the library glowing with virtue.

Making out his slip at the newspaper room he blandly put down next to *firm—The Griffin Press, Inc.*—when he knew as well as I did that he was a free lance and hadn't even got a definite assignment from Griffin.

There's a line on the slip where you put down *reason for consulting files* (*please be specific*). It's a shame to cramp Joe's style to just one line after you pitch him an essay-type question like that. He squeezed in, *Preparation of article on year in biochemistry for Griffin Pr. Encyc. 1952 Yrbk.*, and handed it with a flourish to the librarian.

The librarian, a nice old man, was polite to him, which is usually a mistake with Joe. After he finished telling the librarian how his

microfilm files ought to be organized and how they ought to switch from microfilm to microcard and how in spite of everything the New York Public Library wasn't such a bad place to research, he got down to work.

He's pretty harmless when he's working—it's one of the things that keeps me from cutting his throat. With a noon break for apple pie and coffee he transcribed about a hundred entries onto his cards, mopping up the year in biochemistry nicely. He swaggered down the library steps, feeling like Herman Melville after finishing *Moby Dick*.

"Don't be so smug," I told him. "You still have to write the piece. And they still have to buy it."

"A detail," he said grandly. "Just journalism. I can do it with my eyes shut."

Just journalism. Somehow his three months of running copy for the A.P. before the war has made him an Ed Leahy.

"*When* are you going to do it with your eyes . . . ?" I began but it wasn't any use. He began telling me about how Gautama Buddha didn't break with the world until he was 29 and Mohammed didn't announce that he was a prophet until he was 30, so why couldn't *he* one of these days suddenly bust loose with a new revelation or something and set the world on its ear? What it boiled down to was he didn't think he'd write the article tonight.

He postponed his break with the world long enough to have a ham and cheese on rye and more coffee at an automat and then phoned Maggie. She was available as usual. She said as usual, "Well then, why don't you just drop by and we'll spend a quiet evening with some records?"

As usual he thought that would be fine since he was so beat after a hard day. As usual I told him, "You're a louse, Joe. You know all she wants is a husband and you know it isn't going to be you, so why don't you let go of the girl so she can find somebody who means business?"

The usual answers rolled out automatically and we got that out of the way.

Maybe Maggie isn't very bright but she seemed glad to see him. She's shooting for her Doctorate in sociology at N.Y.U., she does part-time case work for the city, she has one of those three-room Greenwich Village apartments with dyed burlap drapes and studio couches and home-made mobiles. She thinks writing is something holy and Joe's careful not to tell her different.

They drank some rhine wine and seltzer while Joe talked about

the day's work as though he'd won the Nobel prize for biochemistry. He got downright brutal about Maggie being mixed up in such an approximate unquantitative excuse for a science as sociology and she apologized humbly and eventually he forgave her. Big-hearted Joe.

But he wasn't so fried that he *had* to start talking about a man wanting to settle down—"not this year but maybe next. Thirty's a dividing point that makes you stop and wonder what you really want and what you've really got out of life, Maggie darlin'." It was as good as telling her that she should be a good girl and continue to keep open house for him and maybe some day . . . maybe.

As I said, maybe Maggie isn't very bright. But as I also said, Thursday was the day Joe picked to outdo himself.

"Joe," she said with this look on her face, "I got a new LP of the Brahms Serenade Number One. It's on top of the stack. Would you tell me what you think of it?"

So he put it on and they sat sipping rhine wine and seltzer and he turned it over and they sat sipping rhine wine and seltzer until both sides were played. And she kept watching him. Not adoringly.

"Well," she asked with this new look, "what did you think of it?"

He told her, of course. There was some comment on Brahms' architectonics and his resurrection of the contrapuntal style. Because he'd sneaked a look at the record's envelope he was able to spend a couple of minutes on Brahms' debt to Haydn and the young Beethoven in the fifth movement (*allegro,* D Major) and the gay *rondo* of the—

"Joe," she said, not looking at him. "Joe," she said, "I got that record at one hell of a discount down the street. It's a wrong pressing. Somehow the first side is the first half of the Serenade but the second half is Schumann's Symphonic Studies Opus Thirteen. Somebody noticed it when they played it in a booth. But I guess you didn't notice it."

"Get out of *this one,* braino," I told him.

He got up and said in a strangled voice, "And I thought you were my friend. I suppose I'll never learn." He walked out.

I suppose he never will.

God help me, I ought to know.

Time Bum

HARRY TWENTY-THIRD STREET suddenly burst into laughter. His friend and sometimes roper Farmer Brown looked inquisitive.

"I just thought of a new con," Harry Twenty-Third Street said, still chuckling.

Farmer Brown shook his head positively. "There's no such thing, my man," he said. "There are only new switches on old cons. What have you got—a store con? Shall you be needing a roper?" He tried not to look eager as a matter of principle, but everybody knew the Farmer needed a connection badly. His girl had two-timed him on a badger game, running off with the chump and marrying him after an expensive, month-long buildup.

Harry said, "Sorry, old boy. No details. It's too good to split up. I shall rip and tear the suckers with this con for many a year, I trust, before the details become available to the trade. Nobody, but nobody, is going to call copper after I take him. It's beautiful and it's mine. I will see you around, my friend."

Harry got up from the booth and left, nodding cheerfully to a safeblower here, a fixer there, on his way to the locked door of the hangout. Naturally he didn't nod to such small fry as pickpockets and dope peddlers. Harry had his pride.

The puzzled Farmer sipped his lemon squash and concluded that Harry had been kidding him. He noticed that Harry had left behind him in the booth a copy of a magazine with a space ship and a pretty girl in green bra and pants on the cover.

"A furnished . . . bungalow?" the man said hesitantly, as though he knew what he wanted but wasn't quite sure of the word.

"Certainly, Mr. Clurg," Walter Lachlan said. "I'm sure we can suit you. Wife and family?"

"No," said Clurg. "They are . . . far away." He seemed to get some secret amusement from the thought. And then, to Walter's horror, he sat down calmly in empty air beside the desk and, of course, crashed to the floor looking ludicrous and astonished.

Walter gaped and helped him up, sputtering apologies and wondering privately what was wrong with the man. There wasn't a chair there. There was a chair on the other side of the desk and a chair

against the wall. But there just wasn't a chair where Clurg had sat down.

Clurg apparently was unhurt; he protested against Walter's apologies, saying: "I should have known, Master Lachlan. It's quite all right; it was all my fault. What about the bang—the bungalow?"

Business sense triumphed over Walter's bewilderment. He pulled out his listings and they conferred on the merits of several furnished bungalows. When Walter mentioned that the Curran place was especially nice, in an especially nice neighborhood—he lived up the street himself—Clurg was impressed. "I'll take that one," he said. "What is the . . . feoff?"

Walter had learned a certain amount of law for his real-estate license examination; he recognized the word. "The *rent* is seventy-five dollars," he said. "You speak English very well, Mr. Clurg." He hadn't been certain that the man was a foreigner until the dictionary word came out. "You have hardly any accent."

"Thank you," Clurg said, pleased. "I worked hard at it. Let me see—seventy-five is six twelves and three." He opened one of his shiny-new leather suitcases and calmly laid six heavy little paper rolls on Walter's desk. He broke open a seventh and laid down three mint-new silver dollars. "There I am," he said. "I mean, there you are."

Walter didn't know what to say. It had never happened before. People paid by check or in bills. They just didn't pay in silver dollars. But it was money—why shouldn't Mr. Clurg pay in silver dollars if he wanted to? He shook himself, scooped the rolls into his top desk drawer and said: "I'll drive you out there if you like. It's nearly quitting time anyway."

Walter told his wife Betty over the dinner table: "We ought to have him in some evening. I can't imagine where on Earth he comes from. I had to show him how to turn on the kitchen range. When it went on he said, 'Oh, yes—electricity!' and laughed his head off. And he kept ducking the question when I tried to ask him in a nice way. Maybe he's some kind of a political refugee."

"Maybe . . ." Betty began dreamily, and then shut her mouth. She didn't want Walter laughing at her again. As it was, he made her buy her science-fiction magazines downtown instead of at neighborhood newsstands. He thought it wasn't becoming for his wife to read them. He's so eager for success, she thought sentimentally.

That night, while Walter watched a television variety show, she

read a story in one of her magazines. (Its cover, depicting a space ship and a girl in green bra and shorts, had been prudently torn off and thrown away.) It was about a man from the future who had gone back in time, bringing with him all sorts of marvelous inventions. In the end the Time Police punished him for unauthorized time traveling. They had come back and got him, brought him back to his own time. She smiled. It *would* be nice if Mr. Clurg, instead of being a slightly eccentric foreigner, were a man from the future with all sorts of interesting stories to tell and a satchelful of gadgets that could be sold for millions and millions of dollars.

After a week they did have Clurg over for dinner. It started badly. Once more he managed to sit down in empty air and crash to the floor. While they were brushing him off he said fretfully: "I *can't* get used to not—" and then said no more.

He was a picky eater. Betty had done one of her mother's specialties, veal cutlet with tomato sauce, topped by a poached egg. He ate the egg and sauce, made a clumsy attempt to cut up the meat, and abandoned it. She served a plate of cheese, half a dozen kinds, for dessert, and Clurg tasted them uncertainly, breaking off a crumb from each, while Betty wondered where that constituted good manners. His face lit up when he tried a ripe cheddar. He popped the whole wedge into his mouth and said to Betty: "I will have that, please."

"Seconds?" asked Walter. "Sure. Don't bother, Betty. I'll get it." He brought back a quarter-pound wedge of the cheddar.

Walter and Betty watched silently as Clurg calmly ate every crumb of it. He sighed. "Very good. Quite like—" The word, Walter and Betty later agreed, was *see-mon-joe*. They were able to agree quite early in the evening, because Clurg got up after eating the cheese, said warmly, "Thank you so much!" and walked out of the house.

Betty said, *"What—on—Earth!"*

Walter said uneasily, "I'm sorry, doll. I didn't think he'd be quite that peculiar—"

"—But after *all!*"

"—Of course he's a foreigner. What was that word?"

He jotted it down.

While they were doing the dishes Betty said, "I think he was drunk. Falling-down drunk."

"No," Walter said. "It's exactly the same thing he did in my office. As though he expected a chair to come to him instead of him going

to a chair." He laughed and said uncertainly, "Or maybe he's royalty. I read once about Queen Victoria never looking around before she sat down, she was so sure there'd be a chair there."

"Well, there isn't any more royalty, not to speak of," she said angrily, hanging up the dish towel. "What's on TV tonight?"

"Uncle Miltie. But . . . uh . . . I think I'll read. Uh . . . where do you keep those magazines of yours, doll? Believe I'll give them a try."

She gave him a look that he wouldn't meet, and she went to get him some of her magazines. She also got a slim green book which she hadn't looked at for years. While Walter flipped uneasily through the magazines she studied the book.

After about ten minutes she said: "Walter. *Seemonjoe.* I think I know what language it is."

He was instantly alert. "Yeah? What?"

"It should be spelled c-i-m-a-n-g-o, with little jiggers over the C and G. It means 'universal food' in Esperanto."

"Where's Esperanto?" he demanded.

"Esperanto isn't anywhere. It's an artificial language. I played around with it a little once. It was supposed to end war and all sorts of things. Some people called it 'the language of the future'." Her voice was tremulous.

Walter said, "I'm going to get to the bottom of this."

He saw Clurg go into the neighborhood movie for the matinee. That gave him about three hours.

Walter hurried to the Curran bungalow, remembered to slow down and tried hard to look casual as he unlocked the door and went in. There wouldn't be any trouble—he was a good citizen, known and respected—he could let himself into a tenant's house and wait for him to talk about business if he wanted to.

He tried not to think of what people would think if he should be caught rifling Clurg's luggage, as he intended to do. He had brought along an assortment of luggage keys. Surprised by his own ingenuity, he had got them at a locksmith's by saying his own key was lost and he didn't want to haul a heavy packed bag downtown.

But he didn't need the keys. In the bedroom closet the two suitcases stood, unlocked.

There was nothing in the first except uniformly new clothes, bought locally at good shops. The second was full of the same. Going through a rather extreme sports jacket, Walter found a wad of paper in the breast pocket. It was a newspaper page. A number

had been penciled on a margin; apparently the sheet had been torn out and stuck into the pocket and forgotten. The dateline on the paper was July 18th, 2403.

Walter had some trouble reading the stories at first, but found it was easy enough if he read them aloud and listened to his voice.

One said:

TAIM KOP NABD:
PROSKYOOTR ASKS DETH

Patrolm'n Oskr Garth 'v thi Taim Polis w'z arest'd toodei at hiz hom, 4365 9863th Strit, and bookd at 9768th Prisint on tchardg'z 'v Polis-Ekspozh'r. Thi aledjd Ekspozh'r okur'd hwaile Garth w'z on dooti in thi Twenti-Furst Sentch'ri. It konsist'd 'v hiz admish'n too a sit'zen 'v thi Twenti-Furst Sentch'ri that thi Taim Polis ekzisted and woz op'rated fr'm thi Twenti-Fifth Sentch'ri. Thi Proskyoot'rz Ofis sed thi deth pen'lti wil be askt in vyoo 'v thi heinus neitch'r 'v thi ofens, hwitch thret'nz thi hwol fabrik 'v Twenti-Fifth-Sentch'ri eksiztens.

There was an advertisement on the other side:

BOIZ 'ND YUNG MEN!
SERV EUR SENTCH'RI!
ENLIST IN THI TAIM POLIS RISURV NOW!
RIMEMB'R—
ONLI IN THI TAIM POLIS KAN EU SI THI PAJENT 'V THI AJEZ! ONLY IN THI TAIM POLIS KAN EU PROTEKT EUR SIVILIZASH'N FR'M VARI'NS! THEIR IZ NO HAIER SERVIS TOO AR KULTCH'R! THEIR IZ NO K'REER SO FAS'NATING AZ A K'REER IN THI TAIM POLIS!

Underneath it another ad asked:

HWAI BI ASHEIM'D 'V EUR TCHAIRZ? GET ROLFASTS!

No uth'r tcheir haz thi immidjit respons 'v a Rolfast. Sit enihweir—eor Rolfast iz their!

Eur Rolfast met'l partz ar solid gold to avoid tairsum polishing. Eur Rolfast beirings are thi fain'st six-intch dupliks di'mondz for long wair.

Walter's heart pounded. Gold—to avoid tiresome polishing! Six-inch diamonds—for long wear!

And Clurg must be a time policeman. "Only in the time police

can you see the pageant of the ages!" What did a time policeman do? He wasn't quite clear about that. But what they *didn't* do was let anybody else—anybody earlier—know that the Time Police existed. He, Walter Lachlan of the Twentieth Century, held in the palm of his hand Time Policeman Clurg of the Twenty-Fifth Century—the Twenty-Fifth Century where gold and diamonds were common as steel and glass in this!

He was there when Clurg came back from the matinee.

Mutely, Walter extended the page of newsprint. Clurg snatched it incredulously, stared at it and crumpled it in his fist. He collapsed on the floor with a groan. "I'm done for!" Walter heard him say.

"Listen, Clurg," Walter said. "Nobody ever needs to know about this—*nobody*."

Clurg looked up with sudden hope in his eyes. "You will keep silent?" he asked wildly. "It is my life!"

"What's it worth to you?" Walter demanded with brutal directness. "I can use some of those diamonds and some of that gold. Can you get it into this century?"

"It would be missed. It would be over my mass-balance," Clurg said. "But I have a Duplix. I can copy diamonds and gold for you; that was how I made my feoff money."

He snatched an instrument from his pocket—a fountain pen, Walter thought. "It is low in charge. It would Duplix about five kilograms in one operation—"

"You mean," Walter demanded, "that if I brought you five kilograms of diamonds and gold you could duplicate it? And the originals wouldn't be harmed? Let me see that thing. Can I work it?"

Clurg passed over the "fountain pen". Walter saw that within the case was a tangle of wires, tiny tubes, lenses—he passed it back hastily. Clurg said, "That is correct. You could buy or borrow jewelry and I could duplix it. Then you could return the originals and retain the copies. You swear by your contemporary God that you would say nothing?"

Walter was thinking. He could scrape together a good thirty thousand dollars by pledging the house, the business, his own real estate, the bank account, the life insurance, the securities. Put it all into diamonds, of course, and then—*doubled! Overnight!*

"I'll say nothing," he told Clurg. "If you come through." He took the sheet from the twenty-fifth-century newspaper from Clurg's hands and put it securely in his own pocket. "When I get those diamonds duplicated," he said, "I'll burn this and forget the rest.

Until then, I want you to stay close to home. I'll come around in a day or so with the stuff for you to duplicate."

Clurg nervously promised.

The secrecy, of course, didn't include Betty. He told her when he got home and she let out a yell of delight. She demanded the newspaper, read it avidly, and then demanded to see Clurg.

"I don't think he'll talk," Walter said doubtfully. "But if you really want to . . ."

She did, and they walked to the Curran bungalow. Clurg was gone, lock, stock and barrel, leaving not a trace behind. They waited for hours, nervously.

At last Betty said, "He's gone back."

Walter nodded. "He wouldn't keep his bargain, but by God I'm going to keep mine. Come along. We're going to the *Enterprise*."

"Walter," she said. "You wouldn't—would you?"

He went alone, after a bitter quarrel.

At the *Enterprise* office he was wearily listened to by a reporter, who wearily looked over the twenty-fifth-century newspaper. "I don't know what you're peddling, Mr. Lachlan," he said, "but we like people to buy their ads in the *Enterprise*. This is a pretty barefaced publicity grab."

"But—" Walter sputtered.

"Sam, would you please ask Mr. Morris to come up here if he can?" the reporter was saying into the phone. To Walter he explained, "Mr. Morris is our press-room foreman."

The foreman was a huge, white-haired old fellow, partly deaf. The reporter showed him the newspaper from the twenty-fifth century and said, "How about this?"

Mr. Morris looked at it and smelled it and said, showing no interest in the reading matter: "American Type Foundry Futura number nine, discontinued about ten years ago. It's been hand-set. The ink—hard to say. Expensive stuff, not a news ink. A book ink, a job-printing ink. The paper, now, I know. A nice linen rag that Benziger jobs in Philadelphia."

"You see, Mr. Lachlan? It's a fake." The reporter shrugged.

Walter walked slowly from the city room. The press-room foreman *knew*. It was a fake. And Clurg was a faker. Suddenly Walter's heels touched the ground after twenty-four hours and stayed there. Good God, the diamonds! Clurg was a conman! He would have worked a package switch! He would have had thirty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds for less than a month's work!

He told Betty about it when he got home and she laughed unmercifully. "Time Policeman" was to become a family joke between the Lachlans.

Harry Twenty-Third Street stood, blinking, in a very peculiar place. Peculiarly, his feet were firmly encased, up to the ankles, in a block of clear plastic.

There were odd-looking people and a big voice was saying: "May it please the court. The People of the Twenty-Fifth Century versus Harold Parish, alias Harry Twenty-Third Street, alias Clurg, of the Twentieth Century. The charge is impersonating an officer of the Time Police. The Prosecutor's Office will ask the death penalty in view of the heinous nature of the offense, which threatens the whole fabric—"

Passion Pills

THE ONLY DIGNIFIED THING about Richard Claxton Hanbury III was his name, and it served only to underscore the grotesqueness of his appearance. Richard at 23 years was of average height but stooped by a mild spinal curvature into shrimphood; his face thrust boldly forward from a negligible chin and a raked forehead toward what could have been an impressive corvine mask if he had only nose enough to sustain the effect, but Richard's nose was an uncute button.

He had, of course, brains. The Great Kidder does not vouchsafe spectacular ugliness to anybody who is unable to appreciate it fully.

Richard knew perfectly well Bernard Shaw's dictum that there is nobody so ugly or disagreeable that he or she cannot find a spouse, but it happened that a spouse was not what he wanted. What he wanted was Girls. The author admits that this was not very intelligent of Richard, but pleads that he was brainwashed by Twentieth Century Western Culture. A shy and unattractive man like he would in simpler times have found himself in a monastery doing at least no harm and not worrying about bosoms. In a more vicious day he would have found himself now and then in a Place of Ill Repute with nothing more to worry him than the possibility of contracting a ludicrous minor tribulation thought to be no worse

than a bad cold. In more practical times he would have arranged with the parent (*the* parent then!) of a "female" to take said female off said parent's hands and board bill in exchange for a cash settlement; the female would have called him "Mr. Hanbury" even after the marriage, and it would not have occurred to either of them to worry about love.

The era in which Richard had been raised, however, was neither vicious, simple, nor practical. The iconographer of Richard's era was Mr. Jon Whitcomb, and the ritual illustration he has done for a thousand ritual magazine stories sums up the age. There is a yellow convertible with the top down, and there is a tanned blonde girl in the convertible. She is plainly about sixteen years old for her skin is that of an unblemished child, and she is plainly a new mother for her bosom is of a size functional only in a lactating woman; who has committed this crime upon her? Yet the text says she is a virgin! She smiles, and she is plainly an Innocent who has escaped from three-nurse custodial care in the first auto she found, for in that smile there is no trace of human intelligence but only the animal bliss of a bear who has found honey. Yet the text says she is a Ph.D. in astrophysics! She is plainly a narcissistic she-monster, for every hair of every wisp is in its calculated place and her garb is tight where tight and loose where loose to the predetermined thousandth of an inch at the cost of nightly toil, mad self-love and abnegation of all other activity. Yet the text calls her casual, vital, warm!

She was the girl whom Richard wanted, poor fellow, and he wanted lots of her—blonde, red-haired, brunette, tanned and pale, playtime, daytime and gaytime, tall and rangy, cute and cuddly, the sophisticate who learns in the back pages that brains are not enough, the naïve thing who turns out in the back pages to have brains enough to save the day.

My readers have of course all seen through the pitiful sham, and will feel only amused compassion for Richard.

Through grammar school and high school Richard met several dozen versions of The Girl, and for each one he carefully thought out the witty opening phrase of a campaign that would end only with her as helpless putty in his hands. It happened, however, that he never got to speak the carefully-composed phrase. He would choke up; or the girl would say "Well, dig you later" and breeze off wobbling tantalizingly; or a football player would roar up out of nowhere and slap him on the back; or the class bell would ring—always something.

That was the way it went through college too, except for one evening when he got carried away and attempted near-assault on a field-hockey-playing version of The Girl. They patched him up at the infirmary and believed him when he said he had been hit by a runaway three-quarter-ton truck.

After his bones had knit Richard said to himself: "The hell with this noise. Charm I do not have. Muscle too I lack. What I do possess, some knowledge of biochemistry, seems irrelevant to the problem. Or—or *is* it?" For Richard was majoring in biochemistry because of an aptitude test he had taken in the course of which his punch card had been put into a machine upside-down.

Richard leaped to his feet and cried *"Thalassa!"* since his talent for languages was almost as slight as his aptitude for biochemistry. Then, more collectedly, he schemed: "The girl shall be mine through the science which I am learning, and specifically through those certain pills and fluids of which one has heard!"

Forthwith he plunged into a reading program to establish the basis for his research. The first thing he learned in his quest for what are euphemistically called "love philtres" was the discouraging fact that there are no such things, vulgar superstition to the contrary notwithstanding. Such diverse substances as cabbage juice, powdered mandrake, muscatel wine, oysters on the half-shell, and frog spawn have had their vogues, he learned, but proved to have no effect except an imaginary one. The notorious Spanish Fly, he discovered, is about as effective a love potion as a kick in the stomach, which is to say not very.

Richard concluded his first week of reading by slamming his books shut, hurling them into the corner of his dormitory room and stalking with agitation out into the campus night. "Thunderation!" he growled. "I'm going to have to start from scratch and invent this whole science in the lab with my own two hands!" From this the reader may gauge the depths of his determination.

After that it was no unusual thing to see the lights burning late in the biochemistry building, or to behold a single shadow moving busily against the drawn blind, ever pouring, mixing, distilling, titrating, centrifuging. "A good lad, Hanbury," his professors took to telling one another. "Pity he's such a gargoyle."

It will be a little difficult for the lay reader to follow the ensuing passage without the utmost concentration, so the author requests that the television set be turned off, the mind be cleared, the lamp adjusted to shine over the left shoulder without glare and the feet

slightly elevated on a stool or hassock to promote a stimulating flow of blood to the brain.

Richard began his attempts at synthesis of an aphrodisiac by hooking two benzene rings symmetrically to one end of a long-chain hydrocarbon, mainly because the molecular diagram of this compound looked reasonably suggestive. He found, however, that it was instantly toxic to the laboratory hamsters even though it made a fair fuel for his motor scooter, and so was forced to abandon this line. Next he isolated the congenerics of muscatel wine, that is, the trace substances responsible for muscatel's peculiar flavor, using in the process several gallons of the stuff. His attempt to win the radium of truth from the pitchblende of folklore was a failure. The isolated congenerics proved to be a malodorous sludge which caused the hamsters to turn blue and die as if relieved to have done with the awful taste in their little mouths; also, his heavy purchases at the liquor shop gained him an undeserved reputation as a wino which almost resulted in his expulsion from the college.

But as we learn from the illustrious histories of Robert the Bruce, Thomas the Dewey and Adlai the Stevenson, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again." Richard did, and by catalyzing hexylmethyldiethylstilbestrol in the presence of, oddly enough, tri-tri-tri-ethylmermanotic acid he precipitated two five-grain tablets, each one stamped INSTANT LUST.

Obviously success was his at last, and obviously there was no question of testing the pills on a hamster; they were too precious. For days he went about the campus absently juggling his pills in his hand, his eye roving from blonde to brunette to redhead. All unaware, they paraded for him in their youth and beauty.

As if by inspiration the answer came to him after a pleasant week spent in the first eliminations, the finals, and the semi-finals. In a blow the two campus queens (they knew it not) who were vying for his dear smile were swept aside and undone. Studs Flanagan would be his choice.

At first blush this would appear an odd choice, for Studs was moonfaced, stringy-haired, bony of figure and awkward of movement. Studs processing along the gravel walks of the campus reminded students from the great Dakota wheatfields of a steam thresher in full career across the golden harvest bounty. Studs appropriately was in economics. Economics is known as "the dismal science," and it seemed to suit her. Her social life consisted of arguing bitterly with other economics majors about the rediscount

rate and the validity of bat-guano tonnage importations as an index of agricultural prosperity.

Start small, a little voice had told Richard; that was why he chose Studs to be the first to taste his pills. Were he suddenly to become the adored one of a reigning campus queen, there would be no end of talk. He could not immediately afford the luxury of a great beauty; he would have to start small—and who smaller than Studs? —and work his way up while people slowly got used to the idea of him as a successful lover.

He hailed Studs one afternoon at the co-op; she was alone and reading gloomily; untasted cocoa stood before her. "Hi," said Richard, his throat sealed almost shut by *globus hystericus.* "Wanted to talk to you about the bat-guano situation."

She eyed him coldly. "What about it?"

"Well, the effects of synthetic fertilizer, ah, man-made guano so to speak—I'm in biochem, you know—isn't that Professor Guano—I mean Granotto—over there?"

She looked over there; splash-splash went the two little pills into her cocoa. She looked back. "No," she said.

"Have your cocoa," he invited her largely.

"Thanks," she said satirically, and sipped. "Tastes odd," she said, and took a larger gulp, rolled it unattractively around her mouth, and swallowed.

Richard sat back complacently waiting for it to begin.

It began. His pulses started to pound; his eyes popped a little; his heart convulsed in his breast. He was in love with Studs Flanagan.

"Watcha staring at me for?" she demanded. "You chemistry creeps been synthesizing cocaine again?"

"Studs," he said hoarsely, "darling Studs, did anybody ever tell you that you have the most beautiful case of acne in the world?"

"Insults from a monkey like you I don't have to take," she snorted, and stalked out of the co-op. Richard Claxton Hanbury III trailed after her like an arbutus plant.

Eventually he persuaded her of his sincerity and they were married.

Everybody cautiously said that they were well matched. Sometimes Richard would see a tanned, long-limbed blonde lounging in a yellow convertible and suffer an anachronistic pang, but it did not happen often. He was happy in the dear presence of his Studs, and at all times profoundly grateful that he had not tried out the

pills on a hamster. Some things are practically impossible to explain, and that would have been one of them.

Virginia

JAMES "BUNNY" COOGLER woke on the morning of his father's funeral with a confused feeling that it was awfully crowded in his bedroom. Ohara, his valet (of the Shimanoseki Oharas, and not to be confused with the Dublin branch of the family) was shaking his sleeve and saying: "You wake up, Missah Bunny! Ah, such important gentermen come see you!" Bunny groped on the bedside table for the sunglasses to shelter his pink-rimmed eyes from the light. Ohara popped them onto his face and then rapidly poured a prairie oyster, a bromo and a cup of black coffee laced with brandy into him. Bunny's usual rate of morning vibration began to dampen towards zero and he peered about the room through the dark lenses.

"Morning, young Coogler," said a gruff voice. The outline was that of J. G. Barsax, senior partner of his late father's firm. A murmur of greeting came from three other elephantine figures. They were Gonfalonieri of First American, Witz of Diversified Limited, and McChesney of Southern Development Inc. If an efficient bomb had gone off in the room at that moment, it would have liquidated eighteen-billion-dollars' worth of Top Management and Ownership.

"Sorry about your father," Barsax grunted. "Mind if we sit? Not much time before the funeral. Have to brief you fast."

Bunny said, "Mr. Sankton told me what I'd have to do, Mr. Barsax. Rise after the 'Amen,' lead the procession past the casket, up the center aisle to the limousine exit—"

"No, no, no. Of course you know the funeral form. I'm talking about the financial briefing. Coogler, you're a very wealthy young man."

Bunny took off his sunglasses. "I am?" he asked uncertainly. "Surely not. There's this trust thing he was always talking about to pay me twenty thousand a year—"

"Talked," said Gonfalonieri. "That's all he did. He never got it

on paper. You're the sole heir to the liquid equivalent of, say, three and a half billion dollars."

Ohara hastily refilled the cup with laced coffee and put it in Bunny's hand.

"So," little Mr. Witz said softly, "there are certain things you must know. Certain rules that have sprung up which We observe." The capitalized plural pronoun was definitely sounded. Whether it was to be taken as royal, editorial, or theological, who can say?

They proceeded to brief Bunny.

Firstly, he must never admit that he was wealthy. He might use the phrase "what little I have," accompanied by a whimsical shrug.

Secondly, he must never, under any circumstances, at any time, give anything to anybody. Whenever asked for anything he was to intimate that this one request he simply could not grant, that it was the one crushing straw atop his terrible burden of charitable contributions.

Thirdly, whenever offered anything–from a cigar to a million-dollar market tip from a climber–he must take it without thanks and complain bitterly that the gift was not handsomer.

Fourthly, he must look on Touching Capital as morally equivalent to coprophagia, but he must not attempt to sting himself by living on the interest of his interest; that was only for New Englanders.

Fifthly, when he married he must choose his bride from one of Us.

"You mean, one of you four gentlemen?" Bunny asked. He thought of J.G.'s eldest daughter and repressed a shudder.

"No," said Witz. "One of Us in the larger sense. You will come to know who is who, and eventually acquire an instinct that will enable you to distinguish between a millionaire and a person of real substance."

"And that," said Barsax, "is the sum of it. We shall see you at the funeral and approach you later, Coogler." He glanced at his watch. "Come, gentlemen."

Bunny had a mechanical turn of mind; he enjoyed the Museum of Suppressed Inventions at J.G.'s Carolina estate. The quavery old curator pottered after him explaining.

"This, sir, is the hundred-mile-per-gallon carburetor. I was more active when it came out in '36–I was a Field Operative then. I tracked it down to a little Iowa village on a rumor from a patent attorney; it was quite a struggle to suppress that one. Quite a strug-

gle, sir! But—the next case, please, sir—it would have been rendered obsolete within two years. Yes, sir, that's when the Gasoline Pill came out. Let me show you, sir!"

He happily popped one of the green pills into a gallon of water and lectured as it bubbled and fumed and turned the water into 100-octane gasoline.

The Eternal Match was interesting, the Two-Cent Sirloin was delicious, and the Vanishing Cream vanished a half-inch roll of fat from Bunny's belly while he watched. "But Lord bless you, sir," tittered the curator, "what would be the point of giving people something that worked? They'd just go ahead and use it, and then when they had no more need they'd stop using it, eh?

"And this one, sir, it isn't really what you'd call suppressed. We're just working on it to build it up some; perhaps in five years we'll have it looking like it costs five thousand dollars, and then we'll be able to sell it." "It" was three-dimensional, full-color television; the heart of the system was a flashlight battery, a small C-clamp and a pinch of baking soda.

Bunny visited also the vast pest-breeding establishment in the Rockies, where flies, roaches, mice, gnats, boll-weevils, the elm-rot fungus and the tobacco-mosaic virus were patiently raised to maximum virulence and dispatched by couriers to their proper places all over the world. The taciturn Connecticut Yankee who ran the sprawling plant snapped at him, "Danged better mousetraps almost wiped out the mousetrap industry. Think people'd have better sense. DDT almost killed off pesticide—whole danged business, employing two hundred thousand. They think of that? Naw! So we had ter breed them DDT-resistant strains and seed 'em everywhere."

Bunny began to acquire the instinct to which Witz had referred. When he encountered an Oil Texan he could tell that the man's nervous hilarity and brag stemmed from his poverty, and he pitied him. When he encountered one day at Gonfalonieri's place in Baja California a certain quiet fellow named Briggs, he knew without being told that Briggs was one of Us. It was no surprise to learn later that Briggs held all the basic patents on water.

Briggs it was, indeed, who took him aside for an important talk. The quiet man offered him a thousand-dollar cigar (for the growing of whose tobacco Briggs had caused an artificial island to be built in the deep Central Pacific at the exactly correct point of temperature, wind and humidity) and said to him, "It's time you took a wife."

Bunny, who could not these days leaf through *Vogue* or the *New Yorker* without a tender, reminiscent smile for each of the lovely models shown in the advertisements, disagreed. "Can't see why, Briggs," he muttered. "Having jolly good time. Never used to have much luck with girls—all different now. Mean to say, with—" he gave the whimsical little shrug—"what little I have, doing awfully well and it doesn't cost me anything. Queer. When I had ten-twenty thou', when I was poor, had to buy corsages, dinners. All different now. They buy me things. Platinum watches. Have simply *dozens*. But the rules—have to take 'em. Queer."

"We've all been through it," Briggs said. "When you get bored let me know."

"Oh, promise," Bunny said. "Absolutely promise."

He spent the next six months in Hollywood where golden girls vied in plying him with *coq au vin,* solid iridium meat grinders, and similar trifles. One charming lady who had come out to the sound stages in 1934 presented him with a genuine hand-embroidered antique scabbard said to date back to the Crusades. It was a pleasant gift and it varied the . . .

. . . the *monotony?*

He sat up abruptly on the mutation-mink coverlet, causing the shapely blond head which remained on the silken pillow to emit a small sleepy snort.

"Monotony," Bunny said in a tragic whisper. "Definitely." He went home to Ohara, though not neglecting to pick up as he left his little present for the evening, a golden nutcracker set with diamonds and lined with unborn leopard pelt.

Ohara dipped into his store of Oriental wisdom in an effort to console him. He suggested, "Missah Bunny think if must be monotonized, what beautifurr way to *get* monotonized?"

It did not help.

Ohara suggested, "You try make funny, fo'get monotony. Fo' exampurr, spend coupre mirrion dorras make big reso't town, cawr same Schmir-ton, Ohio. Think how mad Missah Nickey be, he put up hoterr, have to cawr same Hoterr Hir-ton Schmir-ton! Oh, raffs!"

It would not do.

"Ohara," Bunny said tragically, "I would give—" he shrugged whimsically—"what little I have not to be bored with, ah, life."

The impassive Oriental countenance of his manservant flickered briefly in a grimace. His orders were clear, and he knew how terrible would be the consequences of disobedience.

Bunny tossed fitfully alone in his bed an hour later, and Ohara

was on the phone to an unlisted New York number. "This Ohara," he whispered. "Missah Bunny talk about giving away money. Awr his money."

The responding voice was that of an Englishman. It said: "Thank you, Ohara. One hopes, of course, for your sake, that the information has arrived in time. One hopes devoutly that it will not be necessary to inflict the Death of a Thousand Cuts on you. A book could be written about Number Three Hundred and Twenty-Eight alone, and as for Number Four Hundred and One—! Well, I won't keep you with my chattering." He hung up.

Within minutes the lonely house in a canyon was surrounded; the Fourth Plutocratic Airborne and Amphibious Assault Force was the ultimate in efficient mercenary troops. By dawn they had Bunny on his way to Barsax' Carolina estate under heavy sedation.

He woke in the guest room he knew, just off the corridor which contained the Museum of Suppressed Inventions. Little Mr. Witz and quiet Mr. Briggs were there. With granite faces they told him: "You have broken the Code, young Coogler. You said there was something you valued above money. You have got to go."

"Please," Bunny blubbered. "I didn't mean it. I'll marry your daughter. I'll marry both your daughters! Just don't kill me."

Mr. Witz said implacably, "Our decent, money-fearing girls wouldn't have anything to do with a dirty plutophobe like you, young Coogler. If only your poor father had put through the trust fund in time—well, thank Heaven he's not alive to see this day. But we won't kill you, young Coogler. It is not within our power to cause the death of a billionaire as if he were an animal or mere human being. What we can and will do is quarantine you. In Virginia."

This sounded like a rank *non sequitur* to Bunny until they took him to the Museum and trundled out a one-man space ship invented early in 1923 by a Herr Rudolf Grenzbach of Czernovitz, Upper Silesia, whose body had been found in Lower Silesia later that year.

Officers of the Fourth P.A.A.A.F. loaded him into the bomb-like contrivance over his spirited protest and pre-set the course. Virginia, it seemed, was an asteroid rather than the neighboring state. They fired the rockets and Bunny was on his way.

Four years later Mr. Witz and Mr. Briggs conferred again. "Perhaps," said Mr. Witz, "we've put enough of a scare into him. Let's radio the lad and find out whether he's given up his wild seditious notions and is ready to be rescued."

They tuned in the asteroid Virginia on another suppressed invention. "Young Coogler," Briggs said into the microphone. "This is Briggs. We wish to know whether you've come to your senses and are ready to take your place in society—ours, of course."

There squawked over the loud-speaker the voice of Bunny. "I say, what *was* that. No, not now, not for a second please. Where did that voice come from? Can you hear me, Mr. Briggs?"

"I hear you," said Mr. Briggs.

"Extraordinary! Another invention, eh?"

"Yes," said Briggs. "I am calling, young Coogler, to learn whether you are properly contrite and if so to arrange for your rescue."

"Rescue?" said the voice of Bunny. "Why, no thanks. That won't be necessary. Having a fine time here. They need me, you know. They love me for, ah, myself alone. Not the dashed money. *Double*-dash the money, I say!"

Mr. Briggs, white to the lips, broke the connection.

"He meant you to do that," Mr. Witz remarked.

"I know. Let him rot there."

The quavery old curator had been listening. "On Virginia?" he asked tremulously. "You don't rot on Virginia. Don't you gentlemen know how it got its name?"

"Never bothered to find out," Mr. Briggs snapped. "Since you're bursting to tell us, you might as well."

The curator beamed. "They call it Virginia because it's the planetoid of virgins. The dangdest thing. *Perpetual* virgins. The Plutocratic Space Force says they've never seen anything like it, not on Mars, not on Callisto. Self-renewing—the *dangdest* thing!"

Mr. Briggs and Mr. Witz looked at each other. After a while Mr. Witz spoke.

"Bunny," he said reflectively. "Bunny. He was well named."

The Slave

1

THE DRUNKEN BUM known as Chuck wandered through the revelry of the New Year's Eve crowd. Times Square was jammed with peo-

ple; midnight and a whole new millennium were approaching. Horns tooted, impromptu snake-dances formed and dissolved, bottles were happily passed from hand to hand; it was minutes to A.D. 2,000. One of those bottles passed to Chuck and passed no further. He scowled at a merry-maker who reached for it after he took his swig, and jammed it into a pocket. He had what he came for; he began to fight his way out of the crowd, westward to the jungle of Riveredge.

The crowd thinned out at Ninth Avenue, and by Tenth Avenue he was almost alone, lurching through the tangle of transport machinery that fed Manhattan its daily billion tons of food, freight, clothes, toys. Floodlights glared day and night over Riveredge, but there was darkness there too, in patches under a 96-inch oil main or in the angle between a warehouse wall and its inbound roofed freightway. From these patches men looked out at him with sudden suspicion and then dull lack of care. One or two called at him aimlessly, guessing that he had a bottle on him. Once a woman yelled her hoarse invitation at him from the darkness, but he stumbled on. Ten to one the invitation was to a lead pipe behind the ear.

Now and then losing his bearings, he stopped and turned his head peeringly before stumbling on. He never got lost in Riveredge, which was more than most transport engineers, guided by blueprints, could say. T.G. was *that* way.

He crashed at last into his own shared patch of darkness: the hollow on one side of a titanic I-beam. It supported a freightway over which the heaviest castings and forgings for the city rumbled night and day. A jagged sheet of corrugated metal leaned against the hollow, enclosing it as if by accident.

"Hello, Chuck," T.G. croaked at him from the darkness as he slid under the jagged sheet and collapsed on a pallet of nylon rags.

"Yeh," he grunted.

"Happy New Year," T.G. said. "I heard it over here. It was louder than the freightway. You scored."

"Good guess," Chuck said skeptically, and passed him the bottle. There was a long gurgle in the dark. T.G. said at last: "Good stuff." The gurgle again. Chuck reached for the bottle and took a long drink. It was good stuff. Old Huntsman. He used to drink it with—

T.G. said suddenly, pretending innocent curiosity: "Jocko who?"

Chuck lurched to his feet and yelled: "God damn you, I told you not to do that! If you want any more of my liquor keep the hell out of my head—and I *still* think you're a phony!"

T.G. was abject. "Don't take it that way, Chuck," he whined. "I

get a belt of good stuff in me and I want to give the talent a little workout, that's all. You know I would not do anything bad to you."

"You'd better not . . . Here's the bottle."

It passed back and forth. T.G. said at last: "You've got it too."

"You're crazy."

I would be if it wasn't for liquor . . . but you've got it too.

"Oh, shut up and drink."

Innocently: "I didn't say anything, Chuck."

Chuck glared in the darkness. It was true; he hadn't. His imagination was hounding him. His imagination or something else he didn't want to think about.

The sheet of corrugated metal was suddenly wrenched aside and blue-white light stabbed into their eyes. Chuck and the old man cowered instinctively back into the hollow of the I-beam, peering into the light and seeing nothing but dazzle.

"God, look at them!" a voice jeered from the other side of the light. "Like turning over a wet rock."

"What the hell's going on?" Chuck asked hoarsely. "Since when did you clowns begin to pull vags?"

T.G. said: "They aren't the clowns, Chuck. They want you—I can't see why."

The voice said: "Yeah? And just who are you, grampa?"

T.G. stood up straight, his eyes watering in the glare. "The Great Hazleton," he said, with some of the old ring in his voice. "At your service. Don't tell me who you are, sir. The Great Hazleton knows. I see a man of authority, a man who works in a large white building—"

"Knock it off, T.G.," Chuck said.

"You're Charles Barker," the voice said. "Come along quietly."

Chuck took a long pull at the bottle and passed it to T.G. "Take it easy," he said. "I'll be back sometime."

"No," T.G. quavered. "I see danger. I see terrible danger."

The man behind the dazzling light took his arm and yanked him out of the shelter of the I-beam.

"Cut out the mauling," Chuck said flatly.

"Shut up, Barker," the man said with disgust. "*You* have no beefs coming."

So he knew where the man had come from and could guess where the man was taking him.

At 1:58 A.M. of the third millennium Chuck was slouching in a waiting room on the 89th floor of the New Federal Building. The

man who had pulled him out of Riveredge was sitting there too, silent and aloof.

Chuck had been there before. He cringed at the thought. He had been there before, and not to sit and wait. Special Agent Barker of Federal Security and Intelligence had been ushered right in with the sweetest smile a receptionist could give him. . . .

A door opened and a spare, well-remembered figure stood there. "Come in, Barker," the Chief said.

He stood up and went in, his eyes on the gray carpeting. The office hadn't changed in three years; neither had the Chief. But now Chuck waited until he was asked before sitting down.

"We had some trouble finding you," the Chief said absently. "Not much, but some. First we ran some ads addressed to you in the open Service code. Don't you read the papers any more?"

"No," Chuck said.

"You look pretty well shot. Do you think you can still work?"

The ex-agent looked at him piteously.

"Answer me."

"Don't play with me," Chuck said, his eyes on the carpet. "You never reinstate."

"Barker," the Chief said, "I happen to have an especially filthy assignment to deal out. In my time, I've sent men into an alley at midnight after a mad-dog killer with a full clip. This one is so much worse and the chances of getting a sliver of useable information in return for an agent's life are so slim that I couldn't bring myself to ask for volunteers from the roster. Do you think you can still work?"

"Why me?" the ex-agent demanded sullenly.

"That's a good question. There are others. I thought of you because of the defense you put up at your departmental trial. Officially, you turned and ran, leaving Jocko McAllester to be cut down by the gun-runners. Your story was that somehow you knew it was an ambush and when that dawned on you, you ran to cover the flank. The board didn't buy it and neither do I—not all the way. You let a hunch override standard doctrine, and you were wrong and it looked like cowardice under fire. We can't have that; you had to go. But you've had other hunches that worked out better. The Bruni case. Locating the photostats we needed for the Wayne County civil rights indictment. Digging up that louse Sherrard's wife in Birmingham. Unless it's been a string of lucky flukes you have a certain talent I need right now. If you have that talent, you may come out alive. And cleared."

Barker leaned forward and said savagely: "That's good enough for me. Fill me in."

2

The woman was tall, quietly dressed and a young forty-odd. Her eyes were serene and guileless as she said: "You must be curious as to how I know about your case. It's quite simple—and unethical. We have a tipster in the clinic you visited. May I sit down?"

Dr. Oliver started and waved her to the dun-colored chair. A reaction was setting in. It was a racket—a cold-blooded racket preying on weak-minded victims silly with terror. "What's your proposition?" he asked, impatient to get it over with. "How much do I pay?"

"Nothing," the woman said calmly. "We usually pay poorer patients a little something to make up for the time they lose from work, but I presume you have a nest-egg. All this will cost you is a pledge of secrecy—and a little time."

"Very well," said Oliver stiffly. He had been hooked often enough by salesmen on no-money-down, free-trial-for-thirty-days, demonstration-for-consumer-reaction-only deals. He was on his guard.

"I find it's best to begin at the beginning," the woman said. "I'm an investment counselor. For the past five years I've also been a field representative for something called the Moorhead Foundation. The Moorhead Foundation was organized in 1915 by Oscar Moorhead, the patent-medicine millionaire. He died very deeply embittered by the attacks of the muckrakers; they called him a baby-poisoner and a number of other things. He always claimed that his preparations did just as much good as a visit to an average doctor of the period. Considering the state of medical education and licensing, maybe he was right.

"His will provided for a secret search for the cure of cancer. He must have got a lot of consolation daydreaming about it. One day the Foundation would announce to a startled world that it had cracked the problem and that old Oscar Moorhead was a servant of humanity and not a baby-poisoner after all.

"Maybe secrecy is good for research. I'm told that we know a number of things about neoplasms that the pathologists haven't hit on yet, including how to cure most types by radiation. My job, besides clipping coupons and reinvesting funds for the Foundation, is to find and send on certain specified types of cancer patients. The

latest is what they call a Rotino 707-G. You. The technical people will cure you without surgery in return for a buttoned lip and the chance to study you for about a week. Is it a deal?"

Hope and anguish struggled in Dr. Oliver. *Could* anybody invent such a story? *Was* he saved from the horror of the knife?

"Of course," he said, his guts contracting, "I'll be expected to pay a share of the expenses, won't I? In common fairness?"

The woman smiled. "You think it's a racket, don't you? Well, it isn't. You don't pay a cent. Come with your pockets empty and leave your check book at home if you like. The Foundation gives you free room and board. I personally don't know the ins and outs of the Foundation, but I have professional standing of my own and I assure you I'm not acting as a transmission belt to a criminal gang. I've *seen* the patients, Dr. Oliver. I send them on sick, and I see them a week or so later well. It's like a miracle."

Dr. Oliver went distractedly to his telephone stand, picked up the red book and leafed through it.

"Roosevelt 4-19803," the woman said with amusement in her voice.

Doggedly he continued to turn the "W" pages. He found her. "Mgrt WINSTON invstmnt cnslr RO4-19803." He punched the number.

"Winston investments," came the answer.

"Is Miss Winston there?" he asked.

"No, sir. She should be back by three if you wish to call again. May I take a message?"

"No message. But—would you describe Miss Winston for me?"

The voice giggled. "Why not? She's about five-eight, weighs about 135, brown hair and eyes, and when last seen was wearing a tailored navy culotte suit with white cuffs and collar. What're you up to, mister?"

"Not a thing," he said. "Thanks." He hung up.

"Look," the woman said. She was emptying her wallet. "Membership card in the Investment Counselors' Guild. U.M.T. honorable discharge, even if it is a reduced photostat. City license to do business. Airline credit card. Residential rental permit. Business rental permit. City motor vehicle parking permit. Blood-donor card."

He turned them over in his hands. The plastic-laminated things were unanswerable, and he gave himself up to relief and exultation. "I'm in, Miss Winston," he said fervently. "You should have seen

the fellow they showed me after an operation like mine." He shuddered as he remembered Jimmy and his "splendid adjustment."

"I don't have to," the woman said, putting her wallet away. "I saw my mother die. From one of the types of cancer they haven't licked yet. I get the usual commission on funds I handle for them, but I have a little personal interest in promoting the research end. . . ."

"Oh. I see."

Suddenly she was brisk. "Now, Dr. Oliver, you've got to write whatever letters are necessary to explain that you're taking a little unplanned trip to think things out, or whatever you care to say. And pack enough things for a week. You can be on the jet in an hour if you're a quick packer and a quick letter-writer."

"Jet to where?" he asked, without thinking.

She smiled and shook her head.

Dr. Oliver shrugged and went to his typewriter. This was one gift horse he would not look in the mouth. Not after Jimmy.

Two hours later the fat sophomore Gillespie arrived full of lies and explanations with his overdue theme on the Elizabethan dramatists, which was full of borrowings and evasions. On Dr. Oliver's door was pinned a small note in the doctor's handwriting: *Dr. Oliver will be away for several days for reasons of health.*

Gillespie scratched his head and shrugged. It was all right with him; Dr. Oliver was practically impossible to get along with, in spite of his vague reputation for brilliance. A schizoid, his girl called him. She majored in Psych.

3

The Moorhead Foundation proved to be in Mexico, in a remote valley of the state of Sonora. A jetliner took Dr. Oliver and Miss Winston most of the way very fast. Buses and finally an obsolete gasoline-powered truck driven by a Mexican took them the rest of the way very slowly. The buildings were a remodeled *rancheria* enclosed by a low, thick adobe wall.

Dr. Oliver, at the door of his comfortable bedroom, said: "Look, will I be treated immediately?" He seemed to have been asking that question for two days, but never to have got a plain yes or no answer.

"It all depends," Miss Winston said. "Your type of growth is definitely curable, and they'll definitely cure it. But there may be a slight holdup while they're studying it. That's your part of the bargain, after all. Now I'll be on my way. I expect you're sleepy, and

the lab people will take over from here. It's been a great pleasure."

They shook hands and Dr. Oliver had trouble suppressing a yawn. He was very sleepy, but he tried to tell Miss Winston how grateful he was. She smiled deprecatingly, almost cynically, and said: "We're using you too, remember? Well, good-by."

Dr. Oliver barely made it to his bed.

His nightmares were terrible. There was a flashing light, a ringing bell, and a wobbling pendulum that killed him, killed him, killed him, inch by inch, burying him under a mountain of flashes and clangs and blows while he was somehow too drugged to fight his way out.

He reached fuzzily in the morning for the Dialit, which wasn't there. Good God! he marveled. Was one expected to get *up* for breakfast? But he found a button that brought a grinning Mexican with a breakfast tray. After he dressed the boy took him to *los medicos.*

The laboratory, far down a deserted corridor, was staffed by two men and a woman. "Dr. Oliver," the woman said briskly. "Sit there." It was a thing like a dentist's chair with a suggestion of something ugly and archaic in a cup-shaped headrest.

Oliver sat, uneasily.

"The carcinoma," one of the men said to the other.

"Oh yes." The other man, quite ignoring Oliver as a person, wheeled over a bulky thing not much different in his eyes from a television camera. He pointed it at Oliver's throat and played it noiselessly over his skin. "That should do it," he said to the first man.

Oliver asked incredulously: "You mean I'm cured?" And he started to rise.

"Silence!" the woman snarled, rapping a button. Dr. Oliver collapsed back into the chair with a moan. Something had happened to him; something terrible and unimaginable. For a hideous split-second he had known undiluted pain, pure and uniform over every part of his body, interpreted variously by each. Blazing headache, eyeache and earache, wrenching nausea, an agony of itching, colonic convulsions, stabbing ache in each of his bones and joints.

"But—" he began piteously.

"Silence!" the woman snarled, and rapped the button again.

He did not speak a third time but watched them with sick fear, cringing into the chair.

They spoke quite impersonally before him, lapsing occasionally into an unfamiliar word or so.

"Not more than twenty-seven *vistch,* I should say. Cardiac."

"Under a good–master, would you call it?–who can pace him, more."

"Perhaps. At any rate, he will not be difficult. See his record."

"Stimulate him again."

Again there was the split-second of hell on earth. The woman was studying a small sphere in which colors played prettily. "A good surge," she said, "but not a good recovery. What is the order?"

One of the men ran his finger over a sheet of paper–but he was looking at the woman. "Three military."

"What kind of military, *sobr'?"*

The man hastily rechecked the sheet with his index finger. "All for *igr' i khom.* I do not know what you would call it. A smallship? A killship?"

The other man said scornfully: "Either a light cruiser or a heavy destroyer."

"According to functional analogy I would call it a heavy destroyer," the woman said decisively. "A good surge is important to *igr' i khom.* We shall call down the destroyer to take on this Oliver and the two Stosses. Have it done."

"Get up," one of the men said to Oliver.

He got up. Under the impression that he could be punished only in the chair he said: "What–?"

"Silence!" the woman snarled, and rapped the button. He was doubled up with the wave of pain. When he recovered, the man took his arm and led him from the laboratory. He did not speak as he was half-dragged through endless corridors and shoved at last through a door into a large, sunlit room. Perhaps a dozen people were sitting about and turned to look.

He cringed as a tall, black-haired man said to him: "Did you just get out of the chair?"

"It's all right," somebody else said. "You can talk. We aren't–them. We're in the same boat as you. What's the story–heart disease? Cancer?"

"Cancer," he said, swallowing. "They promised me–"

"They come through on it," the tall man said. "They do come through on the cures. Me, I have nothing to show for it. I was supposed to survey for minerals here–my name's Brockhaus. And this is Johnny White from Los Angeles. He was epileptic–bad seizures every day. But not any more. And this–but never mind. You can

meet the rest later. You better sit down. How many times did they give it to you?"

"Four times," Dr. Oliver said. "What's all this about? Am I going crazy?"

The tall man forced him gently into a chair. "Take it easy," he said. "We don't know what it's all about."

"Goddamn it," somebody said, "the hell we don't. It's the commies, as plain as the nose on your face. Why else should they kidnap an experienced paper salesman like me?"

Brockhaus drowned him out: "Well, maybe it's the reds, though I doubt it. All we *know* is that they get us here, stick us in the chair and then—take us away. And the ones they take away don't come back."

"They said something about cruisers and destroyers," Oliver mumbled. "And surges."

"You mean," Brockhaus said, "you stayed conscious all the way through?"

"Yes. Didn't you?"

"No, my friend. Neither did any of us. What are you, a United States Marine?"

"I'm an English professor. Oliver, of Columbia University."

Johnny White from Los Angeles threw up his hands. "He's an English professor!" he yelled to the room. There was a cackle of laughter.

Oliver flushed, and White said hastily: "No offense, prof. But naturally we've been trying to figure out what—they—are after. Here we've got a poetess, a preacher, two lawyers, a salesman, a pitchman, a mining engineer, a dentist—and now an English professor."

"*I* don't know," Oliver mumbled. "But they did say something about cruisers and destroyers and surges."

Brockhaus was looking skeptical. "I didn't imagine it," Oliver said stubbornly. "And they said something about 'two Stosses.' "

"I guess you didn't imagine it," the tall man said slowly. "Two Stosses we've got. Ginny! This man heard something about you and your old man."

A white-haired man, stocky in build and with the big, mobile face of an actor, thrust himself past Brockhaus to confront Oliver. "What did they say?" he demanded.

A tired-looking blond girl said to him: "Take it easy, Mike. The man's beat."

"It's all right," Oliver said to her. "They talked about an order.

One of the men seemed to be reading something in Braille—but he didn't seem to have anything wrong with his eyes. And the woman said they'd call down the destroyer to take on me and the two Stosses. But don't ask me what it means."

"We've been here a week," the girl said. "They tell me that's as long as anybody stays."

"Young man," Stoss said confidentially, "since we're thrown together in this informal fashion I wonder if I could ask whether you're a sporting man? The deadly dullness of this place—" He was rattling a pair of dice casually.

"*Please,* Mike!" the girl said in a voice near hysteria. "Leave the man alone. What good's money here?"

"I'm a sporting man, Ginny," he said mildly. "A friendly game of chance to break the monotony—"

"You're a crook on wheels," the girl said bitterly, "and the lousiest monte operator that ever hit the road."

"My own daughter," the man said miserably. "My own daughter that got me into this lousy can—"

"How was I supposed to know it was a fake?" she flared. "And if you do die you won't die a junkie, by God!"

Oliver shook his head dazedly at their bickering.

"What will this young man think?" asked Stoss, with a try at laughing it off. "I can see he's a person of indomitable will behind his mild exterior, a person who won't let the chance word of a malicious girl keep him from indulging in a friendly—"

"Yeah! I might believe that if I hadn't been hearing you give that line to farmhands and truck-drivers since I was seven. Now you're a cold-reader. My aching torso."

"Well," Stoss said with dignity, "*this* time I happened to have meant it."

Oliver's head was throbbing. An indomitable will behind a mild exterior. It rang a bell somewhere deep inside him—a bell that clanged louder and louder until he felt his very body dissolve under its impact.

He dismissed the bizarre fantasy. He was Dr. Oliver of Columbia. He was Dr. Oliver of Columbia. He had always been.

The Stosses had drifted to a window, still quarreling. Brockhaus said after a pause: "It's a funny thing. He was on heroin. You should see his arms. When he first got here he went around begging and yelling for a fix of dope because he *expected* that he'd want it. But after a few hours he realized that he didn't want it at all. For the first time in twelve years, he says. Maybe it was the shocks in the

chair. Maybe they did it intentionally. I don't know. The girl—there's nothing wrong with her. She just came along to keep the old man company while he took the marvelous free cure."

A slight brunette woman with bangs was saying to him shyly: "Professor, I'm Mitty Worth. You may have heard of me—or not. I've had some pieces in the *New New Review*."

"Delighted," Dr. Oliver said. "How did they get *you*?"

Her mouth twisted. "I was doing the Michoacan ruins. There was a man—a very handsome man—who persuaded me that he had made an archaeological find, that it would take the pen of a poet to do it justice—" She shrugged. "What's your field, professor?"

"Jacobean prose writers."

Her face lit up. "Thank God for somebody to talk to. I'm specially interested in Tom Fuller myself. I have a theory, you know, about the *Worthies of England*. Everybody automatically says it's a grab-bag, you know, of everybody who happened to interest Fuller. But I think I can detect a definite *structure* in the book—"

Dr. Oliver of Columbia groped wildly in his memory. What was the woman running on about?

"I'm afraid I'm not familiar with the work," he said.

Mitty Worth was stunned.

"Or perhaps," Oliver said hastily, "I'm still groggy from the—the laboratory. Yes, I think that must be it."

"Oh," Mitty Worth said, and retreated.

Oliver sat and puzzled. Of course his specialty was the Jacobean prose writers. The foolish woman had made a mistake. Tom Fuller must be in another period. The *real* writers of Jacobean prose were—

Were—?

Dr. Oliver of Columbia, whose field was the Jacobean prose writers, didn't know any of them by name.

I'm going crazy, he decided wildly. I'm Oliver of Columbia. I wrote my thesis on—

What?

The old faker was quite right. He was an indomitable will behind a mild exterior, and a ringing bell had something to do with it, and so did a flashing light and a wobbling pendulum, and so did Marty Braun who could keep a tin can bouncing ten yards ahead of him as he walked firing from the hip, but Marty had a pair of star-gauge .44's and he wasn't a gun nut himself even if he could nip the ten-ring four out of five—

The world of Dr. Oliver was dissolving into delirium when his name was sharply called.

Everybody was looking at him as if he were something to be shunned, something with a curse laid on it. One of—them—was standing in the door. Dr. Oliver remembered what they could do. He got up hastily and hastily went through an aisle that cleared for him to the door as if by magic.

"Stand there," the man said to him. "The two Stoss people," he called. The old man and his daughter silently joined him.

"You must walk ahead of me," said the man.

They walked down the corridor and turned left at a command, and went through a handsome oak door into the sunlight. Gleaming in the sunlight was a vast disk-shaped thing.

Dr. Oliver of Columbia smiled suddenly and involuntarily. He knew now who he was and what was his mission.

He was Special Agent Charles Barker of Federal Security and Intelligence. He was in disguise—the most thorough disguise ever effected. His own personality had been obliterated by an unbroken month of narcohypnosis, and for another unbroken month a substitute personality, that of the ineffectual Dr. Oliver, had been shoved into his head by every mechanical and psychological device that the F. S. I. commanded. Twenty-four hours a day, waking and sleeping, records had droned in his ears and films had unreeled before his glazed drugged eyes, all pointing toward this moment of post-hypnotic revelation.

People vanished. People had always vanished. Blind Homer heard vague rumors and incorporated them in his repertory of songs about the recent war against the Trojans: vague rumors about a one-eyed thing that kidnapped men—to eat, of course.

People continued to vanish through the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the growth of population and the invention of census machines. When the census machines were perfected everything was known statistically about everybody, though without invasion of privacy, for the machines dealt in percentages and not personalities. Population loss could be accounted for; such and such a percentage died, and this percentage pigged it drunkenly in Riveredge, and that percentage deserted wife and kids for a while before it was inevitably, automatically traced—

And there was a percentage left over. People still vanished.

The F. S. I. noted that three cancer patients in Morningside Heights, New York, had vanished last year, so they gave (Temporary) Special Agent Charles Barker a cancer by nagging a harmless

throat polyp with dyes and irritants, and installed him in Morningside Heights to vanish—and do something about it.

The man marched the two Stosses and Barker-Oliver into the spaceship.

Minutes later a smashing takeoff acceleration dashed them unconscious to the deck.

4

In an earthly navy they would have called Gori "Guns" in the wardroom. He didn't look like an officer and a gentleman, or a human being for that matter, and the batteries of primary and secondary weapons he ruled over did not look like cannon. But Gori had a pride and a class feeling that would have made familiar sense in any navy. He voiced it in his needling of Lakhrut: a brother officer but no fighting man; a sweat-soaked ruler of the Propulsion Division whose station was between decks, screwing the last flicker of drive from the units.

Languidly Gori let his fingertips drift over a page of text; he was taking a familiarization course in propulsion. "I don't understand," he said to Lakhrut, "why one shouldn't treat the units with a little more formality. My gun-pointers, for example—"

Lakhrut knew he was being needled, but had to pretend otherwise. Gori was somewhat his senior. "Gun-pointers are one thing," he said evenly. "Propulsion units are another. I presume you've worked the globes."

Gori raised his fingers from the page in surprise. "Evidently you—people between decks don't follow the Games," he said. "I have a Smooth Award from the last meet but one."

"What class vessel?"

"Single-seater. And a beauty! Built to my orders, stripped to a bare hull microns in thickness."

"Then you know working the globes isn't easy. But—with all respect—I don't believe you know that working a globe under orders, shift after shift, with no stake in the job and no hope or relief ever is most infernally heartbreaking. You competed for the Smooth Award and won it and slept for a week, I dare say, and are still proud—don't misunderstand me: *rightly* proud—of the effort. But the propulsion units aren't competing for anything. They've been snatched away from their families—I'm not certain; I believe a family system prevails—and they *don't* like it. We must break them of that. Come and see the new units."

Gori reluctantly followed Lakhrut to the inport where unconscious figures were being stacked.

"Pah! They stink!" he said.

"A matter of diet. It goes away after they've been on our rations for a while."

Gori felt one of the figures curiously. "Clothes," he said in surprise. "I thought—"

Lakhrut told him wearily: "They have been wearing clothes for quite a while now. Some five thousand of their years." That had been a dig too. Gori had been reminding him that he was not greatly concerned with the obscure beasts between decks; that he, Lakhrut, must clutter his mind with such trivial details while Gori was splendidly free to man his guns if there should be need. "I'll go and see my driver," he snapped.

When he left, Gori sat down and laughed silently.

Lakhrut went between decks to the banks of units and swiftly scanned them. Number Seven was sleeping, with deep lines of fatigue engraved on his mind. He would be the next to go; indeed he should have been shot through the spacelock with Three, Eight-Female and Twelve. At the first opportunity— His driver approached.

"Baldwin," he snapped at the driver, "will you be able to speak with the new units?"

Baldwin, a giant who had been a mere propulsion unit six months ago and was fiercely determined never to be one again, said in his broken speech: "Believe it. Will make to understand somewise. They may not—converse—my language called English. Will make to understand somewise."

Barker awoke staring into dull-red lights that looked unbelievably like old-fashioned incandescent lamps. Beside him a girl was moaning with shock and fear. In the dull light he could make out her features: Ginny Stoss. Her father was lying unconscious with his head in her lap.

A brutal hand yanked him to his feet—there was gravity! But there was no time to marvel over it. A burly giant in a gray kilt was growling at him: "You speak English?"

"Yes. What's all this about? Where are we?"

He was ignored. The giant yanked Ginny Stoss to her feet and slapped her father into consciousness as the girl winced and Barker balled his fists helplessly. The giant said to the three of them: "My name's Baldwin. You call me mister. Come on."

He led them, the terrified girl, the dazed old man and the rage-choked agent, through spot-polished metal corridors to—

A *barber shop,* Barker thought wildly. Rows and rows of big adjustable chairs gleaming dully under the red lights, people sitting in them, at least a hundred people. And then you saw there was something archaic and ugly about the cup-shaped headrests fitted to the chairs. And then you saw that the people, men and women, were dirty, unkempt and hopeless-eyed, dressed in rags or nothing at all.

Ginny Stoss screamed sharply when she saw Lakhrut. He was not a pretty sight with his single bulging orb above the nose. It pointed at her and Lakhrut spat guttural syllables at Baldwin. The burly giant replied, cringing and stammering. The monster's orb aimed at Barker, and he felt a crawling on the surface of his brain—as if fingers were trying to grasp it.

Barker knew what to do; more important, he did it. He turned off Barker. He turned on Dr. Oliver, the erudite scared rabbit.

Lakhrut scanned them suspiciously. The female was radiating sheer terror; good. The older male was frightened too, but his sense of a reality was clouded; he detected a faint undertone of humor. *That* would go. The younger man—Lakhrut stooped forward in a reflex associated with the sense of smell. The younger man—men? —no; man—the younger man—

Lakhrut stopped trying to scan him. He seemed to be radiating on two bands simultaneously, which was not possible. Lakhrut decided that he wasn't focusing properly, that somebody else's radiation was leaking and that the younger man's radiation was acting as a carrier wave for it. And felt vaguely alarmed and ashamed of himself. He ought to be a better scanner than he was.

"Baldwin," he said, "question that one closely."

The hulking driver asked: "You want name?"

"Of course not, fool! Question him about anything. I want to scan his responses."

Baldwin spoke to the fellow unintelligibly and the fellow replied unintelligibly. Lakhrut almost smiled with relief as the questioning progressed. The odd double-band effect was vanishing and the young man radiated simple fright.

Baldwin said laboriously: "Says is teacher of language and—tales of art. Says where is this and why have—"

"That's enough," he told the driver. "Install them." None of this group was dangerous enough to need killing.

"Sit there," Baldwin told Barker, jerking his thumb at an empty chair.

Barker felt the crawling fingers withdraw, and stifled a thought of triumph. They *had* him, this renegade and his cyclops boss. They had him like a bug underfoot to be squashed at a whim, but there had been some kind of test and he had bluffed them. Wearing the persona of Oliver, he quavered: "What *is* this terrible place, Mr. Baldwin? *Why* should I sit there?"

Baldwin moved in with a practiced ring shuffle and swung his open palm against the side of Barker's head. The agent cried out and nursed the burning cheek. Baldwin would never know how close he came that moment to a broken back. . . .

He collapsed limply into the chair and felt it mould to him almost like a living thing. Plates slid under his thighs and behind his shoulder blades, accommodating themselves to his body.

"Just to show you nobody's fooling," Baldwin said grimly. He pressed a button on the chair and again something indescribably painful happened, wringing his bones and muscles to jelly for a timeless instant of torment. He did not faint; it was there and gone too quickly for the vascular system to make such an adjustment. He slumped in the chair, gasping.

Baldwin said: "Take hold of the two handles." He was surprised to find that he could move. He took hold of two spherical handles. They were cold and slimy-dry. Baldwin said: "You have to make the handles turn rough, like abrasive paper. You do it different ways. I can't tell you how. Everybody has a different way. Some people just concentrate on the handles. Other people just try to make their minds a blank and that works for them. You just find your own way and do it when we tell you to. Or you get the Pain again. That's all."

Barker heard him move down the line and repeat the speech in substantially the same words to the Stosses.

Baldwin was no puzzle. He was just a turncoat bastard. The wrecked, ragged men and women with lackluster eyes sitting around him were no puzzle. Not after the Pain. Baldwin's boss, the cyclops—

How long had this been going on? Since Homer?

He bore down on the spherical handles. Amazingly they went from silk-smooth to paper-coarse and then to sandstone-gritty. Baldwin was back, peering to look at an indicator of some unimaginable kind. "That's very good," the big man said. "You keep that up and some day you'll get out of the chair like me."

Not like you, you bastard. Not like you. He choked down the thought. If the boss were here it would have undone him.

There were mechanical squeals and buzzers. Those who were sleeping in their chairs awoke instantly, with panic on their faces, visible even in the dim red light.

"All right," Baldwin was shouting. "*Give,* you bastards! Five seconds and we cut you in. *Give,* Morgan, or it's the Pain! Silver, make it move! I ain't forgetting anything, Silver—next time it's three jolts. Give, you bastards! *Give!*"

Barker gave in a frenzy of concentration. Under his sweaty palms the globes became abrasive. In five seconds there was a thudding shock through his body that left him limp. The globes went smooth and Baldwin was standing over him: "Make it go, Oliver, or it's the Pain. Make it go."

Somehow, he did.

It seemed to go on for hours while the world rocked and reeled about him, whether subjectively or objectively he could not tell. And at last there was the roar: "Let it go now. Everybody off."

Racking vibration ceased and he let his head nod forward limply.

From the chair in front of him came an exhausted whisper: "He's gone now. Some day I'm going to—"

"Can we talk?" Barker asked weakly.

"Talk, sing, anything you want." There was a muttering and stirring through the big room. From the chair in front, hopefully: "You happen to be from Rupp City? My family—"

"No," Barker said. "I'm sorry. What is all this? What are we doing?"

The exhausted whisper said: "All this is an armed merchantman of the A'rkhov-Yar. We're running it. We're galley slaves."

5

Three feedings later the man from Rupp City leaped from his chair, howling, and threw himself on a tangle of machinery in the center aisle. He was instantly electrocuted.

Before he died he had told Barker in rambling, formless conversations that he had it figured out; the star-people simply knew how to amplify psychokinetic energy. He thought he could trace eighteen stages of amplification through the drive machinery.

The death was—a welcome break in the monotony. Barker was horrified to discover that was his principal reaction to it, but he was not alone.

They were fed water and moist yellow cakes that tasted like spoiled pork. Normally they worked three shifts in rotation. Only now and then were they all summoned for a terrific surge; usually they had only to keep steerage way on the vessel. But eight hours spent bearing down on the spherical handles, concentrating, was an endless agony of boredom and effort. If your attention wandered, you got the Pain. Barker got it five times in fifteen feedings. Others got it ten or twelve. Ginny Stoss was flighty of mind; she got it twenty times, and after that, never. She mumbled continuously after that and spent all her time in practice, fingering the handles and peering into the bad light with dim, monomaniac eyes.

There was an efficient four-holer latrine, used without regard to sex or privacy. Sex was a zero in their lives, despite the mingling of men and women. When they slept in their chairs, they slept. The Pain and then death were the penalties for mating, and also their energy was low. The men were not handsome and the women were not beautiful. Hair and beards grew and straggled—why not? Their masters ignored them as far as clothing went. If the things they wore when they came aboard fell apart, very well, they fell apart. They weren't going any place.

It was approximately eight hours working the globular handles, eight hours sleeping, and eight hours spent in rambling talk about the past, with many lies told of riches and fame. Nobody ever challenged a lie; why should they?

Bull-necked Mr. Baldwin appeared for feedings, but he did not eat with them. The feedings were shift-change time, and he spent them in harangues and threats.

Barker sucked up to Baldwin disgustingly, earning the hatred of all the other "units." But they knew next to nothing, and what he desperately needed was information. All they knew was that they had been taken aboard—a year ago? Six years ago? A month ago? They could only guess. It was impossible to keep track of time within the changeless walls of the room. Some of them had been taken directly aboard. Some had been conveyed in a large craft with many others and then put aboard. Some had served in other vessels, with propulsion rooms that were larger or smaller, and then put aboard. They had been told at one time or another that they were in the A'rkhov-Yar fleet, and disputed feebly about the meaning and pronunciation. It was more of a rumor than a fact.

Barker picked a thread from his tie each day to mark the days, and sucked up to Baldwin.

Baldwin liked to be liked, and pitied himself. "You think," he

asked plaintively, "I'm inhuman? You think I want to drive the units like I do? I'm as friendly as the next guy, but it's dog eat dog, isn't it? If I wasn't driving I'd be in a chair getting driven, wouldn't I?"

"*I* can see that, Mr. Baldwin. And it takes character to be a leader like you are."

"You're Goddamned right it does. And if the truth was known, I'm the best friend you people have. If it wasn't me it'd be somebody else who'd be worse. Lakhrut said to me once that I'm too easy on the units and I stood right up to him and said there wasn't any sense to wearing them out and not having any drive when the going gets hot."

"I think it's amazing, Mr. Baldwin, the way you picked up the language. That takes *brains.*"

Baldwin beamed modestly. "Oh, it ain't too hard. For instance—"

Instruction began. It was not too hard, because Baldwin's vocabulary consisted of perhaps four hundred words, all severely restricted to his duties. The language was uninflected; it could have been an old and stable speech. The grammar was merely the word-order of logic: subject, verb, object. Outstandingly, it was a guttural speech. There were remnants of "tonality" in it. Apparently it had once been a sung language like Chinese, but had evolved even out of that characteristic. Phonemes that once had been low-toned were now sounded back in the throat; formerly high-toned phonemes were now forward in the throat. That sort of thing he had picked up from "Oliver."

Barker hinted delicately at it, and Baldwin slammed a figurative door in his face. "I don't know," he growled. "I don't go asking smart questions. You better not either."

Four more threads were snapped from the fringe of Barker's tie before Baldwin came back, hungry for flattery. Barker was on shift, his head aching with the pointless, endless, unspeakably dull act of concentration when the big man shook his shoulder and growled: "You can lay off. Seven, eight—it don't matter. The others can work harder."

He slobbered thanks.

"Ah, that's all right. I got a good side to me too, see? I said to Lakhrut once—"

And so on, while the other units glared.

"Mr. Baldwin, this word *khesor,* does it mean the whole propul-

sion set-up or the energy that makes it work? You say, *'Lakhrut a'g khesor-takh'* for 'Lakhrut is the boss of propulsion,' right?"

Baldwin's contempt was kindly. "For a smart man you can ask some Goddamned stupid questions. What difference does it make?" He turned to inspect the globes for a moment and snarl at Ginny Stoss: "What's the matter with you? You want the Pain again? *Give!*"

Her lips moved in her endless mutter and her globe flared bright.

The bull-necked man said confidingly: "Of course I wouldn't really give her the Pain again. But you have to scare them a little from time to time."

"Of course, Mr. Baldwin. You certainly know psychology." *One of these days I'm going to murder you, you bastard.*

"Sure; it's the only way. Now, you know what *ga'lt* means?"

"No, Mr. Baldwin."

The bull-necked pusher was triumphant. "There is no word for it in English. It's something they can do and we can't. They can look right into your head if they want to. *'Lakhrut ga'lt takh-lyur-Baldwin'* means 'Lakhrut looks right into underchief Baldwin's head and reads his mind.'"

"Do they do it all the time?"

"No. I think it's something they learn. I don't think all of them can do it either—or maybe not all of them learn to do it. I got a theory that Lakhrut's a *ga'lt* specialist."

"Why, Mr. Baldwin?"

Baldwin grinned. "To screen out troublemakers. No hard feelings, Oliver, but do you notice what a gutless bunch of people you got here? Not a rebel in a carload. Chicken-livered. Don't take it personal—either you got it or you don't."

"But *you,* Mr. Baldwin—why didn't the screening stop you?"

"I got a theory about that. I figure he let me through on purpose because they needed a hard guy to do just what I'm doing. After I got broke in on the globes it wasn't hardly any time at all before I got to be *takh-lyur.*"

You're wrong, you bastard. You're the yellowest coward aboard.

"That must be it, Mr. Baldwin. They know a leader when they see one."

Four threads later he knew that he had acquired all of the language Baldwin had to give him. During his sleep period he went to old Stoss' chair. Stoss was on rest. He was saying vaguely to a gray-haired woman in the chair in front of his: "Boston, Atlanta, Kansas

City—all the prominent cities of the nation, my dear lady. I went in with a deck of cards and came out of each with a diamond ring and a well-filled wallet. My hands were sure, my voice was friendly—"

"Atlanta," the woman sighed. "The Mathematics Teachers Association met there in '87, or was it '88? I remember gardens with old brick walls—or was that Charleston? Yes, I think it was Charleston."

"—In one memorable session of stud behind locked doors in the old Muehlbach Hotel I was high on the third card with the Jack of clubs and the ten of diamonds, with the ace of clubs for my hole-card. Well, madam—"

"—We had terrible trouble in the school one year with the boys and girls gambling in the reactor room, and worse if you can believe it. The reactor man was their 'look-out,' so to speak, so naturally we tried to have him discharged. But the union wouldn't let—"

"—Well, madam, there was seven hundred-odd dollars in the pot—"

"Mr. Stoss," Barker said.

The old man studied him coolly for a moment and then said: "I don't believe I care to talk to you, sir. As I was saying, ma'am, there was—"

"I'm going to kill Baldwin," Barker told him.

He was instantly alert, and instantly scared. "But the danger," he whispered. "Won't they take it out on all of us? And he's a big brute—"

"So maybe he'll kill me. But I'm going to try. I want you to go to the latrine when Baldwin shows up next. Don't quite go in. Watch the corridor. If there's anybody coming, lift your hand. I'll only need a few seconds. Either way, it'll be finished by then."

"The danger," whispered Stoss. His eyes wandered to his daughter's chair. She was asleep. And her lips still moved in her endless muttering. "All right," the old man said at last. "I'll help you."

"Can you imagine that?" the woman said, still amazed after all these years. "The man was caught *in flagrente delicto,* so to speak, and the union wouldn't let the principal discharge him without a full public hearing, and naturally the publicity would have been most distasteful so we were forced to—"

Barker padded back to his chair, a gaunt man in stinking rags, wild-haired and sporting a beard in which gray hairs were beginning to appear.

There had to be a lookout. Three times since takeoff Lakhrut

had appeared in the doorway for a moment to stare at the units. Twice other people had actually come into the room with Baldwin to probe through the tangle of machinery down the center aisle with long, slender instruments.

It might have been one hour; it might have been seven. Baldwin appeared, followed by the little self-propelled cart. It began to make its rounds, stopping at each chair long enough for the bottle of water and the dish of soggy cake to be picked off. Stoss, looking perfectly innocent, passed Barker's chair.

Barker got up and went to the pusher. Stoss was looking through the door, and did not wave. The cart clicked and rolled to the next chair. "Something wrong, Oliver?" Baldwin asked.

"I'm going to kill you, you bastard."

"What?" Baldwin's mouth was open, but he dropped into a fighter's crouch instinctively.

His ankle hooked behind Baldwin's foot. The bull-necked man threw a punch which he ducked, and tried to clinch when he butted him in the chest. Baldwin went sprawling into the tangle of machinery at the same spot where the man from Rupp City had fried. There were sparks and stench. Then it was over.

Baldwin's mouth was still open and his body contorted. Barker could imagine him saying: "You think I'm inhuman? You think I want to drive the units like I do?" And he could also imagine him roaring: *"Give,* Goddamn you!"

Steadily Barker went back to his seat in time for the cart to click by. Stoss, his face a perfect blank, padded back from the latrine. A murmur and stir grew louder in the big rectangular room.

6

Lakhrut was lying in his hammock in the dark, his fingers idly reading. It should have been a manual; instead it was an historical romance. His fingers skipped a half-page describing an old-style meal and slowed to absorb the description of the fight in which it ended.

"Yar raises his revolver charged with powder and ball. Who is so brave as Yar? He pulls back the trigger and presses the hammer of the death-dealing tube! The flash of flame shows the face of Lurg! But smoke from the tube obscures—"

His fingers jerked from the page as the commander's voice roared through his cubicle: *"Lakhrut!* Look to your units! We have no steerage way!"

He leaped from the hammock and raced through the vessel cursing Baldwin, the maintenance crew, the units and every soul on board.

He took in the situation at a glance. Baldwin lying spread-eagled and charred against the conversion grids. The units yammering and terrified in their chairs, none of them driving. Into a wall mike he snapped to the bridge: "My driver's dead, Commander. He got the charge from the conversion grids—"

"Stop your gabbing and give me power, you fool!"

Deathly pale, Lakhrut turned to the disorganized units and tried to talk to them in remembered scraps of English. (He should have worked more with his driver on it. He should have worked more.) They only gawked at him, and he swore in A'rkhov—

But one of the units was doing something that made sense. He was yelling in English, pointing to the chairs. And a dozen of the units resumed their places and began to drive, feebly at first and then better.

That was taken care of. He turned to the machinery and checked rapidly through the stages of amplification. They were clear; the commander, curse him, was getting his power. The fellow who had yelled at the units was standing by him when the inspection was completed. Startlingly, he said in A'rkhov, though with a fearsome accent: "Can I serve Lakhrut-*takh?*"

With considerable effort, Lakhrut scanned him. Obedience, fear, respect, compliance. All was well. He asked him coldly: "Who are you that you should speak the tongue?"

"Name is Oliver. I studied languages. Baldwin-*takh-lyur* taught me the tongue." Lakhrut scanned; it all was true.

"How did he die?"

"I did not see. Oliver was not looking. I was in darkness."

Asleep, was he trying clumsily to say? Lakhrut scanned. There was no memory of the death-scene in the scared, compliant mind of this unit. But something nagged Lakhrut and teased at his mind. "Did you kill him?" he snapped.

The flood of horror and weakness he scanned was indubitable. The unit babbled brokenly: "No, Lakhrut-*takh!* No! I could not kill! I could not kill!" Well, *that* was true enough. It had been a silly thing to ask.

"Take me," he said, "to each unit in turn and ask them whether they killed the *takh-lyur*."

This Oliver did, and reported twenty-two denials while Lakhrut scanned each. Each was true; none of the twenty-two minds into

which he peered was shuddering with the aftermath of murder; none seemed to have the killer's coldness and steel.

Lakhrut said to the wall mike: "Power is restored. I have established that my driver's death was accidental. I have selected a new driver from among the units." He turned off the mike after a curt acknowledgment and said to Oliver: "Did you understand? I meant you." At the mike again he called two maintenance men to clear the conversion grid and space the body.

"Establish unit shifts and then come with me," he told Oliver, and waited for the new driver to tell off the gangs. He ceased scanning; his head was aching abominably.

Barker felt the fingers leave his brain and breathed deeper. Dr. Oliver of Columbia, the whining incubus on him, was bad company. His own memory of the past few minutes was vague and fragmentary. In jittery terror Dr. Oliver had yelled at the units to man their chairs before they all were killed for disobedience. In abject compliance Dr. Oliver had placed himself at Lakhrut's orders. And he had heard that he would be the new slave-driver with almost tearful gratitude. To be shaved and clean again! To dine again! Barker wanted to spit. Instead he divided the units into new shifts and followed Lakhrut from the oblong room.

He washed and used a depilatory powder that burned horribly as the cyclops monster called Lakhrut silently watched. Somebody brought him shorts that fit. Apparently the concept of a uniform was missing—so even was style. He saw passing on the upper decks crew "men" in trousers, gowns, kilts and indescribable combinations of these. The only common note was simplicity and a queer, vulgar absence of dash, as if nobody cared what he looked like as long as the clothes didn't get in his way.

"That's enough," Lakhrut said, as Barker was trying to comb his wetted hair with his fingers. "Come with me."

Back between decks they went to a cubicle near the drive room—a combination of kitchen, cramped one-man office and hammock-space. Lakhrut briskly showed Barker how to draw and prepare the food for the units—it was the first time he suspected that Baldwin had cooked for them—and how to fill in a daily report on the condition of the units. It was hardly writing; he simply had to check a box in the appropriate column next to the unit's number. His "pen" flowed clear plastic which bonded to the paper in a raised ridge. The "printed" form was embossed with raised lines. Barker could make nothing of the numerals that designated the units or the

column-headings; the alphabet rang no bells in his memory or the Oliver-memory. But that would come later.

The commander was winding up his critique, and his division officers were perspiring freely.

"As to the recent gun-drill, I have very little to say. What, gentlemen, *is* there to say about the state of training, the peak of perfection which enabled Gori-*takh*'s crews to unlimber, train and dry-fire their primary and secondary batteries in a mere two hundred and thirty-six and eleven-twelfths *vistch?* I am sure the significance of this figure will be clear to us all when I point out that the average space engagement lasts one hundred and eighteen *vistch.* Is the significance clear to you, Gori-*takh?*"

"Yes, Commander," said the division officer, very pale.

"*Perfectly* clear?"

"Yes, Commander," Gori said, wishing he were dead.

"Good. Then we will go on to pleasanter subjects. Propulsion has been excellent and uninterrupted since our last meeting. Steerage way has been satisfactorily maintained, units are in reasonable health, mechanical equipment checks out between Satisfactory and Excellent. The surprise-drill calls for driving surges were responded to promptly and with vigor. Lakhrut-*takh,* you are to be commended."

He left the compartment on that note, and the division officers sprawled, sighed and gave other signs of release from tension.

Lakhrut said to Gori, with the proper blend of modesty and sympathetic blandness: "It's just luck, you know. Your bad luck and my good luck. I happen to have stumbled on the most extraordinary driver in the fleet. The fellow is amazing. He speaks the tongue, he's pitiless to the units, and he's wild to anticipate my every wish. He's even trying to learn the mechanism."

A *takh* vaguely corresponding to the Paymaster of a British naval vessel, with a touch of Chaplain and Purser thrown in, said: "What's that? Isn't there a *Yongsong* order about that? Perhaps I'd better—"

Lakhrut hastily balanced the benefit of a lie at this point against the chance that the *takh,* a master-scanner because of his office, might scan him for veracity. Since scanning of equals was bad manners and he felt himself the *takh*'s equal at least after the commander's sweet words of praise, he lied. " 'Trying' does not mean 'succeeding,' " he said, letting his voice sound a little hurt. "I'm surprised that you should think I'd let an Outworlder into our secrets. No; the man is merely cracking his brains over an obsolete manual

or two of advanced theory. He can barely read, as I've repeatedly verified by scanning. His tactile-memory barely exists. What brutes these Outlanders are! I doubt that they can tell fur from marble."

The *takh* said: "That is extremely unlikely in view of their fairly-advanced mechanical culture. Take me to him; I shall scan him."

Gori tried not to look exultant as Lakhrut, crestfallen, led the *takh* from the room.

The *takh* was somehow alarmed when he saw Lakhrut's driver. Even before scanning he could see that the fellow was tough. Vague thoughts of a spotter from Fleet Command or a plant from some enemy—or nominally friendly—fleet drifted through his head before he could clamp down on them. He said to the driver: "Who are you and what was your occupation?" And simultaneously he scanned deep.

The driver said: "Name is Oliver, *takh*. Teacher of language and letters."

The personality-integral included: Inferiority. ? Self-deprecation/ Neurosis. ? . . . . . Weakling's job/Shame. ? Traumata. . . . . A light. A bell. A pendulum. Fear. Fear. Being buried, swallowed, engulfed.

The *takh* was relieved. There was no danger in such a personality-integral. But the matter of security—he handed the driver a fingering-piece, a charming abstraction by the great Kh'hora. It had cost him his pay for an entire tour of duty and it was quite worth it. Kh'hora had carved it at the height of his power, and his witty juxtapositions of textures were unsurpassed to this day. It could be fingered a dozen ways, each a brilliant variation on a classic theme.

The driver held it stupidly.

"Well?" demanded the *takh,* his brows drawing together. He scanned.

The driver said: "Please, *takh,* I don't know what to do with it."

The personality-integral included: Fear. Bewilderment. Ignorance. Blankness.

"Finger it, you fool!"

The driver fumbled at the piece and the *takh* scanned. The tactile impressions were unbelievably obtuse and blurry. There was no emotional response to them whatsoever except a faint, dull gratification at a smooth boss on the piece. And the imbecile kept *looking* at it.

It was something like sacrilege. The *takh* snatched the piece back indignantly. "Describe it," he said, controlling himself.

The fellow began to maunder about its visual appearance while the *takh* scanned. It was true; he had practically no tactile memory.

The *takh* left abruptly with Lakhrut. "You were right," he said. "If it amuses the fellow to pretend that he can read, I see no obstacle. And if it contributes to the efficiency of your department, we all shine that much brighter." (More literally, with fuller etymological values, his words could be rendered: "If it amuses the fellow to pretend that he fingers wisdom, my hands are not grated. And if it smoothes your quarry wall, we all hew more easily.")

Lakhrut's hands were not grated either; it was a triumphant vindication of his judgment.

And so, for departmental efficiency, he let his marvelous driver have all the books he wanted.

7

Barker's head ached and his eyes felt ready to fall out of their sockets. He did not dare take rubbings of the books, which would have made them reasonably legible. He had to hold them slantwise to the light in his cubicle and read the shadows of the characters. Lakhrut had taught him the Forty-Three Syllables, condescendingly, and the rest was up to him. He had made the most of it.

An imagery derived more from tactile than visual sense-impressions sometimes floored him with subtleties—as, he was sure, an intensely visual English nature poem would have floored Lakhrut. But he progressed.

Lakhrut had brought him a mish-mash of technical material and trashy novelettes—and a lexicon. The *takh* who had made such a fuss about the chipped pebble had brought him something like a Bible. Pay dirt!

It seems that in the beginning Spirit had created Man—which is what the A'rkhov-Yar called the A'arkhov-Yar—and set him to rule over all lesser creation. Man had had his ups and downs on the Planet, but Spirit had seen to it that he annihilated after sanguinary, millennium-long battles, his principal rivals for the Planet. These appeared to have been twelve-footed brutes who fought with flint knives in their first four feet.

And then Spirit had sent the Weak People to the Planet in a spaceship. Schooled to treachery in the long struggle against the knife-wielding beasts, Man had greeted the Weak People with smiles, food and homage. The Weak People had foolishly taught them the art of writing, had foolishly taught Man their sciences.

And then the Weak People had been slain, all twelve of them, in an hour of blood.

Barker somehow saw the Weak People as very tired, very gentle, very guileless survivors of a planetary catastrophe beyond guessing. But the book didn't say.

So the A'rkhov-Yar stole things. Science. People. Let George do it, appeared to be their morality, and then steal it from George. Well, they'd had a hard upbringing fighting down the Knifers, which was no concern of his. They'd been man-stealing for God knows how long; they'd made turncoats like the late Mister Baldwin, and judas goats like neat Miss Winston, disgusting creatures preying on their own kind.

From the varied reading matter he built up a sketchy picture of the A'rkhov-Yar universe. There were three neighboring stars with planetary systems, and the cyclopes had swarmed over them once the guileless Weak People had shown them spaceflight. First they had driven their own ships with their own wills. Then they had learned that conquered races could be used equally well, so they had used them. Then they learned that conquered races tended to despair and die out.

"Then," he said savagely to old man Stoss, "they showed the one flash of creative intelligence in their career—unless they stole it from one of their subjects. They invaded Earth—secretly. Without knowing it, we're their slave-breeding pen. If we knew it, we'd either fight and win, or fight and lose—and die out in despair."

"The one flash?" Stoss asked dryly, looking about them at the massive machinery.

"Stolen. All stolen. They have nations, trades and wars—but this is a copy of the Weak People's ship; all their ships are. And their weapons are the meteor screens and sweepers of the Weak People. With stolen science they've been stealing people, I think at a rate of thousands per year. God knows how long it's been going on—probably since the neolithic age. You want proof of their stupidity? The way they treat us. It leads to a high death rate and fast turnover. That's bad engineering, bad economics and bad housekeeping. Look at the lights they use—low-wattage incandescents! As inefficient lamps as were ever designed—"

"I've got a thought about those lights," Stoss said. "The other day when Lakhrut was inspecting and you were passing out the food I took two cakes instead of one—just to keep in practice. I used sleight of hand, misdirection—but Lakhrut didn't misdirect worth a

damn. He slapped the pain button and I put the extra cake back. What does it mean when the hand is quicker than the eye but the sucker isn't fooled?"

"I don't get you."

"What if those aren't very inefficient lamps but very efficient heaters?"

"They're blind," whispered Barker. "My God, you've got to be right! The lamps, the tactile culture, the embossed writing. And that thing that looks like an eye—it's their mind-reading organ, so it can't be an eye after all. You can't perform two radically different functions with the same structure."

"It's worth thinking about," old man Stoss said.

"I could have thought about it for a million years without figuring that out, Stoss. How did you do it?"

The old man looked modest. "Practice. Long years of it. When you want to take a deacon for a long score on the con game, you study him for his weaknesses. You don't assume he hasn't got any just because he's a deacon, or a doctor, or a corporation treasurer. Maybe it's women, or liquor, or gambling, or greed. You just play along, what interests him interests you, everything he says is wise and witty, and sooner or later he lets you know what's his soft spot. Then, lad, you've got him. You make his world revolve around his little weakness. You cater to it and play it up and by and by he gets to thinking that you're the greatest man in the world, next to him, and the only real friend he'll ever have. Then you 'tell the tale,' as we say. And the next sound you hear is the sweetest music this side of Heaven, the squealing of a trimmed sucker."

"You're a revolting old man," said Barker, "and I'm glad you're here."

"I'm glad you're here too," the old man said. And he added with a steady look: "Whoever you are."

"You might as well know. Charles Barker—F. S. I. agent. They fished me out of the Riveredge gutter because I may or may not have telepathic flashes, and they put me on the disappearance thing."

Stoss shook his head unhappily. "At my age, cooperating with the F. S. I. I'll never live it down."

Barker said: "They've got sound to go on, of course. They hear movements, air currents. They carry in their heads a sound picture —but it isn't a 'picture'; damn language!—of their environment. They can't have much range or discrimination with that sense; too much noise hashing up the picture. They're probably heat-detectors, too. If bedbugs and mosquitoes can use heat for information, so

can these things. Man could do it too if he had to, but we have eyes. The heat-sense must be short range too; black-body radiation falls off proportional to the fourth power of the distance. It's beginning to fit together. They don't go *very* near those incandescent bulbs ever, do they? They keep about a meter distant?"

"Yes, I've noticed that. Anything closer must be painful to the heat sense—'blinding,' you might say."

"Then that leaves their telepathy. That specialist came into this room to examine me, which tells us something about the range. Something—but not enough."

Stoss said: "A person might pretend to throw something at one of them from a distance of ten yards. If the creature didn't notice, we'd know they don't have a ten-yard range with sound, heat or telepathy. And the next day he could try it at nine yards. And so on, until it noticed."

"And blew the person in half with those side-arms they carry," said Barker. "Who volunteers for the assignment, Stoss?"

"Not I," the old man said hastily. "Let's be practical. But perhaps I could persuade Miss Trimble?"

"The math teacher? Hell, no. If things work out, we're going to need all the mathematical talent we've got."

They conferred quietly, deciding which of their fellow-Earthmen could be persuaded to sacrifice himself. The choice fell on a nameless, half-mad youngster in the third seat of the second tier; he spoke to nobody and glared suspiciously over his food and drink.

"But can you do it?" asked Barker.

Stoss was offended. "In my time," he said, "I've taken some fifty-five really big scores from suckers. I've persuaded people who love money better than life itself to turn their money over to me, and I've sent them to the bank for more."

"Do your best," Barker said.

What approach the old swindler did use, he never learned. But the next day Third Seat, Second Tier, rose during the doling out of the food and pretended to hurl his plate at Lakhrut. The cyclops, ten meters away, stalked serenely on and the young man collapsed in an ecstasy of fright.

The next day it was eight yards.

The next day six.

And other things filled the days: the need for steady driving of the ship, and whispered consultations up and down the benches.

They needed a heat source, something that would blaze at 500

degrees, jangling, dazzling and confusing the senses of their captors. But it was an armed merchantman, a warship, and warships have nothing on board that will burn. Their poor clothing heaped together and somehow ignited would make a smouldering little fire, doing more damage to the human beings by its smoke than to the A'rkhov-Yar by its heat.

Barker went exploring in the cargo spaces. Again and again he was passed in the corridors by crew "men." Huddling against the glowing bulbs, choking down his rage and fear, he imitated the paint on the walls, and sometimes they broke their stride for a puzzled moment, sometimes not.

In a cargo space on the next day he found cases labeled with worms of plastic as "attention sticks" or possibly "arresting or halting tubes."

They were the close equivalent of railroad flares in appearance. He worked the tight-fitting cap of one to the point where he felt gritty friction. A striking surface—but he did not dare strike and test it. These things would have to put out hundreds of degrees of heat, or, if they were intended for use at any appreciable distance, thousands. They were thermal shrieks; they would be heard from one end of the ship to the other. In three trips he smuggled 140 of the sticks back to the propulsion room. Stoss helped him distribute them among the seats. He grimly told the lackluster eyes and loose mouths: "If anybody pulls off one of the caps before I say so, I am going to hit the pain button and hold it down for five minutes."

They understood it for the death threat it was.

"Today's the day, I think," said Stoss in a whisper as Lakhrut made his benevolent entrance. "He sensed something yesterday at four meters. Today it's going to be three."

Barker pushed his little food cart, fingering the broken-off knob of a propulsion chair resting on its lower tray. He moved past Third Seat, Second Tier, Lakhrut behind him. The mad young man rose, picked up his plate and pretended to throw it at the cyclops.

Lakhrut drew his side-arm and blew the young man's head into a charred lump. "Oliver!" he cried, outraged. "Why did you not report that one of your units was becoming deranged? You should have put him through the spacelock days ago!"

"Oliver's" reply was to pace off a precise four meters and hurl the broken-off knob at the monster. He took a full windup, and rage for five thousand years of slavery and theft drove his muscles. The cyclops eye broke and spilled; the cyclops staggered in circles, screaming. Barker closed in, twisted the side-arm from the monster's

convulsed hand and gave him what Third Seat, Second Tier, had got.

The roomful of men and women rose in terror, screaming.

"Quiet!" he yelled at them. "I've talked to some of you about this. You saw what happened. Those things are blind! You can strike them from five yards away and they'll never know what hit them."

He snatched up one of the fusees and rasped off the cap; it began to flare pulsatingly, not very bright, but intensely hot. He held it at arm's length and it scorched the hair on the back of his hand. "These things will dazzle what sensory equipment they do have," he yelled, "and you can confuse them with noise. They'll be coming to get us in a minute. All you have to do is make noise and mill around. You'll see what happens when they come for us—and then we'll go hunting!"

In less than a minute his prediction was verified. A squad of the cyclops crew burst in, and the screaming of the Earth people left nothing to be desired; the creatures recoiled as if they had struck a wall. From six meters away Barker and the Stosses carefully ignited the flares and tossed them into the squad. They made half-hearted efforts to fire into the source of the trouble, but they were like men in a darkened boiler works—whose darkness was intermittently relieved by intolerable magnesium flares. Lakhrut's side-arm made short work of the squad.

Barker ripped their weapons from their fingers and demanded: "Who wants one? Who wants to go hunting? Not you, Miss Trimble; we'll need you for later. Stay in a safe place. Who's ready for a hunting party?"

One by one, twitching creatures remembered they were men and came up to take their weapons.

The first hunting party worked its way down a corridor, hurling fusees, yelling and firing. The bag was a dozen cyclopes, a dozen more weapons.

They met resistance at a massive door with a loophole. Blasts from a hand weapon leaped through the loophole, blind but deadly. Three of them fell charging the door.

"Warm it up for them," Stoss said. He snatched a dozen fusees, ducked under the fire and plastered himself against the door. Meticulously he uncapped the sticks and leaned them against the door, one by one. The blast of heat drove Barker and his party back

down the corridor. Stoss did not collapse until he had ignited the last flare and wrenched open the door with a seared hand.

Through the door could be seen staggering cyclops figures, clawing blindly at the compartment walls. The Earthmen leaped through the brief, searing heat of the dozen flares and burned them down.

In the A'rkhov-Yar language, a terrified voice spoke over the ship public address system: "To the leader of the rebels! To the leader of the rebels! Return to your propulsion room and your crimes will be forgiven! Food will be doubled and the use of the Pain discontinued!"

Barker did not bother to translate. "Let's head for the navigation room," he said. "Try to save a couple of them."

One hour later he was telling the commander and Gori: "You two will set courses for Earth. You will work separately, and if your results don't agree we will put you each in a chair and hold down the button until you produce results that do agree. We also have a lady able to check on your mathematics, so don't try anything."

"You are insane," said the commander. "Other ships will pursue and destroy you."

"Other ships," Barker corrected him, "will pursue and fail to overtake us. I doubt very much that slave ships can overtake a ship driven by free men and women going home."

"We will attack openly for this insolence," snorted Gori. "Do you think you can stand against a battle fleet? We will destroy your cities until you've had enough, and then use you as the slaves you are."

"I'm sure you'll try," said Barker. "However, all I ask is a couple of weeks for a few first-rate Ph.D.'s to go over this ship and its armaments. I believe you'll find you have a first-rate war on your hands, gentlemen. We don't steal; we *learn*.

"And now, if you please, start figuring that course. *You're* working for *us* now."

Kazam Collects

"HAIL, JEWEL IN THE LOTUS," half whispered the stringy, brown person. His eyes were shut in holy ecstasy, his mouth pursed as though he were tasting the sweetest fruit that ever grew.

"Hail, jewel in the lotus," mumbled back a hundred voices in a confused backwash of sound. The stringy, brown person turned and faced his congregation. He folded his hands.

"Children of Hagar," he intoned. His voice was smooth as old ivory and had a mellow sheen about it.

"Children of Hagar, you who have found delight and peace in the bosom of the Elemental, the Eternal, the Un-knowingness that is without bounds, make Peace with me." You could tell by his very voice that the words were capitalized.

"Let our Word," intoned the stringy, brown person, "be spread. Let our Will be brought about. Let us destroy, let us mould, let us build. Speak low and make your spirits white as Hagar's beard." With a reverent gesture he held before them two handfuls of an unattached beard that hung from the altar.

"Children of Hagar, unite your Wills into One." The congregation kneeled as he gestured at them, gestured as one would at a puppy one was training to play dead.

The meeting hall—or rather, temple—of the Cult of Hagar was on the third floor of a little building on East 59th Street, otherwise almost wholly unused. The hall had been fitted out to suit the sometimes peculiar requirements of the unguessable Will-Mind-Urge of Hagar Inscrutable; that meant that there was gilded wood everywhere there could be, and strips of scarlet cloth hanging from the ceiling in circles of five. There was, you see, a Sanctified Ineffability about the unequal lengths of the cloth strips.

The faces of the congregation were varying studies in rapture. As the stringy, brown person tinkled a bell they rose and blinked absently at him as he waved a benediction and vanished behind a door covered with chunks of gilded wood.

The congregation began to buzz quietly.

"Well?" demanded one of another. "What did you think of it?"

"I dunno. Who's *he,* anyway?" A respectful gesture at the door covered with gilded wood.

"Kazam's his name. They say he hasn't touched food since he saw the Ineluctable Modality."

"What's *that?*"

Pitying smile. "You couldn't understand it just yet. Wait till you've come around a few more times. Then maybe you'll be able to read *his* book—'The Unravelling.' After that you can tackle the 'Isba Kazhlunk' that he found in the Siberian ice. It opened the way to the Ineluctable Modality, but it's pretty deep stuff—even for me."

They filed from the hall buzzing quietly, dropping coins into a bowl that stood casually by the exit. Above the bowl hung from the ceiling strips of red cloth in a circle of five. The bowl, of course, was covered with chunks of gilded wood.

Beyond the door the stringy, brown man was having a little trouble. Detective Fitzgerald would not be convinced.

"In the first place," said the detective, "you aren't licensed to collect charities. In the second place this whole thing looks like fraud and escheatment. In the third place this building isn't a dwelling and you'll have to move that cot out of here." He gestured disdainfully at an army collapsible that stood by the battered rolltop desk. Detective Fitzgerald was a big, florid man who dressed with exquisite neatness.

"I am sorry," said the stringy, brown man. "What must I do?"

"Let's begin at the beginning. The Constitution guarantees freedom of worship, but I don't know if they meant something like this. Are you a citizen?"

"No. Here are my registration papers." The stringy, brown man took them from a cheap, new wallet.

"Born in Persia. Name's Joseph Kazam. Occupation, scholar. How do you make that out?"

"It's a good word," said Joseph Kazam with a hopeless little gesture. "Are you going to send me away—deport me?"

"I don't know," said the detective thoughtfully. "If you register your religion at City Hall before we get any more complaints, it'll be all right."

"Ah," breathed Kazam. "Complaints?"

Fitzgerald looked at him quizzically. "We got one from a man named Rooney," he said. "Do you know him?"

"Yes. Runi Sarif is his real name. He has hounded me out of Norway, Ireland and Canada—wherever I try to reestablish the Cult of Hagar."

Fitzgerald looked away. "I suppose," he said matter-of-factly, "you have lots of secret enemies plotting against you."

Kazam surprised him with a burst of rich laughter. "I have been investigated too often," grinned the Persian, "not to recognize that one. You think I'm mad."

"No," mumbled the detective, crestfallen. "I just wanted to find out. Anybody running a nut cult's automatically reserved a place in Bellevue."

"Forget it, sir. I spit on the Cult of Hagar. It is my livelihood, but I know better than any man that it is a mockery. Do you know what our highest mystery is? The Ineluctable Modality." Kazam sneered.

"That's Joyce," said Fitzgerald with a grin. "You have a sense of humor, Mr. Kazam. That's a rare thing in the religious."

"Please," said Joseph Kazam. "Don't call me that. I am not worthy—the noble, sincere men who work for their various faiths are my envy. I have seen too much to be one of them."

"Go on," said Fitzgerald, leaning forward. He read books, this detective, and dearly loved an abstract discussion.

The Persian hesitated. "I," he said at length, "am an occult engineer. I am a man who can make the hidden forces work."

"Like staring a leprechaun in the eye till he finds you a pot of gold?" suggested the detective with a chuckle.

"One manifestation," said Kazam calmly. "Only one."

"Look," said Fitzgerald. "They still have that room in Bellevue. Don't say that in public—stick to the Ineluctable Modality if you know what's good for you."

"Tut," said the Persian regretfully. "He's working on you."

The detective looked around the room. "Meaning who?" he demanded.

"Runi Sarif. He's trying to reach your mind and turn you against me."

"Balony," said Fitzgerald coarsely. "You get yourself registered as a religion in twenty-four hours; then find yourself a place to live. I'll hold off any charges of fraud for a while. Just watch your step." He jammed a natty Homburg down over his sandy hair and strode pugnaciously from the office.

Joseph Kazam sighed. Obviously the detective had been disappointed.

That night, in his bachelor's flat, Fitzgerald tossed and turned uneasily on his modern bed. Being blessed with a sound digestion able to cope even with a steady diet of chain-restaurant food and

the soundest of consciences, the detective was agitated profoundly by his wakefulness.

Being, like all bachelors, a cautious man, he hesitated to dose himself with the veronal he kept for occasions like this, few and far between though they were. Finally, as he heard the locals pass one by one on the El a few blocks away and then heard the first express of the morning, with its higher-pitched bickering of wheels and quicker vibration against the track, he stumbled from bed and walked dazedly into his bathroom, fumbled open the medicine chest.

Only when he had the bottle and had shaken two pills into his hand did he think to turn on the light. He pulled the cord and dropped the pills in horror. They weren't the veronal at all but an old prescription which he had thriftily kept till they might be of use again.

Two would have been a fatal overdose. Shakily Fitzgerald filled a glass of water and drank it down, spilling about a third on his pajamas. He replaced the pills and threw away the entire bottle. You never know when a thing like that might happen again, he thought—too late to mend.

Now thoroughly sure that he needed the sedative, he swallowed a dose. By the time he had replaced the bottle he could scarcely find his way back to the bed, so sleepy was he.

He dreamed then. Detective Fitzgerald was standing on a plain, a white plain, that was very hot. His feet were bare. In the middle distance was a stone tower above which circled winged skulls—bat-winged skulls, whose rattling and flapping he could plainly hear.

From the plain—he realized then that it was a desert of fine, white sand—spouted up little funnels or vortices of fog in a circle around him. He began to run very slowly, much slower than he wanted to. He thought he was running away from the tower and the vortices, but somehow they continued to stay in his field of vision. No matter where he swerved the tower was always in front and the little twisters around him. The circle was growing smaller around him, and he redoubled his efforts to escape.

Finally he tried flying, leaping into the air. Though he drifted for yards at a time, slowly and easily, he could not land where he wanted to. From the air the vortices looked like petals of a flower, and when he came drifting down to the desert he would land in the very center of the strange blossom.

Again he ran, the circle of foggy cones following still, the tower still before him. He felt with his bare feet something tinglingly

clammy. The circle had contracted to the point of coalescence, had gripped his two feet like a trap.

He shot into the air and headed straight for the tower. The creaking, flapping noise of the bat-winged skulls was very much louder now. He cast his eyes to the side and was just able to see the tips of his own black, flapping membranes.

As though regular nightmares—always the same, yet increasingly repulsive to the detective—were not enough woe for one man to bear, he was troubled with a sudden, appalling sharpness of hearing. This was strange, for Fitzgerald had always been a little deaf in one ear.

The noises he heard were distressing things, things like the ticking of a wristwatch two floors beneath his flat, the gurgle of water in sewers as he walked the streets, humming of underground telephone wires. Headquarters was a bedlam with its stentorian breathing, the machine-gun fire of a telephone being dialed, the howitzer crash of a cigarette case snapping shut.

He had his bedroom soundproofed and tried to bear it. The inches of fibreboard helped a little; he found that he could focus his attention on a book and practically exclude from his mind the regular swish of air in his bronchial tubes, the thudding at his wrists and temples, the slushing noise of food passing through his transverse colon.

Fitzgerald did not go mad for he was a man with ideals. He believed in clean government and total extirpation of what he fondly believed was a criminal class which could be detected by the ear lobes and other distinguishing physical characteristics.

He did not go to a doctor because he knew that the word would get back to headquarters that Fitzgerald heard things and would probably begin to see things pretty soon and that it wasn't good policy to have a man like that on the force.

The detective read up on the later Freudians, trying to interpret the recurrent dream. The book said that it meant he had been secretly in love with a third cousin on his mother's side and that he was ashamed of it now and wanted to die, but that he was afraid of heavenly judgment. He knew that wasn't so; his mother had had no relations and detective Fitzgerald wasn't afraid of anything under the sun.

After two weeks of increasing horror he was walking around like a corpse, moving by instinct and wearily doing his best to dodge the accidents that seemed to trail him. It was then that he was assigned to check on the Cult of Hagar. The records showed that they had registered at City Hall, but records don't show everything.

He walked in on the cult during a service and dully noted that its members were more prosperous in appearance than they had been, and that there were more women present. Joseph Kazam was going through precisely the same ritual that the detective had last seen.

When the last bill had fallen into the pot covered with gilded wood and the last dowager had left Kazam emerged and greeted the detective.

"Fitzgerald," he said, "you damned fool, why didn't you come to me in the first place?"

"For what?" asked the detective, loosening the waxed cotton plugs in his ears.

The stringy, brown man chuckled. "Your friend Rooney's been at work on you. You hear things. You can't sleep and when you do—"

"That's plenty," interjected Fitzgerald. "Can you help me out of this mess I'm in?"

"Nothing to it. Nothing at all. Come into the office."

Dully the detective followed, wondering if the cot had been removed.

The ritual that Kazam performed was simple in the extreme, but a little revolting. The mucky aspects of it Fitzgerald completely excused when he suddenly realized that he no longer heard his own blood pumping through his veins, and that the asthmatic wheeze of the janitor in the basement was now private to the janitor again.

"How does it feel?" asked Kazam concernedly.

"Magnificent," breathed the detective, throwing away his cotton plugs. "Too wonderful for words."

"I'm sorry about what I had to do," said the other man, "but that was to get your attention principally. The real cure was mental projection." He then dismissed the bedevilment of Fitzgerald with an airy wave of the hand. "Look at this," he said.

"My God!" breathed the detective. "Is it real?"

Joseph Kazam was holding out an enormous diamond cut into a thousand glittering facets that shattered the light from his desk lamp into a glorious blaze of color.

"This," said the stringy, brown man, "is the Charity Diamond."

"You mean," sputtered the detective, "you got it from—"

"The very woman," said Kazam hastily. "And of her own free will. I have a receipt: 'For the sum of one dollar in payment for the Charity Diamond. Signed, Mrs.——' "

"Yes," said the detective. "Happy days for the Sons of Hagar. Is this what you've been waiting for?"

"This," said Kazam curiously turning the stone in his hand, "is what I've been hunting over all the world for years. And only by starting a nut cult could I get it. Thank God it's legal."

"What are you going to do now?" asked the detective.

"Use the diamond for a little trip. You will want to come along, I think. You'll have a chance to meet your Mr. Rooney."

"Lead on," said Fitzgerald. "After the past two weeks I can stand anything."

"Very well." Kazam turned out the desk lamp.

"It glows," whispered Fitzgerald. He was referring to the diamond, over whose surface was passing an eerie blue light, like the invisible flame of anthracite.

"I'd like you to pray for success, Mr. Fitzgerald," said Kazam. The detective began silently to go over his brief stock of prayers. He was barely conscious of the fact that the other man was mumbling to himself and caressing the diamond with long, wiry fingers.

The shine of the stone grew brighter yet; strangely, though, it did not pick out any of the details of the room.

Then Kazam let out an ear-splitting howl. Fitzgerald winced, closing his eyes for just a moment. When he opened them he began to curse in real earnest.

"You damned rotter!" he cried. "Taking me here—"

The Persian looked at him coldly and snapped: "Easy, man! This is real—look around you!"

The detective looked around and saw that the tower of stone was rather far in the distance, farther than in his dreams, usually. He stooped and picked up a handful of the fine white desert sand, let it run through his fingers.

"How did you get us here?" he asked hoarsely.

"Same way I cured you of Runi Sarif's curse. The diamond has rare powers to draw the attention. Ask any jewel-thief. This one, being enormously expensive, is so completely engrossing that unsuspected powers of concentration are released. That, combined with my own sound knowledge of a particular traditional branch of psychology, was enough to break the walls down which held us pent to East 59th Street."

The detective was beginning to laugh, flatly and hysterically. "I come to you hag-ridden, you first cure me and then plunge me twice as deep into Hell, Kazam! What's the good of it?"

"This isn't Hell," said the Persian matter-of-factly. "It isn't Hell,

but it isn't Heaven either. Sit down and let me explain." Obediently Fitzgerald squatted on the sand. He noticed that Kazam cast an apprehensive glance at the horizon before beginning.

"I was born in Persia," said Kazam, "but I am not Persian by blood, religion or culture. My life began in a little mountain village where I soon saw that I was treated not as the other children were. My slightest wish could command the elders of the village and if I gave an order it would be carried out.

"The reasons for all this were explained to me on my thirteenth birthday by an old man—a very old man whose beard reached to his knees. He said that he had in him only a small part of the blood of Kaidar, but that I was almost full of it, that there was little human blood in me.

"I cried and screamed and said that I didn't want to be Kaidar, that I just wanted to be a person. I ran away from the village after another year, before they began to teach me their twisted, ritualistic versions of occult principles. It was this flight which saved me from the usual fate of the Kaidar; had I stayed I would have become a celebrated miracle man, known for all of two hundred miles or so, curing the sick and cursing the well. My highest flight would be to create a new Islamic faction—number three hundred and eighty-two, I suppose.

"Instead I knocked around the world. And Lord, got knocked around too. Tramp steamers, maritime strike in Frisco, the Bela Kun regime in Hungary—I wound up in North Africa when I was about thirty years old.

"I was broke, as broke as any person could be and stay alive. A Scotswoman picked me up, hired me, taught me mathematics. I plunged into it, algebra, conics, analytics, calculus, relativity. Before I was done, I'd worked out wave-mechanics three years before that Frenchman had even begun to think about it.

"When I showed her the set of differential equations for the carbon molecule, all solved, she damned me for an unnatural monster and threw me out. But she'd given me the beginnings of mental discipline, and done it many thousands of times better than they could have in that Persian village. I began to realize what I was.

"It was then that I drifted into the nut cult business. I found out that all you need for capital is a stock of capitalized abstract qualities, like All-Knowingness, Will-Mind-Urge, Planetude and Exciliation. With that to work on I can make my living almost anywhere on the globe.

"I met Runi Sarif, who was running an older-established sect,

the Pan-European Astral Confederation of Healers. He was a Hindu from the Punjab plains in the North of India. Lord, what a mind he had! He worked me over quietly for three months before I realized what was up.

"Then there was a little interview with him. He began with the complicated salute of the Astral Confederation and got down to business. 'Brother Kazam,' he said, 'I wish to show you an ancient sacred book I have just discovered.' I laughed, of course. By that time I'd already discovered seven ancient books by myself, all ready-translated into the language of the country I would be working at the time. The 'Isba Kazhlunk' was the most successful; that's the one I found preserved in the hide of a mammoth in a Siberian glacier.

"Runi looked sour. 'Brother Kazam,' said he, 'do not scoff. Does the word *Kaidar* mean anything to you?' I played dumb and asked whether it was something out of the third chapter of the Lost Lore of Atlantis, but I remembered ever so faintly that I had been called that once.

" 'A Kaidar,' said Runi, 'is an atavism to an older, stronger people who once visited this plane and left their seed. They can be detected by'—he squinted at me sharply—'by a natural aptitude for occult pursuits. They carry in their minds learning undreamable by mortals. Now, Brother Kazam, if we could only find a Kaidar . . .'

" 'Don't carry yourself away,' I said. 'What good would that be to us?'

"Silently he produced what I'll swear was actually an ancient sacred book. And I wouldn't be surprised if he'd just discovered it, moreover. It was the psaltery of a small, very ancient sect of Edomites who had migrated beyond the Euphrates and died out. When I'd got around the rock-Hebrew it was written in I was very greatly impressed. They had some noble religious poems, one simply blistering exorcism and anathema, a lot of tedious genealogy in verse form. And they had a didactic poem on the Kaidar, based on one who had turned up in their tribe.

"They had treated him horribly—chained him to a cave wall and used him for a sort of male Sybil. They found out that the best way to get him to prophesy was to show him a diamond. Then, one sad day, they let him touch it. Blam! He vanished, taking two of the rabbis with him. The rabbis came back later; appeared in broad daylight raving about visions of Paradise they had seen.

"I quite forgot about the whole affair. At that time I was obsessed with the idea that I would become the Rockefeller of occultism—

get disciples, train them carefully and spread my cult. If Mohammed could do it, why not I? To this day I don't know the answer.

"While I was occupying myself with grandiose daydreams, Runi was busily picking over my mind. To a natural cunning and a fantastic ability to concentrate he added what I unconsciously knew, finally achieving adequate control of many factors.

"Then he stole a diamond, I don't know where, and vanished. One presumes he wanted to have that Paradise that the rabbis told of for his very own. Since then he has been trying to destroy me, sending out messages, dominating other minds on the Earthly plane —if you will excuse the jargon—to that end. He reached you, Fitzgerald, through a letter he got someone else to write and post, then when you were located and itemized he could work on you directly.

"You failed him, and he, fearing I would use you, tried to destroy you by heightening your sense of hearing and sending you visions nightly of this plane. It would destroy any common man; we are very fortunate that you are extraordinarily tough in your psychological fibre.

"Since then I have been dodging Runi Sarif, trying to get a diamond big enough to send me here through all the barriers he has prepared against my coming. You helped me very greatly." Again Kazam cast an apprehensive look at the horizon.

The detective looked around slowly. "Is this a paradise?" he asked. "If so I've been seriously misled by my Sunday School teachers." He tried weakly to smile.

"That is one of the things I don't understand—yet," said the Persian. "And this is another unpleasantness which approaches."

Fitzgerald stared in horror at the little spills of fog which were upending themselves from the sand. He had the ghastly, futile dream sensation again.

"Don't try to get away from them," snapped Kazam. "Walk *at* the things." He strode directly and pugnaciously at one of the little puffs, and it gave way before him and they were out of the circle.

"That was easy," said the detective weakly.

Suddenly before them loomed the stone tower. The winged skulls were nowhere to be seen.

Sheer into the sky reared the shaft, solid and horribly hewn from grey granite, rough-finished on the outside. The top was shingled to a shallow cone, and embrasures were black slots in the wall.

Then, Fitzgerald never knew how, they were inside the tower, in the great round room at its top. The winged skulls were perched on little straggling legs along a golden rail. Aside from the flat black-

ness of their wings all was crimson and gold in that room. There was a sickly feeling of decay and corruption about it, a thing that sickened the detective.

Hectic blotches of purple marked the tapestries that hung that circular wall, blotches that seemed like the high spots in rotten meat. The tapestries themselves the detective could not look at again after one glance. The thing he saw, sprawling over a horde of men and women, drooling flame on them, a naked figure still between its jaws, colossal, slimy paws on a little heap of human beings, was not a pretty sight.

Light came from flambeaux in the wall, and the torches cast a sickly, reddish-orange light over the scene. Thin curls of smoke from the sockets indicated an incense.

And lastly there was to be seen a sort of divan, heaped with cushions in fantastic shapes. Reclining easily on them was the most grotesque, abominable figure Fitzgerald had ever seen. It was a man, had been once. But incredible incontinence had made the creature gross and bloated with what must have been four hundred pounds of fat. Fat swelled out the cummerbund that spanned the enormous belly, fat welted out the cheeks so that the ears of the creature could not be seen beneath the embroidered turban, gouts of fat rolled in a blubbery mass about the neck like the wattles of a dead cockerel.

"Ah," hissed Joseph Kazam. "Runi Sarif . . ." He drew from his shirt a little sword or big knife from whose triangular blade glinted the light of the flambeaux.

The suety monster quivered as though maggots were beneath his skin. In a voice that was like the sound a butcher makes when he tears the fat belly from a hog's carcass, Runi Sarif said: "Go—go back. Go back—where you came from—" There was no beginning or ending to the speech. It came out between short, grunting gasps for breath.

Kazam advanced, running a thumb down the knife-blade. The monster on the divan lifted a hand that was like a bunch of sausages. The nails were a full half-inch below the level of the skin. Afterwards Fitzgerald assured himself that the hand was the most repellent aspect of the entire affair.

With creaking, flapping wingstrokes the skulls launched themselves at the Persian, their jaws clicking stonily. Kazam and the detective were in the middle of a cloud of flying jaws that were going for their throats.

Insanely Fitzgerald beat at the things, his eyes shut. When he looked they were lying on the floor. He was surprised to see that there were just four of them. He would have sworn to a dozen at

least. And they all four bore the same skillfully delivered slash mark of Kazam's knife.

There was a low, choking noise from the monster on the divan. As the detective stared Kazam stepped up the first of the three shallow steps leading to it.

What followed detective Fitzgerald could never disentangle. The lights went out, yet he could plainly see. He saw that the monstrous Runi Sarif had turned into a creature such as he had seen on the tapestry, and he saw that so had Kazam, save that the thing which was the Persian carried in one paw a blade.

They were no longer in the tower room, it seemed, nor were they on the white desert below. They were hovering in a roaring squalling tumult, in a confusion of spheres which gently collided and caromed off each other without noise.

As the detective watched, the Runi monster changed into one of the spheres and so, promptly, did Kazam. On the side of the Kazam sphere was the image of the knife. Tearing at a furious rate through the jostling confusion and blackness Fitzgerald followed, and he never knew how.

The Kazam sphere caught the other and spun dizzily around it, with a screaming noise which rose higher and higher. As it passed the top threshold of hearing, both spheres softened and spread into black, crawling clouds. Suspended in the middle of one was the knife.

The other cloud knotted itself into a furious, tight lump and charged the one which carried the blade. It hurtled into and through it, impaling itself.

Fitzgerald shook his head dizzily. They were in the tower room, and Runi Sarif lay on the divan with a cut throat. The Persian had dropped the knife, and was staring with grim satisfaction at the bleeding figure.

"Where were we?" stuttered the detective. "Where—?" At the look in Kazam's eyes he broke off and did not ask again.

The Persian said: "He stole my rights. It is fitting that I should recover them, even thus. In one plane—there is no room for two in contest."

Jovially he clapped the detective on the shoulder. "I'll send you back now. From this moment I shall be a card in your Bureau of Missing Persons. Tell whatever you wish—it won't be believed."

"It was supposed to be a paradise," said the detective.

"It is," said Kazam. "Look."

They were no longer in the tower, but on a mossy bank above a river whose water ran a gamut of pastels, changing hues without

end. It tinkled out something like a Mozart sonata and was fragrant with a score of scents.

The detective looked at one of the flowers on the bank. It was swaying of itself and talking quietly in a very small voice, like a child.

"They aren't clever," said Kazam, "but they're lovely."

Fitzgerald drew in his breath sharply as a flight of butterfly things passed above. "Send me away," he gasped. "Send me away now or I'll never be able to go. I'd kill you to stay here in another minute."

Kazam laughed. "Folly," he said. "Just as the dreary world of sand and a tower that—a certain unhappy person—created was his and him so this paradise is me and mine. My bones are its rock, my flesh is its earth, my blood is its waters, my mind is its living things."

As an unimaginably glowing drift of crystalline, chiming creatures loped across the whispering grass of the bank Kazam waved one hand in a gesture of farewell.

Fitzgerald felt himself receding with incredible velocity, and for a brief moment saw an entire panorama of the world that was Kazam. Three suns were rising from three points of the horizon, and their slanting rays lit a paradise whose only inglorious speck was a stringy, brown man on a riverbank. Then the man vanished as though he had been absorbed into the ground.

The Last Man Left in the Bar

YOU KNOW HIM, Joe—or Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben, whatever your deceitful, cheaply genial name may be. And do not lie to yourself, Gentle Reader; you know him too.

A loner, he was.

You did not notice him when he slipped in; you only knew by his aggrieved air when he (finally) caught your eye and self-consciously said "Shot of Red Top and a beer" that he'd ruffle your working day. (Six at night until two in the morning is a day? But ah, the horrible alternative is to work for a living.)

Shot of Red Top and a beer at 8:35.

And unbeknownst to him, Gentle Reader, in the garage up the street the two contrivers of his dilemma conspired; the breaths of tall dark stooped cadaverous Galardo and the mouse-eyed lassie mingled.

"Hyü shall be a religion-isst," he instructed her.

"I know the role," she squeaked and quoted: "'Woe to the day on which I was born into the world! Woe to the womb which bare me! Woe to the bowels which admitted me! Woe to the breasts which suckled me! Woe to the feet upon which I sat and rested! Woe to the hands which carried me and reared me until I grew! Woe to my tongue and my lips which have brought forth and spoken vanity, detraction, falsehood, ignorance, derision, idle tales, craft and hypocrisy! Woe to mine eyes which have looked upon scandalous things! Woe to mine ears which have delighted in the words of slanderers! Woe to my hands which have seized what did not of right belong to them! Woe to my belly and my bowels which have lusted after food unlawful to be eaten! Woe to my throat which like a fire has consumed all that it found!'"

He sobbed with the beauty of it and nodded at last, tears hanging in his eyes: "Yess, that religion. It iss one of my fave-o-ritts."

She was carried away. "I can do others. Oh, I can do others. I can do Mithras, and Isis, and Marduk, and Eddyism and Billsword and Pealing and Uranium, both orthodox and reformed."

"Mithras, Isis and Marduk are long gone and the resst are ss-till tü come. Listen tü your master, dü not chat-ter, and we shall an artwork make of which there will be talk under the green sky until all food is eaten."

Meanwhile, Gentle Reader, the loner listened. To his left strong silent sinewy men in fellowship, the builders, the doers, the darers: "So I told the foreman where he should put his Bullard. I told him I run a Warner and Swasey, I run a Warner and Swasey good, I never even *seen* a Bullard up close in my life, and where he should put it. I know how to run a Warner and Swasey and why should he take me off a Warner and Swasey I know how to run and put me on a Bullard and where he should put it ain't I right?"

"Absolutely."

To his right the clear-eyed virtuous matrons, the steadfast, the true-seeing, the loving-kind: "Oh, I don't know what I want, what do you want? I'm a Scotch drinker really but I don't feel like Scotch but if I come home with muscatel on my breath Eddie calls me a wino and laughs his head off. I don't know what I want. What do you want?"

In the box above the bar the rollicking raster raced.

VIDEO	AUDIO
Gampa smashes bottle over the head of *Bibby*.	*Gampa:* Young whippersnapper!
Bibby spits out water.	*Bibby:* Next time put some flavoring in it, Gramps!
Gampa picks up sugar bowl and smashes it over *Bibby's* head. *Bibby* licks sugar from face.	*Bibby:* My, that's better! But what of Naughty Roger and his attempted kidnapping of Sis to extort the secret of the Q-Bomb?
cut to	
Limbo Shot of Reel-Rye bottle.	*Announcer:* Yes, kiddies! What of Roger? But first a word from the makers of Reel-Rye, that happy syrup that gives your milk grown up flavor! YES! Grown up flavor!

Shot of Red Top and a beer. At 8:50.

In his own un-secret heart: Steady, boy. You've got to think this out. Nothing impossible about it, no reason to settle for a stalemate; just a little time to think it out. Galardo said the Black Chapter would accept a token submission, let me return the Seal, and that would be that. But I mustn't count on that as a datum; he lied to me about the Serpentists. Token submission *sounds* right; they go in big for symbolism. Maybe because they're so stone-broke, like the Japs. Drinking a cup of tea, they gussie it all up until it's a religion; that's the way you squeeze nourishment out of poverty—

Skip the Japs. Think. He lied to me about the Serpentists. The big thing to remember is, I have the Chapter Seal and they need it back, or think they do. All you need's a little time to think things through, place where he won't dare jump you and grab the Seal. And this is it.

"Joe. Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben, whoever you are. Hit me again."

Joe—Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben?—tilts the amber bottle quietly; the liquid's level rises and crowns the little glass with a convex meniscus. He turns off the stream with an easy roll of the wrist. The suntan line of neon tubing at the bar back twinkles off the curve of surface tension, the placid whiskey, the frothy beer. At 9:05.

To his left: "So Finkelstein finally meets Goldberg in the garment center and he grabs him like this by the lapel, and he yells, 'You louse, you rat, you no-good, what's this about you running around with my wife? I ought to—I ought to—say, you call *this* a *button*hole?"

Restrained and apprehensive laughter; Catholic, Protestant, Jew (choice of one), what's the difference I always say.

Did they have a Jewish Question still, or was all smoothed and troweled and interfaithed and brotherhoodooed—

Wait. Your formulation implies that they're in the future, and you have no proof of that. Think straighter; you don't know *where* they are, or *when* they are, or *who* they are. You *do* know that you walked into Big Maggie's resonance chamber to change the target, experimental iridium for old reliable zinc

and

"Bartender," in a controlled and formal voice. Shot of Red Top and a beer at 9:09, the hand vibrating with remembrance of a dirty-green el Greco sky which *might* be Brookhaven's heavens a million years either way from now, or one second sideways, or (bow to Method and formally exhaust the possibilities) a hallucination. The Seal snatched from the greenlit rock altar could be a blank washer, a wheel from a toy truck, or the screw top from a jar of shaving cream but for the fact that it wasn't. It was the Seal.

So: they began seeping through after that. The Chapter wanted it back. The Serpentists wanted it, period. Galardo had started by bargaining and wound up by threatening, but how could you do anything but laugh at his best offer, a rusty five-pound spur gear with a worn keyway and three teeth missing? His threats were richer than his bribes; they culminated with The Century of Flame. "Faith, father, it doesn't scare me at all, at all; sure, no man could stand it." Subjective-objective (How you used to sling *them* around!), and Master Newton's billiard-table similes dissolve into sense-impressions of pointer-readings as you learn your trade, but Galardo had scared hell out of you, or into you, with The Century of Flame.

But you had the Seal of the Chapter and you had time to think, while on the screen above the bar:

VIDEO	AUDIO
Long shot down steep, cobblestoned French village street. *Pierre* darts out of alley in middle distance, looks wildly around and runs toward camera, pistol in hand. *Annette* and *Paul* appear from same alley and dash after him.	*Paul:* Stop, you fool!
Cut to *Cu* of *Pierre's* face; beard stubble and sweat.	*Pierre:* A fool, am I?

Cut to long shot; *Pierre* aims and fires; *Paul* grabs his left shoulder and falls.

Annette: Darling!

Cut to two-shot, *Annette* and *Paul.*

Paul: Don't mind me. Take my gun—after him. He's a mad dog, I tell you!

Dolly back.
Annette takes his pistol.

Annette: This, my dear, is as good a time as any to drop my little masquerade. Are you American agents really so stupid that you never thought I might be—a plant, as you call it?

Annette stands; we see her aim down at *Paul,* out of the picture. Then we dolly in to a *Cu* of her head; she is smiling triumphantly.

Sound: click of cocking pistol.

A hand holding a pistol enters the *Cu;* the pistol muzzle touches *Annette's* neck.

Harkrider: Drop it, Madame Golkov.

Dolly back to middle shot. *Harkrider* stands behind *Annette* as *Paul* gets up briskly and takes the pistol from her hand.

Paul: No, Madame Golkov; we American agents were not really so stupid. Wish I could say the same for—your people. Pierre Tourneur *was* a plant, I am glad to say; otherwise he would not have missed me. He is one of the best pistol shots in Counterintelligence.

Cut to long shot of street, *Harkrider* and *Paul* walk away from the camera, *Annette* between them. Fadeout.

Harkrider: Come along, Madame Golkov.

Music: theme up and out.

To his right: "It ain't reasonable. All that shooting and yelling and falling down and not one person sticks his head out of a window to see what's going on. They should of had a few people looking out to see what's going on, otherwise it ain't reasonable."

"Yeah who's fighting tonight?"

"Rocky Mausoleum against Rocky Mazzarella. From Toledo."

"Rocky Mazzarella beat Rocky Granatino, didn't he?"

"Ah, that was Rocky Bolderoni, and he whipped Rocky Capacola."

Them and their neatly packaged problems, them and their neatly packaged shows with beginning middle and end. The rite of the low-budget shot-in-Europe spy series, the rite of pugilism, the rite of the dog-walk after dinner and the beer at the bar with co-celebrant worshippers at the high altar of Nothing.

9:30. Shot of Red Top and a beer, positively the last one until you get this figured out; you're beginning to buzz like a transformer.

Do they have transformers? Do they have vitamins? Do they have anything but that glaring green sky, and the rock altar and treasures like the Seal and the rusty gear with three broken teeth? "All smelling of iodoform. And all quite bald." But Galardo looked as if he were dying of tuberculosis, and the letter from the Serpentists was in a sick and straggling hand. Relics of mediaeval barbarism.

To his left—

"*Galardo!*" he screamed.

The bartender scurried over—Joe, Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben?—scowling. "What's the matter, mister?"

"I'm sorry. I got a stitch in my side. A cramp."

Bullyboy scowled competently and turned. "What'll you have, mister?"

Galardo said cadaverously: "Wodeffer my vriend hyere iss havfing."

"Shot of Red Top and a beer, right?"

"*What are you doing here?*"

"Drink-ing beferachiss . . . havf hyü de-site-it hwat tü dü?"

The bartender rapped down the shot glass and tilted the bottle over it, looking at Galardo. Some of the whiskey slopped over. The bartender started, went to the tap and carefully drew a glass of beer, slicing the collar twice.

"My vriend hyere will pay."

He got out a half dollar, fumbling, and put it on the wet wood. The bartender, old-fashioned, rapped it twice on the bar to show he wasn't stealing it even though you weren't watching; he rang it up double virtuous on the cash register, the absent owner's fishy eye.

"What are you doing here?" again, in a low, reasonable, almost amused voice to show him you have the whip hand.

"Drink-ing beferachiss . . . it iss so cle-an hyere." Galardo's sunken face, unbelievably, looked wistful as he surveyed the barroom, his head swiveling slowly from extreme left to extreme right.

"Clean. Well. Isn't it clean there?"

"Sheh, not!" Galardo said mournfully. "Sheh, not! Hyere it iss

so cle-an . . . hwai did yü outreach tü us? Hag-rid us, wretch-it, hag-rid us?" There were tears hanging in his eyes. "Haff yü de-site-it hwat tü dü?"

Expansively: "I don't pretend to understand the situation *fully*, Galardo. But you know and I know that I've got something you people [think you] need. Now there doesn't seem to be any body of law covering artifacts that appear [*plink!*] in a magnetron on accidental overload, and I just have your word that it's yours."

"Ah, that iss how yü re-member it now," said sorrowful Galardo.

"Well, it's the way it [but wasn't something green? I think of spired Toledo and three angled crosses toppling] happened. I don't want anything silly, like a million dollars in small unmarked bills, and I don't want to be bullied, to be bullied, no, I mean not by you, not by anybody. Just, just tell me who you are, what all this is about. This is nonsense, you see, and we can't have nonsense. I'm afraid I'm not expressing myself very well—"

And a confident smile and turn away from him, which shows that you aren't afraid, you can turn your back and dare him to make something of it. In public, in the bar? It is laughable; you have him in the palm of your hand. "Shot of Red Top and a beer, please, Sam." At 9:48.

The bartender draws the beer and pours the whiskey. He pauses before he picks up the dollar bill fished from the pants pocket, pauses almost timidly and works his face into a friend's grimace. But you can read him; he is making amends for his suspicion that you were going to start a drunken brawl when Galardo merely surprised you a bit. You can read him because your mind is tensed to concert pitch tonight, ready for Galardo, ready for the Serpentists, ready to crack this thing wide open; strange!

But you weren't ready for the words he spoke from his fake apologetic friend's grimace as you delicately raised the heavy amber-filled glass to your lips: "Where'd your friend go?"

You slopped the whiskey as you turned and looked.

Galardo gone.

You smiled and shrugged; he comes and goes as he pleases, you know. Irresponsible, no manners at all—but *loyal*. A prince among men when you get to know him, a prince, I tell you. All this in your smile and shrug—why, you could have been an actor! The worry, the faint neurotic worry, didn't show at all, and indeed there is no reason why it should. You have the whip hand; you have the Seal; Galardo will come crawling back and explain everything. As for example:

"You may wonder why I've asked all of you to assemble in the libr'reh."

or

"For goodness' sake, Gracie, I wasn't going to go to Cuba! When you heard me on the extension phone I was just ordering a dozen Havana *cigars!*"

or

"In your notation, we are from 19,276 AD. Our basic mathematic is a quite comprehensible subsumption of your contemporary statistical analysis and topology which I shall now proceed to explain to you."

And that was all.

With sorrow, Gentle Reader, you will have noticed that the marble did not remark: "I am chiseled," the lumber "I am sawn," the paint "I am applied to canvas," the tea leaf "I am whisked about in an exquisite Korean bowl to brew while the celebrants of *cha no yu* squeeze this nourishment out of their poverty." Vain victim, relax and play your hunches; subconscious integration does it. Stick with your lit-tle old subconscious integration and all will go *swimmingly,* if only it weren't so damned noisy in here. But it was dark on the street and conceivably things could happen there; stick with crowds and stick with witnesses, but if only it weren't so . . .

To his left they were settling down; it was the hour of confidences, and man to man they told the secret of their success: "In the needle trade, I'm in the needle trade, I don't sell anybody a crooked needle, my father told me that. Albert, he said to me, don't never sell nobody nothing but a straight needle. And today I have four shops."

To his right they were settling down; freed of the cares of the day they invited their souls, explored the spiritual realm, theologized with exquisite distinctions: "Now *wait* a minute, I didn't say I was a *good* Mormon, I said I was a Mormon and that's what I am, a Mormon. I *never* said I was a *good* Mormon, I just said I was a Mormon, my mother was a Mormon and my father was a Mormon, and that makes me a Mormon but I *never* said I was a *good* Mormon—"

Distinguo, rolled the canonical thunder; *distinguo.*

Demurely a bonneted lassie shook her small-change tambourine beneath his chin and whispered, snarling: "Galardo lied."

Admit it; you were startled. But what need for the bartender to come running with raised hand, what need for needle-trader to your left to shrink away, the L.D.S. to cower?

"Mister, that's twice you let out a yell, we run a quiet place, if you can't be good, begone."

Begob.

"I ash-assure you, bartender, it was—unintenable."

Greed vies with hate; greed wins; greed always wins: "Just keep it quiet, mister, this ain't the Bowery, this is a family place." Then, relenting: "The same?"

"Yes, please." At 10:15 the patient lassie jingled silver on the parchment palm outstretched. He placed a quarter on the tambourine and asked politely: "Did you say something to me before, Miss?"

"God bless you, sir. Yes, sir, I did say something. I said Galardo lied; the Seal is holy to the Serpent, sir, and to his humble emissaries. If you'll only hand it over, sir, the Serpent will somewhat mitigate the fearsome torments which are rightly yours for snatching the Seal from the Altar, sir."

[Snatchings from Altars? *Ma foi,* the wench is mad!]

"Listen, lady. That's only talk. What annoys me about you people is, you won't talk sense. I want to know who you are, what this is about, maybe just a little hint about your mathematics, and I'll do the rest and you can have the blooming Seal. I'm a passable physicist even if I'm only a technician. I bet there's something you didn't know. I bet you didn't know the tech shortage is tighter than the scientist shortage. You get a guy can tune a magnetron, he writes his own ticket. So I'm weak on quantum mechanics, the theory side, I'm still a good all-around man and be-*lieve* me, the Ph.D.'s would kiss my ever-loving *feet* if I told them I got an offer from Argonne—

"So listen, you Janissary emissary. I'm happy right here in this necessary commissary and here I *stay.*"

But she was looking at him with bright frightened mouse's eyes and slipped on down the line when he paused for breath, putting out the parchment palm to others but not ceasing to watch him.

Coins tapped the tambour. "God bless you. God bless you. God bless you."

The raving-maniacal ghost of G. Washington Hill descended then into a girdled sibyl; she screamed from the screen: "It's *Hit* Pa-*rade!*"

"I like them production numbers."

"I like that Pigalle Mackintosh."

"I like them production numbers. Lotsa pretty girls, pretty clothes, something to take your mind off your troubles."

"I like that Pigalle Mackintosh. She don't just sing, mind you, she plays the saxophone. Talent."

"I like them production numbers. They show you just what the song is all about. Like last week they did *Sadist Calypso* with this mad scientist cutting up the girls, and then Pigalle comes in and whips him to death at the last verse, you see just what the song's all about, something to take your mind off your troubles."

"I like that Pigalle Mackintosh. She don't just sing, mind you, she plays the saxophone and cracks a blacksnake whip, like last week in *Sadist Calypso—*"

"Yeah. Something to take your mind off your troubles."

Irritably he felt in his pocket for the Seal and moved, stumbling a little, to one of the tables against the knotty pine wall. His head slipped forward on the polished wood and he sank into the sea of myth.

Galardo came to him in his dream and spoke under a storm-green sky: "Take your mind off your troubles, Edward. It was stolen like the first penny, like the quiz answers, like the pity for your bereavement." His hand, a tambourine, was out.

"Never shall I yield," he declaimed to the miserable wretch. "By the *honneur* of a Gascon, I stole it fair and square; 'tis mine, knave! *En garde!*"

Galardo quailed and ran, melting into the sky, the altar, the tambourine.

A ham-hand manhandled him. "Light-up time," said Sam. "I let you sleep because you got it here, but I got to close up now."

"Sam," he says uncertainly.

"One for the road, mister. On the house. *Up-sy*-daisy!" meaty hooks under his armpits heaving him to the bar.

The lights are out behind the bar, the jolly neons, glittering off how many gems of amber rye and the tan crystals of beer? A meager bulb above the register is the oasis in the desert of inky night.

"Sam," groggily, "you don't understand. I mean I never explained it—"

"Drink up, mister," a pale free drink, soda bubbles lightly tinged with tawny rye. A small sip to gain time.

"Sam, there are some people after me—"

"You'll feel better in the morning, mister. Drink up, I got to close up, hurry up."

"These people, Sam [it's cold in here and scary as a noise in the

attic; the bottles stand accusingly, the chrome globes that top them eye you] these people, they've got a thing, The Century of—"

"Sure, mister, I let you sleep because you got it here, but we close up now, drink up your drink."

"Sam, let me go home with you, will you? It isn't anything like that, don't misunderstand, I just can't be alone. These people—look, I've got money—"

He spreads out what he dug from his pocket.

"Sure, mister, you got lots of money, two dollars and thirty-eight cents. Now you take your money and get out of the store because I got to lock up and clean out the register—"

"Listen, bartender, I'm not drunk, maybe I don't have much money on me but I'm an important man! Important! They couldn't run Big Maggie at Brookhaven without me, I may not have a degree but what I get from these people if you'll only let me stay here—"

The bartender takes the pale one on the house you only sipped and dumps it in the sink; his hands are iron on you and you float while he chants:

"Decent man. Decent place.
Hold their liquor. Got it here.
Try be nice. Drunken bum.
Don't—come—back."

The crash of your coccyx on the concrete and the slam of the door are one.

Run!

Down the black street stumbling over cans, cats, orts, to the pool of light in the night, safe corner where a standard sprouts and sprays radiance.

The tall black figure that steps between is Galardo.

The short one has a tambourine.

"Take it!" He thrust out the Seal on his shaking palm. "If you won't tell me anything, you won't. Take it and go away!"

Galardo inspects it and sadly says: "Thiss appearss to be a blank wash-er."

"Mistake," he slobbers. "Minute." He claws in his pockets, ripping. "Here! Here!"

The lassie squeaks: "The wheel of a toy truck. It will not do at all, sir." Her glittereyes.

"Then this! This is it! This must be it!"

Their heads shake slowly. Unable to look his fingers feel the rim and rolled threading of the jar cap.

They nod together, sad and glitter-eyed, and The Century of Flame begins.

The Adventurer

PRESIDENT FOLSOM XXIV said petulantly to his Secretary of the Treasury: "Blow me to hell, Bannister, if I understood a single word of that. *Why* can't I buy the Nicolaides Collection? And don't start with the rediscount and the Series W business again. Just tell me *why*."

The Secretary of the Treasury said with an air of apprehension and a thread-like feeling across his throat: "It boils down to—no money, Mr. President."

The President was too engrossed in thoughts of the marvelous collection to fly into a rage. "It's *such* a bargain," he said mournfully. "An archaic Henry Moore figure—really too big to finger, but I'm no culture-snob, thank God—and fifteen early Morrisons and I can't begin to tell you what else." He looked hopefully at the Secretary of Public Opinion: "Mightn't I seize it for the public good or something?"

The Secretary of Public Opinion shook his head. His pose was gruffly professional. "Not a chance, Mr. President. We'd never get away with it. The art-lovers would scream to high Heaven."

"I suppose so . . . *Why* isn't there any money?" He had swiveled dangerously on the Secretary of the Treasury again.

"Sir, purchases of the new Series W bond issue have lagged badly because potential buyers have been attracted to—"

"Stop it, stop it, *stop* it! You know I can't make head or tail of that stuff. Where's the money *going?*"

The Director of the Budget said cautiously: "Mr. President, during the biennium just ending, the Department of Defense accounted for 78 per cent of expenditures—"

The Secretary of Defense growled: "Now wait a minute, Felder! We were voted—"

The President interrupted, raging weakly: "Oh, you rascals! My father would have known what to do with you! But don't think I can't handle it. *Don't* think you can hoodwink me." He punched a button ferociously; his silly face was contorted with rage and there was a certain tension on all the faces around the Cabinet table.

Panels slid down abruptly in the walls, revealing grim-faced Secret Servicemen. Each Cabinet officer was covered by at least two automatic rifles.

"Take that—that traitor away!" the President yelled. His finger pointed at the Secretary of Defense, who slumped over the table, sobbing. Two Secret Servicemen half-carried him from the room.

President Folsom XXIV leaned back, thrusting out his lower lip. He told the Secretary of the Treasury: "*Get* me the money for the Nicolaides Collection. Do you understand? I don't care how you do it. *Get* it." He glared at the Secretary of Public Opinion. "Have you any comments?"

"No, Mr. President."

"All right, then." The President unbent and said plaintively: "I don't see why you can't all be more reasonable. I'm a very reasonable man. I don't see why I can't have a few pleasures along with my responsibilities. Really I don't. And I'm sensitive. I don't *like* these scenes. Very well. That's all. The Cabinet meeting is adjourned."

They rose and left silently in the order of their seniority. The President noticed that the panels were still down and pushed the button that raised them again and hid the granite-faced Secret Servicemen. He took out of his pocket a late Morrison fingering-piece and turned it over in his hand, a smile of relaxation and bliss spreading over his face. *Such* amusing textural contrast! *Such* unexpected variations on the classic sequences!

The Cabinet, less the Secretary of Defense, was holding a rump meeting in an untapped corner of the White House gymnasium.

"God," the Secretary of State said, white-faced. "Poor old Willy!"

The professionally gruff Secretary of Public Opinion said: "We should murder the bastard. I don't care what happens—"

The Director of the Budget said dryly: "We all know what would happen. President Folsom XXV would take office. No; we've got to keep plugging as before. Nothing short of the invincible can topple the Republic . . ."

"What about a war?" the Secretary of Commerce demanded fiercely. "We've no proof that our program will work. What about a war?"

State said wearily: "Not while there's a balance of power, my dear man. The Io-Callisto Question proved that. The Republic and the Soviet fell all over themselves trying to patch things up as soon as it seemed that there would be real shooting. Folsom XXIV and his excellency Premier Yersinsky know at least that much."

The Secretary of the Treasury said: "What would you all think of Steiner for Defense?"

The Director of the Budget was astonished. "Would he take it?"

Treasury cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact, I've asked him to stop by right about now." He hurled a medicine ball into the budgetary gut.

"Oof!" said the Director. "You bastard. Steiner would be perfect. He runs Standards like a watch." He treacherously fired the medicine ball at the Secretary of Raw Materials, who blandly caught it and slammed it back.

"Here he comes," said the Secretary of Raw Materials. "Steiner! Come and sweat some oleo off!"

Steiner ambled over, a squat man in his fifties, and said: "I don't mind if I do. Where's Willy?"

State said: "The President unmasked him as a traitor. He's probably been executed by now."

Steiner looked grim, and grimmer yet when the Secretary of the Treasury said, dead-pan: "We want to propose you for Defense."

"I'm happy in Standards," Steiner said. "Safer, too. The Man's father took an interest in science, but The Man never comes around. Things are very quiet. Why don't you invite Winch, from the National Art Commission? It wouldn't be much of a change for the worse for him."

"No brains," the Secretary for Raw Materials said briefly. "Heads up!"

Steiner caught the ball and slugged it back at him. "What good are brains?" he asked quietly.

"Close the ranks, gentlemen," State said. "These long shots are too hard on my arms."

The ranks closed and the Cabinet told Steiner what good were brains. He ended by accepting.

The Moon is all Republic. Mars is all Soviet. Titan is all Republic. Ganymede is all Soviet. But Io and Callisto, by the Treaty of Greenwich, are half-and-half Republic and Soviet.

Down the main street of the principal settlement on Io runs an invisible line. On one side of the line, the principal settlement is

known as New Pittsburgh. On the other side it is known as Nizhni-Magnitogorsk.

Into a miner's home in New Pittsburgh one day an eight-year-old boy named Grayson staggered, bleeding from the head. His eyes were swollen almost shut.

His father lurched to his feet, knocking over a bottle. He looked stupidly at the bottle, set it upright too late to save much of the alcohol, and then stared fixedly at the boy. "See what you made me do, you little bastard?" he growled, and fetched the boy a clout on his bleeding head that sent him spinning against the wall of the hut. The boy got up slowly and silently—there seemed to be something wrong with his left arm—and glowered at his father.

He said nothing.

"Fighting again," the father said, in a would-be fierce voice. His eyes fell under the peculiar fire in the boy's stare. "Damn fool—"

A woman came in from the kitchen. She was tall and thin. In a flat voice she said to the man: "Get out of here." The man hiccupped and said: "Your brat spilled my bottle. Gimme a dollar."

In the same flat voice: "I have to buy food."

"I said gimme a dollar!" The man slapped her face—it did not change—and wrenched a small purse from the string that suspended it around her neck. The boy suddenly was a demon, flying at his father with fists and teeth. It lasted only a second or two. The father kicked him into a corner where he lay, still glaring, wordless and dry-eyed. The mother had not moved; her husband's handmark was still red on her face when he hulked out, clutching the money bag.

Mrs. Grayson at last crouched in the corner with the eight-year-old boy. "Little Tommy," she said softly. "My little Tommy! Did you cross the line again?"

He was blubbering in her arms, hysterically, as she caressed him. At last he was able to say: "I didn't cross the line, Mom. Not this time. It was in school. They said our name was really Krasinsky. God-damn him!" the boy shrieked. "They said his grandfather was named Krasinsky and he moved over the line and changed his name to Grayson! God-damn him! Doing that to us!"

"Now darling," his mother said, caressing him. "Now, darling." His trembling began to ebb. She said: "Let's get out the spools, Tommy. You mustn't fall behind in school. You owe that to me, don't you, darling?"

"Yes, Mom," he said. He threw his spindly arms around her and kissed her. "Get out the spools. We'll show him. I mean them."

President Folsom XXIV lay on his death-bed, feeling no pain, mostly because his personal physician had pumped him full of morphine. Dr. Barnes sat by the bed holding the presidential wrist and waiting, occasionally nodding off and recovering with a belligerent stare around the room. The four wire-service men didn't care whether he fell asleep or not; they were worriedly discussing the nature and habits of the President's first-born, who would shortly succeed to the highest office in the Republic.

"A firebrand, they tell me," the A.P. man said unhappily.

"Firebrands I don't mind," the U.P. man said. "He can send out all the inflammatory notes he wants just as long as he isn't a fiend for exercise. I'm not as young as I once was. You boys wouldn't remember the *old* President, Folsom XXII. He used to do point-to-point hiking. He worshipped old F.D.R."

The I.N.S. man said, lowering his voice: "Then he was worshipping the wrong Roosevelt. Teddy was the athlete."

Dr. Barnes started, dropped the presidential wrist and held a mirror to the mouth for a moment. "Gentlemen," he said, "the President is dead."

"O.K.," the A.P. man said. "Let's go, boys. I'll send in the flash. U.P., you go cover the College of Electors. I.N.S., get onto the President Elect. Trib, collect some interviews and background—"

The door opened abruptly; a colonel of infantry was standing there, breathing hard, with an automatic rifle at port. "Is he dead?" he asked.

"Yes," the A.P. man said. "If you'll let me past—"

"Nobody leaves the room," the colonel said grimly. "I represent General Slocum, Acting President of the Republic. The College of Electors is acting now to ratify—"

A burst of gunfire caught the colonel in the back; he spun and fell, with a single hoarse cry. More gunfire sounded through the White House. A Secret Serviceman ducked his head through the door: "President's dead? You boys stay put. We'll have this thing cleaned up in an hour—" He vanished.

The doctor sputtered his alarm and the newsmen ignored him with professional poise. The A.P. man asked: "Now who's Slocum? Defense Command?"

I.N.S. said: "I remember him. Three stars. He headed up the Tactical Airborne Force out in Kansas four-five years ago. I think he was retired since then."

A phosphorus grenade crashed through the window and exploded with a globe of yellow flame the size of a basketball; dense clouds of

phosphorus pentoxide gushed from it and the sprinkler system switched on, drenching the room.

"Come on!" hacked the A.P. man, and they scrambled from the room and slammed the door. The doctor's coat was burning in two or three places, and he was retching feebly on the corridor floor. They tore his coat off and flung it back into the room.

The U.P. man, swearing horribly, dug a sizzling bit of phosphorus from the back of his hand with a pen-knife and collapsed, sweating, when it was out. The I.N.S. man passed him a flask and he gurgled down half a pint of liquor. "Who flang that brick?" he asked faintly.

"Nobody," the A.P. man said gloomily. "That's the hell of it. None of this is happening. Just the way Taft the Pretender never happened in '03. Just the way the Pentagon Mutiny never happened in '67."

"'68," the U.P. man said faintly. "It didn't happen in '68, not '67."

The A.P. man smashed a fist into the palm of his hand and swore. "*God*-damn," he said. "Some day I'd like to—" He broke off and was bitterly silent.

The U.P. man must have been a little dislocated with shock and quite drunk to talk the way he did. "Me too," he said. "Like to tell the story. Maybe it was '67 not '68. I'm not sure now. Can't write it down so the details get lost and then after a while it didn't happen at all. Revolution'd be good deal. But it takes people t' make revolution. *People*. With eyes 'n ears. 'N memories. We make things not-happen an' we make people not-see an' not-hear . . ." He slumped back against the corridor wall, nursing his burned hand. The others were watching him, very scared.

Then the A.P. man caught sight of the Secretary of Defense striding down the corridor, flanked by Secret Servicemen. "Mr. Steiner!" he called. "What's the picture?"

Steiner stopped, breathing heavily, and said: "Slocum's barricaded in the Oval Study. They don't want to smash in. He's about the only one left. There were only fifty or so. The Acting President's taken charge at the Study. You want to come along?"

They did, and even hauled the U.P. man after them.

The Acting President, who would be President Folsom XXV as soon as the Electoral College got around to it, had his father's face —the petulant lip, the soft jowl—on a hard young body. He also had an auto-rifle ready to fire from the hip. Most of the Cabinet was present. When the Secretary of Defense arrived, he turned on him.

"Steiner," he said nastily, "can you explain why there should be a rebellion against the Republic in your department?"

"Mr. President," Steiner said, "Slocum was retired on my recommendation two years ago. It seems to me that my responsibility ended there and Security should have taken over."

The President Elect's finger left the trigger of the auto-rifle and his lip drew in a little. "Quite so," he said curtly, and turned to the door. "Slocum!" he shouted. "Come out of there. We can use gas if we want."

The door opened unexpectedly and a tired-looking man with three stars on each shoulder stood there, bare-handed. "All right," he said drearily. "I was fool enough to think something could be done about the regime. But you fat-faced imbeciles are going to go on and on and—"

The stutter of the auto-rifle cut him off. The President Elect's knuckles were white as he clutched the piece's forearm and grip; the torrent of slugs continued to hack and plow the general's body until the magazine was empty. "Burn that," he said curtly, turning his back on it. "Dr. Barnes, come here. I want to know about my father's passing."

The doctor, hoarse and red-eyed from the whiff of phosphorus smoke, spoke with him. The U.P. man had sagged drunkenly into a chair, but the other newsmen noted that Dr. Barnes glanced at them as he spoke, in a confidential murmur.

"Thank you, doctor," the President Elect said at last, decisively. He gestured to a Secret Serviceman. "Take those traitors away." They went, numbly.

The Secretary of State cleared his throat. "Mr. President," he said, "I take this opportunity to submit the resignations of myself and fellow Cabinet members according to custom."

"That's all right," the President Elect said. "You may as well stay on. I intend to run things myself anyway." He hefted the auto-rifle. "You," he said to the Secretary of Public Opinion. "You have some work to do. Have the memory of my father's—artistic—preoccupations obliterated as soon as possible. I wish the Republic to assume a warlike posture—yes; what is it?"

A trembling messenger said: "Mr. President, I have the honor to inform you that the College of Electors has elected you President of the Republic—unanimously."

Cadet Fourth Classman Thomas Grayson lay on his bunk and sobbed in an agony of loneliness. The letter from his mother was

crumpled in his hand: "—prouder than words can tell of your appointment to the Academy. Darling, I hardly knew my grandfather but I know that you will serve as brilliantly as he did, to the eternal credit of the Republic. You must be brave and strong for my sake—"

He would have given everything he had or ever could hope to have to be back with her, and away from the bullying, sneering fellow-cadets of the Corps. He kissed the letter—and then hastily shoved it under his mattress as he heard footsteps.

He popped to a brace, but it was only his roommate Ferguson. Ferguson was from Earth, and rejoiced in the lighter Lunar gravity which was punishment to Grayson's Io-bred muscles.

"Rest, mister," Ferguson grinned.

"Thought it was night inspection."

"Any minute now. They're down the hall. Lemme tighten your bunk or you'll be in trouble—" Tightening the bunk he pulled out the letter and said, calfishly: "Ah-*hah!* Who is she?—" and opened it.

When the cadet officers reached the room they found Ferguson on the floor being strangled black in the face by spidery little Grayson. It took all three of them to pull him off. Ferguson went to the infirmary and Grayson went to the Commandant's office.

The Commandant glared at the cadet from under the most spectacular pair of eyebrows in the Service. "Cadet Grayson," he said, "explain what occurred."

"Sir, Cadet Ferguson began to read a letter from my mother without my permission."

"That is not accepted by the Corps as grounds for mayhem. Do you have anything further to say?"

"Sir, I lost my temper. All I thought of was that it was an act of disrespect to my mother and somehow to the Corps and the Republic too—that Cadet Ferguson was dishonoring the Corps."

Bushwah, the Commandant thought. *A snow job and a crude one.* He studied the youngster. He had never seen such a brace from an Io-bred fourth-classman. It must be torture to muscles not yet toughened up to even Lunar gravity. Five minutes more and the boy would have to give way, and serve him right for showing off.

He studied Grayson's folder. It was too early to tell about academic work, but the fourth-classman was a bear—or a fool—for extra duty. He had gone out for half a dozen teams and applied for membership in the exacting Math Club *and* Writing Club. The Commandant glanced up; Grayson was still in his extreme brace.

The Commandant suddenly had the queer idea that Grayson could hold it until it killed him.

"One hundred hours of pack-drill," he barked, "to be completed before quarter-term. Cadet Grayson, if you succeed in walking off your tours, remember that there is a tradition of fellowship in the Corps which its members are expected to observe. Dismiss."

After Grayson's steel-sharp salute and exit the Commandant dug deeper into the folder. Apparently there was something wrong with the boy's left arm, but it had been passed by the examining team that visited Io. Most unusual. Most irregular. But nothing could be done about it now.

The President, softer now in body than on his election day, and infinitely more cautious, snapped: "It's all very well to create an incident. But where's the money to come from? Who wants the rest of Io anyway? And what will happen if there's war?"

Treasury said: "The hoarders will supply the money, Mr. President. A system of percentage-bounties for persons who report currency-hoarders, and then enforced purchase of a bond issue."

Raw materials said: "We need that iron, Mr. President. We need it desperately."

State said: "All our evaluations indicate that the Soviet Premier would consider nothing less than armed invasion of his continental borders as occasion for all-out war. The consumer-goods party in the Soviet has gained immensely during the past five years and of course their armaments have suffered. Your shrewd directive to put the Republic in a warlike posture has borne fruit, Mr. President . . ."

President Folsom XXV studied them narrowly. To him the need for a border incident culminating in a forced purchase of Soviet Io did not seem as pressing as they thought, but they were, after all, specialists. And there was no conceivable way they could benefit from it personally. The only alternative was that they were offering their professional advice and that it would be best to heed it. Still, there was a vague, nagging something . . .

Nonsense, he decided. The spy dossiers on his Cabinet showed nothing but the usual. One had been blackmailed by an actress after an affair and railroaded her off the Earth. Another had a habit of taking bribes to advance favorite sons in civil and military service. And so on. The Republic could not suffer at their hands; the Republic and the dynasty were impregnable. You simply spied on everybody—including the spies—and ordered summary executions

often enough to show that you meant it, and kept the public ignorant: deaf-dumb-blind ignorant. The spy system was simplicity itself; you had only to let things get as tangled and confused as possible until *nobody* knew who was who. The executions were literally no problem, for guilt or innocence made no matter. And mind-control when there were four newspapers, six magazines and three radio and television stations was a job for a handful of clerks.

No; the Cabinet couldn't be getting away with anything. The system was unbeatable.

President Folsom XXV said: "Very well. Have it done."

Mrs. Grayson, widow, of New Pittsburgh, Io, disappeared one night. It was in all the papers and on all the broadcasts. Some time later she was found dragging herself back across the line between Nizhni-Magnitogorsk and New Pittsburgh in sorry shape. She had a terrible tale to tell about what she had suffered at the hands and so forth of the Nizhni-Magnitogorskniks. A diplomatic note from the Republic to the Soviet was answered by another note which was answered by the dispatch of the Republic's First Fleet to Io which was answered by the dispatch of the Soviet's First and Fifth Fleets to Io.

The Republic's First Fleet blew up the customary deserted target hulk, fulminated over a sneak sabotage attack and moved in its destroyers. Battle was joined.

Ensign Thomas Grayson took over the command of his destroyer when its captain was killed on his bridge. An electrified crew saw the strange, brooding youngster perform prodigies of skill and courage, and responded to them. In one week of desultory action the battered destroyer had accounted for seven Soviet destroyers and a cruiser.

As soon as this penetrated to the flagship Grayson was decorated and given a flotilla. His weird magnetism extended to every officer and man aboard the seven craft. They struck like phantoms, cutting out cruisers and battlewagons in wild unorthodox actions that couldn't have succeeded but did—every time. Grayson was badly wounded twice, but his driving nervous energy carried him through.

He was decorated again and given the battlewagon of an ailing four-striper.

Without orders he touched down on the Soviet side of Io, led out a landing party of marines and bluejackets, cut through two regiments of Soviet infantry, and returned to his battlewagon with

prisoners: the top civil and military administrators of Soviet Io.

They discussed him nervously aboard the flagship.

"He had a mystical quality, Admiral. His men would follow him into an atomic furnace. And—and I almost believe he could bring them through safely if he wanted to." The laugh was nervous.

"He doesn't look like much. But when he turns on the charm—watch out!"

"He's—he's a *winner*. Now I wonder what I mean by that?"

"I know what you mean. They turn up every so often. People who can't be stopped. People who have everything. Napoleons. Alexanders. Stalins. Up from nowhere."

"Suleiman. Hitler. Folsom I. Jenghiz Khan."

"Well, let's get it over with."

They tugged at their gold-braided jackets and signalled the honor guard.

Grayson was piped aboard, received another decoration and another speech. This time he made a speech in return.

President Folsom XXV, not knowing what else to do, had summoned his Cabinet. "Well?" he rasped at the Secretary of Defense.

Steiner said with a faint shrug: "Mr. President, there is nothing to be done. He has the fleet, he has the broadcasting facilities, he has the people."

"People!" snarled the President. His finger stabbed at a button and the wall panels snapped down to show the Secret Servicemen standing in their niches. The finger shot tremulously out at Steiner. "Kill that traitor!" he raved.

The chief of the detail said uneasily: "Mr. President, we were listening to Grayson before we came on duty. He says he's de facto President now—"

"Kill him! Kill him!"

The chief went doggedly on: "—and we liked what he had to say about the Republic and he said citizens of the Republic shouldn't take orders from you and he'd relieve you—"

The President fell back.

Grayson walked in, wearing his plain ensign's uniform and smiling faintly. Admirals and four-stripers flanked him.

The chief of the detail said: "Mr. Grayson! Are you taking over?"

The man in the ensign's uniform said gravely: "Yes. And just call me 'Grayson,' please. The titles come later. You can go now."

The chief gave a pleased grin and collected his detail. The rather

slight, youngish man who had something wrong with one arm was in charge—*complete* charge.

Grayson said: "Mr. Folsom, you are relieved of the presidency. Captain, take him out and—" He finished with a whimsical shrug. A portly four-striper took Folsom by one arm. Like a drugged man the deposed president let himself be led out.

Grayson looked around the table. "Who are you gentlemen?"

They felt his magnetism, like the hum when you pass a power station.

Steiner was the spokesman. "Grayson," he said soberly, "we were Folsom's Cabinet. However, there is more that we have to tell you. Alone, if you will allow it."

"Very well, gentlemen." Admirals and captains backed out, looking concerned.

Steiner said: "Grayson, the story goes back many years. My predecessor, William Malvern, determined to overthrow the regime, holding that it was an affront to the human spirit. There have been many such attempts. All have broken up on the rocks of espionage, terrorism and opinion-control—the three weapons which the regime holds firmly in its hands.

"Malvern tried another approach than espionage versus espionage, terrorism versus terrorism and opinion-control versus opinion-control. He determined to use the basic fact that certain men make history: that there are men born to be mould-breakers. They are the Philips of Macedon, the Napoleons, Stalins and Hitlers, the Suleimans—the adventurers. Again and again they flash across history, bringing down an ancient empire, turning ordinary soldiers of the line into unkillable demons of battle, uprooting cultures, breathing new life into moribund peoples.

"There are common denominators among all the adventurers. Intelligence, of course. Other things are more mysterious but are always present. They are foreigners. Napoleon the Corsican. Hitler the Austrian. Stalin the Georgian. Philip the Macedonian. Always there is an Oedipus complex. Always there is physical deficiency. Napoleon's stature. Stalin's withered arm—and yours. Always there is a minority disability, real or fancied.

"This is a shock to you, Grayson, but you must face it. *You were manufactured.*

"Malvern packed the Cabinet with the slyest double-dealers he could find and they went to work. Eighty-six infants were planted on the outposts of the Republic in simulated family environments. Your mother was not your mother but one of the most brilliant

actresses ever to drop out of sight on Earth. Your intelligence-heredity was so good that we couldn't turn you down for lack of a physical deficiency. We withered your arm with gamma radiation. I hope you will forgive us. There was no other way.

"Of the eighty-six you are the one that worked. Somehow the combination for you was minutely different from all the other combinations, genetically or environmentally, and it worked. That is all we were after. The mould has been broken, you know now what you are. Let come whatever chaos is to come; the dead hand of the past no longer lies on—"

Grayson went to the door and beckoned; two captains came in. Steiner broke off his speech as Grayson said to them: "These men deny my godhood. Take them out and—" he finished with a whimsical shrug.

"Yes, your divinity," said the captains, without a trace of humor in their voices.

The Words of Guru

YESTERDAY, when I was going to meet Guru in the woods a man stopped me and said: "Child, what are you doing out at one in the morning? Does your mother know where you are? How old are you, walking around this late?"

I looked at him, and saw that he was white-haired, so I laughed. Old men never see; in fact men hardly see at all. Sometimes young women see part, but men rarely ever see at all. "I'm twelve on my next birthday," I said. And then, because I would not let him live to tell people, I said, "and I'm out this late to see Guru."

"Guru?" he asked. "Who is Guru? Some foreigner, I suppose? Bad business mixing with foreigners, young fellow. Who is Guru?"

So I told him who Guru was, and just as he began talking about cheap magazines and fairy-tales I said one of the words that Guru taught me and he stopped talking. Because he was an old man and his joints were stiff he didn't crumple up but fell in one piece, hitting his head on the stone. Then I went on.

Even though I'm going to be only twelve on my next birthday

I know many things that old people don't. And I remember things that other boys can't. I remember being born out of darkness, and I remember the noises that people made about me. Then when I was two months old I began to understand that the noises meant things like the things that were going on inside my head. I found out that I could make the noises too, and everybody was very much surprised. "Talking!" they said, again and again. "And so very young! Clara, what do you make of it?" Clara was my mother.

And Clara would say: "I'm sure I don't know. There never was any genius in my family, and I'm sure there was none in Joe's." Joe was my father.

Once Clara showed me a man I had never seen before, and told me that he was a reporter—that he wrote things in newspapers. The reporter tried to talk to me as if I were an ordinary baby, I didn't even answer him, but just kept looking at him until his eyes fell and he went away. Later Clara scolded me and read me a little piece in the reporter's newspaper that was supposed to be funny—about the reporter asking me very complicated questions and me answering with baby-noises. It was not true, of course. I didn't say a word to the reporter, and he didn't ask me even one of the questions.

I heard her read the little piece, but while I listened I was watching the slug crawling on the wall. When Clara was finished I asked her: "What is that grey thing?"

She looked where I pointed, but couldn't see it. "What grey thing, Peter?" she asked. I had her call me by my whole name, Peter, instead of anything silly like Petey. "What grey thing?"

"It's as big as your hand, Clara, but soft. I don't think it has any bones at all. It's crawling up, but I don't see any face on the topwards side. And there aren't any legs."

I think she was worried, but she tried to baby me by putting her hand on the wall and trying to find out where it was. I called out whether she was right or left of the thing. Finally she put her hand right through the slug. And then I realized that she really couldn't see it, and didn't believe it was there. I stopped talking about it then and only asked her a few days later: "Clara, what do you call a thing which one person can see and another person can't?"

"An illusion, Peter," she said. "If that's what you mean." I said nothing, but let her put me to bed as usual, but when she turned out the light and went away I waited a little while and then called out softly. "Illusion! Illusion!"

At once Guru came for the first time. He bowed, the way he always has since, and said: "I have been waiting."

"I didn't know that was the way to call you," I said.

"Whenever you want me I will be ready. I will teach you, Peter —if you want to learn. Do you know what I will teach you?"

"If you will teach me about the grey thing on the wall," I said, "I will listen. And if you will teach me about real things and unreal things I will listen."

"These things," he said thoughtfully, "very few wish to learn. And there are some things that nobody ever wished to learn. And there are some things that I will not teach."

Then I said: "The things nobody has ever wished to learn I will learn. And I will even learn the things you do not wish to teach."

He smiled mockingly. "A master has come," he said, half-laughing. "A master of Guru."

That was how I learned his name. And that night he taught me a word which would do little things, like spoiling food.

From that day, to the time I saw him last night he has not changed at all, though now I am as tall as he is. His skin is still as dry and shiny as ever it was, and his face is still bony, crowned by a head of very coarse, black hair.

When I was ten years old I went to bed one night only long enough to make Joe and Clara suppose I was fast asleep. I left in my place something which appears when you say one of the words of Guru and went down the drainpipe outside my window. It always was easy to climb down and up, ever since I was eight years old.

I met Guru in Inwood Hill Park. "You're late," he said.

"Not too late," I answered. "I know it's never too late for one of these things."

"How do you know?" he asked sharply. "This is your first."

"And maybe my last," I replied. "I don't like the idea of it. If I have nothing more to learn from my second than my first I shan't go to another."

"You don't know," he said. "You don't know what it's like— the voices, and the bodies slick with unguent, leaping flames; mind-filling ritual! You can have no idea at all until you've taken part."

"We'll see," I said. "Can we leave from here?"

"Yes," he said. Then he taught me the word I would need to know, and we both said it together.

The place we were in next was lit with red lights, and I think that the walls were of rock. Though of course there was no real seeing there, and so the lights only seemed to be red, and it was not real rock.

As we were going to the fire one of them stopped us. "Who's with you?" she asked, calling Guru by another name. I did not know that he was also the person bearing that name, for it was a very powerful one.

He cast a hasty, sidewise glance at me and then said: "This is Peter of whom I have often told you."

She looked at me then and smiled, stretching out her oily arms. "Ah," she said, softly, like the cats when they talk at night to me. "Ah, this is Peter. Will you come to me when I call you, Peter? And sometimes call for me—in the dark—when you are alone?"

"Don't do that!" said Guru, angrily pushing past her. "He's very young—you might spoil him for his work."

She screeched at our backs: "Guru and his pupil—fine pair! Boy, he's no more real than I am—you're the only real thing here!"

"Don't listen to her," said Guru. "She's wild and raving. They're always tight-strung when this time comes around."

We came near the fires then, and sat down on rocks. They were killing animals and birds and doing things with their bodies. The blood was being collected in a basin of stone, which passed through the crowd. The one to my left handed it to me. "Drink," she said, grinning to show me her fine, white teeth. I swallowed twice from it and passed it to Guru.

When the bowl had passed all around we took off our clothes. Some, like Guru, did not wear them, but many did. The one to my left sat closer to me, breathing heavily at my face. I moved away. "Tell her to stop, Guru," I said. "This isn't part of it, I know."

Guru spoke to her sharply in their own language, and she changed her seat, snarling.

Then we all began to chant, clapping our hands and beating our thighs. One of them rose slowly and circled about the fires in a slow pace, her eyes rolling wildly. She worked her jaws and flung her arms about so sharply that I could hear the elbows crack. Still shuffling her feet against the rock floor she bent her body backwards down to her feet. Her belly-muscles were bands nearly standing out from her skin, and the oil rolled down her body and legs. As the palms of her hands touched the ground, she collapsed in a twitching heap and began to set up a thin wailing noise against the steady chant and hand beat that the rest of us were keeping up. Another of them did the same as the first, and we chanted louder for her and still louder for the third. Then, while we still beat our hands and thighs, one of them took up the third, laid her across the altar and made her ready with a stone knife. The fire's light

gleamed off the chipped edge of obsidian. As her blood drained down the groove, cut as a gutter into the rock of the altar, we stopped our chant and the fires were snuffed out.

But still we could see what was going on, for these things were, of course, not happening at all—only seeming to happen, really, just as all the people and things there only seemed to be what they were. Only I was real. That must be why they desired me so.

As the last of the fires died Guru excitedly whispered: "The Presence!" He was very deeply moved.

From the pool of blood from the third dancer's body there issued the Presence. It was the tallest one there, and when it spoke its voice was deeper, and when it commanded its commands were obeyed.

"Let blood!" it commanded, and we gashed ourselves with flints. It smiled and showed teeth bigger and sharper and whiter than any of the others.

"Make water!" it commanded, and we all spat on each other. It flapped its wings and rolled its eyes, which were bigger and redder than any of the others.

"Pass flame!" it commanded, and we breathed smoke and fire on our limbs. It stamped its feet, let blue flames roar from its mouth, and they were bigger and wilder than any of the others.

Then it returned to the pool of blood and we lit the fires again. Guru was staring straight before him; I tugged his arm. He bowed as though we were meeting for the first time that night.

"What are you thinking of?" I asked. "We shall go now."

"Yes," he said heavily. "Now we shall go." Then we said the word that had brought us there.

The first man I killed was Brother Paul, at the school where I went to learn the things that Guru did not teach me.

It was less than a year ago, but it seems like a very long time. I have killed so many times since then.

"You're a very bright boy, Peter," said the brother.

"Thank you, brother."

"But there are things about you that I don't understand. Normally I'd ask your parents but—I feel that they don't understand either. You were an infant prodigy, weren't you?"

"Yes, brother."

"There's nothing very unusual about that—glands, I'm told. You know what glands are?"

Then I was alarmed. I had heard of them, but I was not certain whether they were the short, thick green men who wear only metal or the things with many legs with whom I talked in the woods.

"How did you find out?" I asked him.

"But Peter! You look positively frightened, lad! I don't know a thing about them myself, but Father Frederick does. He has whole books about them, though I sometimes doubt whether he believes them himself."

"They aren't good books, brother," I said. "They ought to be burned."

"That's a savage thought, my son. But to return to your own problem—"

I could not let him go any further knowing what he did about me. I said one of the words Guru taught me and he looked at first very surprised and then seemed to be in great pain. He dropped across his desk and I felt his wrist to make sure, for I had not used that word before. But he was dead.

There was a heavy step outside and I made myself invisible. Stout Father Frederick entered, and I nearly killed him too with the word, but I knew that that would be very curious. I decided to wait, and went through the door as Father Frederick bent over the dead monk. He thought he was asleep.

I went down the corridor to the book-lined office of the stout priest and, working quickly, piled all his books in the center of the room and lit them with my breath. Then I went down to the schoolyard and made myself visible again when there was nobody looking. It was very easy. I killed a man I passed on the street the next day.

There was a girl named Mary who lived near us. She was fourteen then, and I desired her as those in the Cavern out of Time and Space had desired me.

So when I saw Guru and he had bowed, I told him of it, and he looked at me in great surprise. "You are growing older, Peter," he said.

"I am, Guru. And there will come a time when your words will not be strong enough for me."

He laughed. "Come, Peter," he said. "Follow me if you wish. There is something that is going to be done—" He licked his thin, purple lips and said: "I have told you what it will be like."

"I shall come," I said. "Teach me the word." So he taught me the word and we said it together.

The place we were in next was not like any of the other places I had been to before with Guru. It was No-place. Always before there had been the seeming passage of time and matter, but here there was not even that. Here Guru and the others cast off their forms

and were what they were, and No-place was the only place where they could do this.

It was not like the Cavern, for the Cavern had been out of Time and Space, and this place was not enough of a place even for that. It was No-place.

What happened there does not bear telling, but I was made known to certain ones who never departed from there. All came to them as they existed. They had not color or the seeming of color, or any seeming of shape.

There I learned that eventually I would join with them; that I had been selected as the one of my planet who was to dwell without being forever in that No-place.

Guru and I left, having said the word.

"Well?" demanded Guru, staring me in the eye.

"I am willing," I said. "But teach me one word now—"

"Ah," he said grinning. "The girl?"

"Yes," I said. "The word that will mean much to her."

Still grinning, he taught me the word.

Mary, who had been fourteen, is now fifteen and what they call incurably mad.

Last night I saw Guru again and for the last time. He bowed as I approached him. "Peter," he said warmly.

"Teach me the word," said I.

"It is not too late."

"Teach me the word."

"You can withdraw—with what you master you can master also this world. Gold without reckoning; sardonyx and gems, Peter! Rich crushed velvet—stiff, scraping, embroidered tapestries!"

"Teach me the word."

"Think, Peter, of the house you could build. It could be of white marble, and every slab centered by a winking ruby. Its gate could be of beaten gold within and without and it could be built about one slender tower of carven ivory, rising mile after mile into the turquoise sky. You could see the clouds float underneath your eyes."

"Teach me the word."

"Your tongue could crush the grapes that taste like melted silver. You could hear always the song of the bulbul and the lark that sounds like the dawnstar made musical. Spikenard that will bloom a thousand thousand years could be ever in your nostrils. Your hands could feel the down of purple Himalayan swans that is softer than a sunset cloud."

"Teach me the word."

"You could have women whose skin would be from the black of ebony to the white of snow. You could have women who would be as hard as flints or as soft as a sunset cloud."

"Teach me the word."

Guru grinned and said the word.

Now, I do not know whether I will say that word, which was the last that Guru taught me, today or tomorrow or until a year has passed.

It is a word that will explode this planet like a stick of dynamite in a rotten apple.

Shark Ship

IT WAS THE SPRING SWARMING of the plankton; every man and woman and most of the children aboard Grenville's Convoy had a job to do. As the seventy-five gigantic sailing ships ploughed their two degrees of the South Atlantic, the fluid that foamed beneath their cutwaters seethed also with life. In the few weeks of the swarming, in the few meters of surface water where sunlight penetrated in sufficient strength to trigger photosynthesis, microscopic spores burst into microscopic plants, were devoured by minute animals which in turn were swept into the maws of barely visible sea monsters almost a tenth of an inch from head to tail; these in turn were fiercely pursued and gobbled in shoals by the fierce little brit, the tiny herring and shrimp that could turn a hundred miles of green water to molten silver before your eyes.

Through the silver ocean of the swarming the Convoy scudded and tacked in great controlled zigs and zags, reaping the silver of the sea in the endlessly reeling bronze nets each ship payed out behind.

The Commodore in *Grenville* did not sleep during the swarming; he and his staff dispatched cutters to scout the swarms, hung on the meteorologists' words, digested the endless reports from the scout vessels and toiled through the night to prepare the dawn signal. The mainmast flags might tell the captains "Convoy course five degrees

right," or "Two degrees left," or only "Convoy course: no change." On those dawn signals depended the life for the next six months of the million and a quarter souls of the Convoy. It had not happened often, but it had happened that a succession of blunders reduced a Convoy's harvest below the minimum necessary to sustain life. Derelicts were sometimes sighted and salvaged from such convoys; strong-stomached men and women were needed for the first boarding and clearing away of human debris. Cannibalism occurred, an obscene thing one had nightmares about.

The seventy-five captains had their own particular purgatory to endure throughout the harvest, the Sail-Seine Equation. It was their job to balance the push on the sails and the drag of the ballooning seines so that push exceeded drag by just the number of pounds that would keep the ship on course and in station, given every conceivable variation of wind force and direction, temperature of water, consistency of brit, and smoothness of hull. Once the catch was salted down it was customary for the captains to converge on *Grenville* for a roaring feast by way of letdown.

Rank had its privileges. There was no such relief for the captains' Net Officers or their underlings in Operations and Maintenance, or for their Food Officers under whom served the Processing and Stowage people. They merely worked, streaming the nets twenty-four hours a day, keeping them bellied out with lines from mast and outriding gigs, keeping them spooling over the great drum amidships, tending the blades that had to scrape the brit from the nets without damaging the nets, repairing the damage when it did occur; and without interruption of the harvest, flash-cooking the part of the harvest to be cooked, drying the part to be dried, pressing oil from the harvest as required, and stowing what was cooked and dried and pressed where it would not spoil, where it would not alter the trim of the ship, where it would not be pilfered by children. This went on for weeks after the silver had gone thin and patchy against the green, and after the silver had altogether vanished.

The routines of many were not changed at all by the swarming season. The blacksmiths, the sailmakers, the carpenters, the water-tenders, to a degree the storekeepers, functioned as before, tending to the fabric of the ship, renewing, replacing, reworking. The ships were things of brass, bronze and unrusting steel. Phosphor-bronze strands were woven into net, lines, and cables; cordage, masts and hull were metal; all were inspected daily by the First Officer and his men and women for the smallest pinhead of corrosion. The

smallest pinhead of corrosion could spread; it could send a ship to the bottom before it had done spreading, as the chaplains were fond of reminding worshippers when the ships rigged for church on Sundays. To keep the hellish red of iron rust and the sinister blue of copper rust from invading, the squads of oilers were always on the move, with oil distilled from the catch. The sails and the clothes alone could not be preserved; they wore out. It was for this that the felting machines down below chopped wornout sails and clothing into new fibers and twisted and rolled them with kelp and with glue from the catch into new felt for new sails and clothing.

While the plankton continued to swarm twice a year, Grenville's Convoy could continue to sail the South Atlantic, from ten-mile limit to ten-mile limit. Not one of the seventy-five ships in the Convoy had an anchor.

The Captain's Party that followed the end of Swarming 283 was slow getting under way. McBee, whose ship was Port Squadron 19, said to Salter of Starboard Squadron 30: "To be frank, I'm too damned exhausted to care whether I ever go to another party, but I didn't want to disappoint the Old Man."

The Commodore, trim and bronzed, not showing his eighty years, was across the great cabin from them greeting new arrivals.

Salter said: "You'll feel differently after a good sleep. It was a great harvest, wasn't it? Enough weather to make it tricky and interesting. Remember 276? *That* was the one that wore me out. A grind, going by the book. But this time, on the fifteenth day my foretopsail was going to go about noon, big rip in her, but I needed her for my S-S balance. What to do? I broke out a balloon spinnaker—now wait a minute, let me tell it first before you throw the book at me—and pumped my fore trim tank out. Presto! No trouble; foretopsail replaced in fifteen minutes."

McBee was horrified. "You could have lost your net!"

"My weatherman absolutely ruled out any sudden squalls."

"Weatherman. You could have lost your net!"

Salter studied him. "Saying that once was thoughtless, McBee. Saying it twice is insulting. Do you think I'd gamble with twenty thousand lives?"

McBee passed his hands over his tired face. "I'm sorry," he said. "I told you I was exhausted. Of course under special circumstances it can be a safe maneuver." He walked to a porthole for a glance at his own ship, the nineteenth in the long echelon behind *Grenville*. Salter stared after him. "Losing one's net" was a phrase that occurred in several proverbs; it stood for abysmal folly. In

actuality a ship that lost its phosphor-bronze wire mesh was doomed, and quickly. One could improvise with sails or try to jury-rig a net out of the remaining rigging, but not well enough to feed twenty thousand hands, and no fewer than that were needed for maintenance. Grenville's Convoy had met a derelict which lost its net back before 240; children still told horror stories about it, how the remnants of port and starboard watches, mad to a man, were at war, a war of vicious night forays with knives and clubs.

Salter went to the bar and accepted from the Commodore's steward his first drink of the evening, a steel tumbler of colorless fluid distilled from a fermented mash of sargassum weed. It was about forty per cent alcohol and tasted pleasantly of iodides.

He looked up from his sip and his eyes widened. There was a man in captain's uniform talking with the Commodore and he did not recognize his face. But there had been no promotions lately!

The Commodore saw him looking and beckoned him over. He saluted and then accepted the old man's hand-clasp. "Captain Salter," the Commodore said, "my youngest and rashest, and my best harvester. Salter, this is Captain Degerand of the White Fleet."

Salter frankly gawked. He knew perfectly well that Grenville's Convoy was far from sailing alone upon the seas. On watch he had beheld distant sails from time to time. He was aware that cruising the two-degree belt north of theirs was another convoy and that in the belt south of theirs was still another, in fact that the seaborne population of the world was a constant one billion, eighty million. But never had he expected to meet face to face any of them except the one and a quarter million who sailed under Grenville's flag.

Degerand was younger than he, all deeply tanned skin and flashing pointed teeth. His uniform was perfectly ordinary and very queer. He understood Salter's puzzled look. "It's woven cloth," he said. "The White Fleet was launched several decades after Grenville's. By then they had machinery to reconstitute fibers suitable for spinning and they equipped us with it. It's six of one and half a dozen of the other. I think our sails may last longer than yours, but the looms require a lot of skilled labor when they break down."

The Commodore had left them.

"Are we very different from you?" Salter asked.

Degerand said: "Our differences are nothing. Against the dirt men we are brothers—blood brothers."

The term "dirt men" was discomforting; the juxtaposition with "blood" more so. Apparently he was referring to whoever it was that lived on the continents and islands—a shocking breach of man-

ners, of honor, of faith. The words of the Charter circled through Salter's head. ". . . return for the sea and its bounty . . . renounce and abjure the land from which we . . ." Salter had been ten years old before he knew that there *were* continents and islands. His dismay must have shown on his face.

"They have doomed us," the foreign captain said. "We cannot refit. They have sent us out, each upon our two degrees of ocean in larger or smaller convoys as the richness of the brit dictated, and they have cut us off. To each of us will come the catastrophic storm, the bad harvest, the lost net, and death."

It was Salter's impression that Degerand had said the same words many times before, usually to large audiences.

The Commodore's talker boomed out: "Now hear this!" His huge voice filled the stateroom easily; his usual job was to roar through a megaphone across a league of ocean, supplementing flag and lamp signals. "Now hear this!" he boomed. "There's tuna on the table—big fish for big sailors!"

A grinning steward whisked a felt from the sideboard, and there by Heaven it lay! A great baked fish as long as your leg, smoking hot and trimmed with kelp! A hungry roar greeted it; the captains made for the stack of trays and began to file past the steward, busy with knife and steel.

Salter marvelled to Degerand: "I didn't dream there were any left that size. When you think of the tons of brit that old-timer must have gobbled!"

The foreigner said darkly: "We slew the whales, the sharks, the perch, the cod, the herring—everything that used the sea but us. They fed on brit and one another and concentrated it in firm savory flesh like that, but we were jealous of the energy squandered in the long food chain; we decreed that the chain would stop with the link brit-to-man."

Salter by then had filled a tray. "Brit's more reliable," he said. "A Convoy can't take chances on fisherman's luck." He happily bolted a steaming mouthful.

"Safety is not everything," Degerand said. He ate, more slowly than Salter. "Your Commodore said you were a rash seaman."

"He was joking. If he believed that, he would have to remove me from command."

The Commodore walked up to them, patting his mouth with a handkerchief and beaming. "Surprised, eh?" he demanded. "Glasgow's lookout spotted that big fellow yesterday half a kilometer away. He signalled me and I told him to lower and row for him.

The boat crew sneaked up while he was browsing and gaffed him clean. Very virtuous of us. By killing him we economize on brit and provide a fitting celebration for my captains. Eat hearty! It may be the last we'll ever see."

Degerand rudely contradicted his senior officer. "They can't be wiped out clean, Commodore, not exterminated. The sea is deep. Its genetic potential cannot be destroyed. We merely make temporary alterations of the feeding balance."

"Seen any sperm whale lately?" the Commodore asked, raising his white eyebrows. "Go get yourself another helping, captain, before it's gone." It was a dismissal; the foreigner bowed and went to the buffet.

The Commodore asked: "What do you think of him?"

"He has some extreme ideas," Salter said.

"The White Fleet appears to have gone bad," the old man said. "That fellow showed up on a cutter last week in the middle of harvest wanting my immediate, personal attention. He's on the staff of the White Fleet Commodore. I gather they're all like him. They've got slack; maybe rust has got ahead of them, maybe they're overbreeding. A ship lost its net and they didn't let it go. They cannibalized rigging from the whole fleet to make a net for it."

"But—"

"But—but—but. Of course it was the wrong thing and now they're all suffering. Now they haven't the stomach to draw lots and cut their losses." He lowered his voice. "Their idea is some sort of raid on the Western Continent, that America thing, for steel and bronze and whatever else they find not welded to the deck. It's nonsense, of course, spawned by a few silly-clever people on the staff. The crews will never go along with it. Degerand was sent to invite us in!"

Salter said nothing for a while and then: "I certainly hope we'll have nothing to do with it."

"I'm sending him back at dawn with my compliments, and a negative, and my sincere advice to his Commodore that he drop the whole thing before his own crew hears of it and has him bowspritted." The Commodore gave him a wintry smile. "Such a reply is easy to make, of course, just after concluding an excellent harvest. It might be more difficult to signal a negative if we had a couple of ships unnetted and only enough catch in salt to feed sixty per cent of the hands. Do you think you could give the hard answer under those circumstances?"

"I think so, sir."

The Commodore walked away, his face enigmatic. Salter thought he knew what was going on. He had been given one small foretaste of top command. Perhaps he was being groomed for Commodore—not to succeed the old man, surely, but his successor.

McBee approached, full of big fish and drink. "Foolish thing I said," he stammered. "Let's have drink, forget about it, eh?"

He was glad to.

"Damn fine seaman!" McBee yelled after a couple more drinks. "Best little captain in the Convoy! Not a scared old crock like poor old McBee, 'fraid of every puff of wind!"

And then he had to cheer up McBee until the party began to thin out. McBee fell asleep at last and Salter saw him to his gig before boarding his own for the long row to the bobbing masthead lights of his ship.

Starboard Squadron Thirty was at rest in the night. Only the slowly-moving oil lamps of the women on their ceaseless rust patrol were alive. The brit catch, dried, came to some seven thousand tons. It was a comfortable margin over the 5,670 tons needed for six months' full rations before the autumnal swarming and harvest. The trim tanks along the keel had been pumped almost dry by the ship's current prison population as the cooked and dried and salted cubes were stored in the glass-lined warehouse tier; the gigantic vessel rode easily on a swelling sea before a Force One westerly breeze.

Salter was exhausted. He thought briefly of having his cox'n whistle for a bosun's chair so that he might be hauled at his ease up the fifty-yard cliff that was the hull before them, and dismissed the idea with regret. Rank hath its privileges and also its obligations. He stood up in the gig, jumped for the ladder and began the long climb. As he passed the portholes of the cabin tiers he virtuously kept eyes front, on the bronze plates of the hull inches from his nose. Many couples in the privacy of their double cabins would be celebrating the end of the back-breaking, night-and-day toil. One valued privacy aboard the ship; one's own 648 cubic feet of cabin, one's own porthole, acquired an almost religious meaning, particularly after the weeks of swarming cooperative labor.

Taking care not to pant, he finished the climb with a flourish, springing onto the flush deck. There was no audience. Feeling a little ridiculous and forsaken, he walked aft in the dark with only the wind and the creak of the rigging in his ears. The five great basket masts strained silently behind their breeze-filled sails; he paused a moment beside Wednesday mast, huge as a redwood, and

put his hands on it to feel the power that vibrated in its steel lattice-work.

Six intent women went past, their hand lamps sweeping the deck; he jumped, though they never noticed him. They were in something like a trance state while on their tour of duty. Normal courtesies were suspended for them; with their work began the job of survival. One thousand women, five per cent of the ship's company, inspected night and day for corrosion. Sea water is a vicious solvent and the ship had to live in it; fanaticism was the answer.

His stateroom above the rudder waited; the hatchway to it glowed a hundred feet down the deck with the light of a wasteful lantern. After harvest, when the tanks brimmed with oil, one type acted as though the tanks would brim forever. The captain wearily walked around and over a dozen stay-ropes to the hatchway and blew out the lamp. Before descending he took a mechanical look around the deck; all was well—

Except for a patch of paleness at the fantail.

"Will this day never end?" he asked the darkened lantern and went to the fantail. The patch was a little girl in a night dress wandering aimlessly over the deck, her thumb in her mouth. She seemed to be about two years old, and was more than half asleep. She could have gone over the railing in a moment; a small wail, a small splash—

He picked her up like a feather. "Who's your daddy, princess?" he asked.

"Dunno," she grinned. The devil she didn't! It was too dark to read her ID necklace and he was too tired to light the lantern. He trudged down the deck to the crew of inspectors. He said to their chief: "One of you get this child back to her parents' cabin," and held her out.

The chief was indignant. "Sir, we are on watch!"

"File a grievance with the Commodore if you wish. Take the child."

One of the rounder women did, and made cooing noises while her chief glared. "Bye-bye, princess," the captain said. "You ought to be keel-hauled for this, but I'll give you another chance."

"Bye-bye," the little girl said, waving, and the captain went yawning down the hatchway to bed.

His stateroom was luxurious by the austere standards of the ship. It was equal to six of the standard nine-by-nine cabins in volume, or to three of the double cabins for couples. These however had something he did not. Officers above the rank of lieutenant were

celibate. Experience had shown that this was the only answer to nepotism, and nepotism was a luxury which no convoy could afford. It meant, sooner or later, inefficient command. Inefficient command meant, sooner or later, death.

Because he thought he would not sleep, he did not.

Marriage. Parenthood. What a strange business it must be! To share a bed with a wife, a cabin with two children decently behind their screen for sixteen years . . . what did one talk about in bed? His last mistress had hardly talked at all, except with her eyes. When these showed signs that she was falling in love with him, Heaven knew why, he broke with her as quietly as possible and since then irritably rejected the thought of acquiring a successor. That had been two years ago when he was 38, and already beginning to feel like a cabin-crawler fit only to be dropped over the fantail into the wake. An old lecher, a roué, a *user* of women. Of course she had talked a little; what did they have in common to talk about? With a wife ripening beside him, with children to share, it would have been different. That pale, tall quiet girl deserved better than he could give; he hoped she was decently married now in a double cabin, perhaps already heavy with the first of her two children.

A whistle squeaked above his head; somebody was blowing into one of the dozen speaking tubes clustered against the bulkhead. Then a push-wire popped open the steel lid of Tube Seven, Signals. He resignedly picked up the flexible reply tube and said into it: "This is the captain. Go ahead."

"*Grenville* signals Force Three squall approaching from astern, sir."

"Force Three squall from astern. Turn out the fore-starboard watch. Have them reef sail to Condition Charlie."

"Fore-starboard watch, reef sail to Condition Charlie, aye-aye."

"Execute."

"Aye-aye, sir." The lid of Tube Seven, Signals, popped shut. At once he heard the distant, penetrating shrill of the pipe, the faint vibration as one sixth of the deck crew began to stir in their cabins, awaken, hit the deck bleary-eyed, begin to trample through the corridors and up the hatchways to the deck. He got up himself and pulled on clothes, yawning. Reefing from Condition Fox to Condition Charlie was no serious matter, not even in the dark, and Walters on watch was a good officer. But he'd better have a look.

Being flush-decked, the ship offered him no bridge. He conned her from the "first top" of Friday mast, the rearmost of her five. The "first top" was a glorified crow's nest fifty feet up the steel

basketwork of that great tower; it afforded him a view of all masts and spars in one glance.

He climbed to his command post too far gone for fatigue. A full moon now lit the scene, good. That much less chance of a green topman stepping on a ratline that would prove to be a shadow and hurtling two hundred feet to the deck. That much more snap in the reefing; that much sooner it would be over. Suddenly he was sure he would be able to sleep if he ever got back to bed again.

He turned for a look at the bronze, moonlit heaps of the great net on the fantail. Within a week it would be cleaned and oiled; within two weeks stowed below in the cable tier, safe from wind and weather.

The regiments of the fore-starboard watch swarmed up the masts from Monday to Friday, swarmed out along the spars as bosun's whistles squealed out the drill—

The squall struck.

Wind screamed and tore at him; the captain flung his arms around a stanchion. Rain pounded down upon his head and the ship reeled in a vast, slow curtsey, port to starboard. Behind him there was a metal sound as the bronze net shifted inches sideways, back.

The sudden clouds had blotted out the moon; he could not see the men who swarmed along the yards but with sudden terrible clarity he felt through the soles of his feet what they were doing. They were clawing their way through the sail-reefing drill, blinded and deafened by sleety rain and wind. They were out of phase by now; they were no longer trying to shorten sail equally on each mast; they were trying to get the thing done and descend. The wind screamed in his face as he turned and clung. Now they were ahead of the job on Monday and Tuesday masts, behind the job on Thursday and Friday masts.

So the ship was going to pitch. The wind would catch it unequally and it would kneel in prayer, the cutwater plunging with a great, deep stately obeisance down into the fathoms of ocean, the stern soaring slowly, ponderously, into the air until the topmost rudder-trunnion streamed a hundred-foot cascade into the boiling froth of the wake.

That was half the pitch. It happened, and the captain clung, groaning aloud. He heard above the screaming wind loose gear rattling on the deck, clashing forward in an avalanche. He heard a heavy clink at the stern and bit his lower lip until it ran with blood that the tearing cold rain flooded from his chin.

The pitch reached its maximum and the second half began, after interminable moments when she seemed frozen at a five-degree angle forever. The cutwater rose, rose, rose, the bowsprit blocked out horizon stars, the loose gear countercharged astern in a crushing tide of bales, windlass cranks, water-breakers, stilling coils, steel sun reflectors, lashing tails of bronze rigging—

Into the heaped piles of the net, straining at its retainers on the two great bollards that took root in the keel itself four hundred feet below. The energy of the pitch hurled the belly of the net open crashing, into the sea. The bollards held for a moment.

A retainer cable screamed and snapped like a man's back, and then the second cable broke. The roaring slither of the bronze links thundering over the fantail shook the ship.

The squall ended as it had come; the clouds scudded on and the moon bared itself, to shine on a deck scrubbed clean. The net was lost.

Captain Salter looked down the fifty feet from the rim of the crow's nest and thought: I should jump. It would be quicker that way.

But he did not. He slowly began to climb down the ladder to the bare deck.

Having no electrical equipment, the ship was necessarily a representative republic rather than a democracy. Twenty thousand people can discuss and decide only with the aid of microphones, loud-speakers and rapid calculators to balance the ayes and noes. With lungpower the only means of communication and an abacus in a clerk's hands the only tallying device, certainly no more than fifty people can talk together and make sense, and there are pessimists who say the number is closer to five than fifty. The Ship's Council that met at dawn on the fantail numbered fifty.

It was a beautiful dawn; it lifted the heart to see salmon sky, iridescent sea, spread white sails of the Convoy ranged in a great slanting line across sixty miles of oceanic blue.

It was the kind of dawn for which one lived—a full catch salted down, the water-butts filled, the evaporators trickling from their thousand tubes nine gallons each sunrise to sunset, wind enough for easy steerageway and a pretty spread of sail. These were the rewards. One hundred and forty-one years ago Grenville's Convoy had been launched at Newport News, Virginia, to claim them.

Oh, the high adventure of the launching! The men and women who had gone aboard thought themselves heroes, conquerors of

nature, self-sacrificers for the glory of NEMET! But NEMET meant only Northeastern Metropolitan Area, one dense warren that stretched from Boston to Newport, built up and dug down, sprawling westward, gulping Pittsburgh without a pause, beginning to peter out past Cincinnati.

The first generation asea clung and sighed for the culture of NEMET, consoled itself with its patriotic sacrifice; any relief was better than none at all, and Grenville's Convoy had drained one and a quarter million population from the huddle. They were immigrants into the sea; like all immigrants they longed for the Old Country. Then the second generation. Like all second generations they had no patience with the old people or their tales. *This* was real, this sea, this gale, this rope! Then the third generation. Like all third generations it felt a sudden desperate hollowness and lack of identity. What was real? Who are we? What is NEMET which we have lost? But by then grandfather and grandmother could only mumble vaguely; the cultural heritage was gone, squandered in three generations, spent forever. As always, the fourth generation did not care.

And those who sat in counsel on the fantail were members of the fifth and sixth generations. They knew all there was to know about life. Life was the hull and masts, the sail and rigging, the net and the evaporators. Nothing more. *Nothing less.* Without masts there was no life. Nor was there life without the net.

The Ship's Council did not command; command was reserved to the captain and his officers. The Council governed, and on occasion tried criminal cases. During the black Winter Without Harvest eighty years before it had decreed euthanasia for all persons over sixty-three years of age and for one out of twenty of the other adults aboard. It had rendered bloody judgment on the ringleaders of Peale's Mutiny. It had sent them into the wake and Peale himself had been bowspritted, given the maritime equivalent of crucifixion. Since then no megalomaniacs had decided to make life interesting for their shipmates, so Peale's long agony had served its purpose.

The fifty of them represented every department of the ship and every age-group. If there was wisdom aboard, it was concentrated there on the fantail. But there was little to say.

The eldest of them, Retired Sailmaker Hodgins, presided. Venerably bearded, still strong of voice, he told them:

"Shipmates, our accident has come. We are dead men. Decency demands that we do not spin out the struggle and sink into—unlaw-

ful eatings. Reason tells us that we cannot survive. What I propose is an honorable voluntary death for us all, and the legacy of our ship's fabric to be divided among the remainder of the Convoy at the discretion of the Commodore."

He had little hope of his old man's viewpoint prevailing. The Chief Inspector rose at once. She had only three words to say: *"Not my children."*

Women's heads nodded grimly, and men's with resignation. Decency and duty and common sense were all very well until you ran up against that steel bulkhead. *Not my children.*

A brilliant young chaplain asked: "Has the question even been raised as to whether a collection among the fleet might not provide cordage enough to improvise a net?"

Captain Salter should have answered that, but he, murderer of the twenty thousand souls in his care, could not speak. He nodded jerkily at his signals officer.

Lieutenant Zwingli temporized by taking out his signals slate and pretending to refresh his memory. He said: "At 0035 today a lamp signal was made to *Grenville* advising that our net was lost. *Grenville* replied as follows: 'Effective now, your ship no longer part of Convoy. Have no recommendations. Personal sympathy and regrets. Signed, Commodore.' "

Captain Salter found his voice. "I've sent a couple of other messages to *Grenville* and to our neighboring vessels. They do not reply. This is as it should be. We are no longer part of the Convoy. Through our own—lapse—we have become a drag on the Convoy. We cannot look to it for help. I have no word of condemnation for anybody. This is how life is."

The chaplain folded his hands and began to pray inaudibly.

And then a council member spoke whom Captain Salter knew in another role. It was Jewel Flyte, the tall, pale girl who had been his mistress two years ago. She must be serving as an alternate, he thought, looking at her with new eyes. He did not know she was even that; he had avoided her since then. And no, she was not married; she wore no ring. And neither was her hair drawn back in the semi-official style of the semi-official voluntary celibates, the super-patriots (or simply sex-shy people, or dislikers of children) who surrendered their right to reproduce for the good of the ship (or their own convenience). She was simply a girl in the uniform of a—a what? He had to think hard before he could match the badge over her breast to a department. She was Ship's Archivist with her crossed key and quill, an obscure clerk and shelf-duster

under—far under!—the Chief of Yeomen Writers. She must have been elected alternate by the Yeomen in a spasm of sympathy for her blind-alley career.

"My job," she said in her calm steady voice, "is chiefly to search for precedents in the Log when unusual events must be recorded and nobody recollects offhand the form in which they should be recorded. It is one of those provoking jobs which must be done by someone but which cannot absorb the full time of a person. I have therefore had many free hours of actual working time. I have also remained unmarried and am not inclined to sports or games. I tell you this so you may believe me when I say that during the past two years I have read the Ship's Log in its entirety."

There was a little buzz. Truly an astonishing, and an astonishingly pointless, thing to do! Wind and weather, storms and calms, messages and meetings and censuses, crimes, trials and punishments of a hundred and forty-one years; what a bore!

"Something I read," she went on, "may have some bearing on our dilemma." She took a slate from her pocket and read: "Extract from the Log dated June 30th, Convoy Year 72. 'The Shakespeare-Joyce-Melville Party returned after dark in the gig. They had not accomplished any part of their mission. Six were dead of wounds; all bodies were recovered. The remaining six were mentally shaken but responded to our last ataractics. They spoke of a new religion ashore and its consequences on population. I am persuaded that we seabornes can no longer relate to the continentals. The clandestine shore trips will cease.' The entry is signed 'Scolley, Captain'."

A man named Scolley smiled for a brief proud moment. His ancestor! And then like the others he waited for the extract to make sense. Like the others he found that it would not do so.

Captain Salter wanted to speak, and wondered how to address her. She had been "Jewel" and they all knew it; could he call her "Yeoman Flyte" without looking like, being, a fool? Well, if he was fool enough to lose his net he was fool enough to be formal with an ex-mistress. "Yeoman Flyte," he said, "where does the extract leave us?"

In her calm voice she told them all: "Penetrating the few obscure words, it appears to mean that until Convoy Year 72 the Charter was regularly violated, with the connivance of successive captains. I suggest that we consider violating it once more, to survive."

The Charter. It was a sort of ground-swell of their ethical life, learned early, paid homage every Sunday when they were rigged for

church. It was inscribed in phosphor-bronze plates on Monday mast of every ship at sea, and the wording was always the same.

> IN RETURN FOR THE SEA AND ITS BOUNTY WE RENOUNCE AND ABJURE FOR OURSELVES AND OUR DESCENDANTS THE LAND FROM WHICH WE SPRUNG: FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF MAN WE SET SAIL FOREVER.

At least half of them were unconsciously murmuring the words.

Retired Sailmaker Hodgins rose, shaking. "Blasphemy!" he said. "The woman should be bowspritted!"

The chaplain said thoughtfully: "I know a little more about what constitutes blasphemy than Sailmaker Hodgins, I believe, and assure you that he is mistaken. It is a superstitious error to believe that there is any religious sanction for the Charter. It is no ordinance of God but a contract between men."

"It is a Revelation!" Hodgins shouted. "A Revelation! It is the newest testament! It is God's finger pointing the way to the clean hard life at sea, away from the grubbing and filth, from the overbreeding and the sickness!"

That was a common view.

"What about my children?" demanded the Chief Inspector. "Does God want them to starve or be—be—" She could not finish the question, but the last unspoken word of it rang in all their minds.

Eaten.

Aboard some ships with an accidental preponderance of the elderly, aboard other ships where some blazing personality generations back had raised the Charter to a powerful cult, suicide might have been voted. Aboard other ships where nothing extraordinary had happened in six generations, where things had been easy and the knack and tradition of hard decision-making had been lost, there might have been confusion and inaction and the inevitable degeneration into savagery. Aboard Salter's ship the Council voted to send a small party ashore to investigate. They used every imaginable euphemism to describe the action, took six hours to make up their minds, and sat at last on the fantail cringing a little, as if waiting for a thunderbolt.

The shore party would consist of Salter, Captain; Flyte, Archivist; Pemberton, Junior Chaplain; Graves, Chief Inspector.

Salter climbed to his conning top on Friday mast, consulted a chart from the archives, and gave the order through speaking tube to the tiller gang: "Change course red four degrees."

The repeat came back incredulously.

"Execute," he said. The ship creaked as eighty men heaved the tiller; imperceptibly at first the wake began to curve behind them.

Ship Starboard 30 departed from its ancient station; across a mile of sea the bosun's whistles could be heard from Starboard 31 as she put on sail to close the gap.

"They might have signalled something," Salter thought, dropping his glasses at last on his chest. But the masthead of Starboard 31 remained bare of all but its commission pennant.

He whistled up his signals officer and pointed to their own pennant. "Take that thing down," he said hoarsely, and went below to his cabin.

The new course would find them at last riding off a place the map described as New York City.

Salter issued what he expected would be his last commands to Lieutenant Zwingli; the whaleboat was waiting in its davits; the other three were in it.

"You'll keep your station here as well as you're able," said the captain. "If we live, we'll be back in a couple of months. Should we not return, that would be a potent argument against beaching the ship and attempting to live off the continent—but it will be your problem then and not mine."

They exchanged salutes. Salter sprang into the whaleboat, signalled the deck hands standing by at the ropes and the long creaking descent began.

Salter, Captain; age 40; unmarried *ex officio;* parents Clayton Salter, master instrument maintenanceman, and Eva Romano, chief dietician; selected from dame school age 10 for A Track training; seamanship school certificate at age 16, navigation certificate at age 20, First Lieutenants School age 24, commissioned ensign age 24; lieutenant at 30, commander at 32; commissioned captain and succeeded to command of Ship Starboard 30 the same year.

Flyte, Archivist, age 25; unmarried; parents Joseph Flyte, entertainer, and Jessie Waggoner, entertainer; completed dame school age 14, B Track training, Yeoman's School certificate at age 16, Advanced Yeoman's School certificate at age 18, Efficiency rating, 3.5.

Pemberton, Chaplain, age 30; married to Riva Shields, nurse; no children by choice; parents Will Pemberton, master distiller-watertender, and Agnes Hunt, felter-machinist's mate; completed dame

school age 12, B Track training, Divinity School Certificate at age 20; mid-starboard watch curate, later fore-starboard chaplain.

Graves, chief inspector, age 34, married to George Omany, blacksmith third class; two children; completed dame school age 15, Inspectors School Certificate at age 16; inspector third class, second class, first class, master inspector, then chief. Efficiency rating, 4.0; three commendations.

Versus the Continent of North America.

They all rowed for an hour; then a shoreward breeze came up and Salter stepped the mast. "Ship your oars," he said, and then wished he dared countermand the order. Now they would have time to think of what they were doing.

The very water they sailed was different in color from the deep water they knew, and different in its way of moving. The life in it—

"Great God!" Mrs. Graves cried, pointing astern.

It was a huge fish, half the size of their boat. It surfaced lazily and slipped beneath the water in an uninterrupted arc. They had seen steel-grey skin, not scales, and a great slit of a mouth.

Salter said, shaken: "Unbelievable. Still, I suppose in the unfished offshore waters a few of the large forms survive. And the intermediate sizes to feed them—" And foot-long smaller sizes to feed *them,* and—

Was it mere arrogant presumption that Man had permanently changed the life of the sea?

The afternoon sun slanted down and the tip of Monday mast sank below the horizon's curve astern; the breeze that filled their sail bowled them towards a mist which wrapped vague concretions they feared to study too closely. A shadowed figure huge as a mast with one arm upraised; behind it blocks and blocks of something solid.

"This is the end of the sea," said the captain.

Mrs. Graves said what she would have said if a silly under-inspector had reported to her blue rust on steel: "Nonsense!" Then, stammering: "I beg your pardon, captain. Of course you are correct."

"But it sounded strange," Chaplain Pemberton said helpfully. "I wonder where they all are?"

Jewel Flyte said in her quiet way: "We should have passed over the discharge from waste tubes before now. They used to pump their waste through tubes under the sea and discharge it several miles out. It colored the water and it stank. During the first voyag-

ing years the captains knew it was time to tack away from land by the color and the bad smell."

"They must have improved their disposal system by now," Salter said, "It's been centuries."

His last word hung in the air.

The chaplain studied the mist from the bow. It was impossible to deny it; the huge thing was an Idol. Rising from the bay of a great city, an Idol, and a female one—the worst kind! "I thought they had them only in High Places," he muttered, discouraged.

Jewel Flyte understood. "I think it has no religious significance," she said. "It's a sort of—huge piece of scrimshaw."

Mrs. Graves studied the vast thing and saw in her mind the glyphic arts as practiced at sea: compacted kelp shaved and whittled into little heirloom boxes, miniature portrait busts of children. She decided that Yeoman Flyte had a dangerously wild imagination. Scrimshaw! Tall as a mast!

There should be some commerce, thought the captain. Boats going to and fro. The Place ahead was plainly an island, plainly inhabited; goods and people should be going to it and coming from it. Gigs and cutters and whaleboats should be plying this bay and those two rivers; at that narrow bit they should be lined up impatiently waiting, tacking and riding under sea anchors and furled sails. There was nothing but a few white birds that shrilled nervously at their solitary boat.

The blocky concretions were emerging from the haze; they were sunset-red cubes with regular black eyes dotting them; they were huge dice laid down side by side by side, each as large as a ship, each therefore capable of holding twenty thousand persons.

Where were they all?

The breeze and the tide drove them swiftly through the neck of water where a hundred boats should be waiting. "Furl the sail," said Salter. "Out oars."

With no sounds but the whisper of the oarlocks, the cries of the white birds and the slapping of the wavelets they rowed under the shadow of the great red dice to a dock, one of a hundred teeth projecting from the island's rim.

"Easy the starboard oars," said Salter; "handsomely the port oars. Up oars. Chaplain, the boat hook." He had brought them to a steel ladder; Mrs. Graves gasped at the red rust thick on it. Salter tied the painter to a corroded brass ring. "Come along," he said, and began to climb.

When the four of them stood on the iron-plated dock Pember-

ton, naturally, prayed. Mrs. Graves followed the prayer with half her attention or less; the rest she could not divert from the shocking slovenliness of the prospect—rust, dust, litter, neglect. What went on in the mind of Jewel Flyte her calm face did not betray. And the captain scanned those black windows a hundred yards inboard—no; inland!—and waited and wondered.

They began to walk to them at last, Salter leading. The sensation underfoot was strange and dead, tiring to the arches and the thighs.

The huge red dice were not as insane close-up as they had appeared from a distance. They were thousand-foot cubes of brick, the stuff that lined ovens. They were set back within squares of green, cracked surfacing which Jewel Flyte named "cement" or "concrete" from some queer corner of her erudition.

There was an entrance, and written over it: THE HERBERT BROWNELL JR. MEMORIAL HOUSES. A bronze plaque shot a pang of guilt through them all as they thought of The Compact, but its words were different and ignoble.

NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

> A project Apartment is a Privilege and not a Right. Daily Inspection is the Cornerstone of the Project. Attendance at Least Once a Week at the Church or Synagogue of your Choice is Required for Families wishing to remain in Good Standing; Proof of Attendance must be presented on Demand. Possession of Tobacco or Alcohol will be considered Prima Facie Evidence of Undesirability. Excessive Water Use, Excessive Energy Use and Food Waste will be Grounds for Desirability Review. The speaking of Languages other than American by persons over the Age of Six will be considered Prima Facie Evidence of Nonassimilability, though this shall not be construed to prohibit Religious Ritual in Languages other than American.

Below it stood another plaque in paler bronze, an afterthought:

> None of the foregoing shall be construed to condone the Practice of Depravity under the Guise of Religion by Whatever Name, and all Tenants are warned that any Failure to report the Practice of Depravity will result in summary Eviction and Denunciation.

Around this later plaque some hand had painted with crude strokes of a tar brush a sort of anatomical frame at which they stared in wondering disgust.

At last Pemberton said: "They were a devout people." Nobody noticed the past tense, it sounded so right.

"Very sensible," said Mrs. Graves. "No nonsense about them."

Captain Salter privately disagreed. A ship run with such dour coercion would founder in a month; could land people be that much different?

Jewel Flyte said nothing, but her eyes were wet. Perhaps she was thinking of scared little human rats dodging and twisting through the inhuman maze of great fears and minute rewards.

"After all," said Mrs. Graves, "it's nothing but a Cabin Tier. We have cabins and so had they. Captain, might we have a look?"

"This *is* a reconnaissance," Salter shrugged. They went into a littered lobby and easily recognized an elevator which had long ago ceased to operate; there were many hand-run dumbwaiters at sea.

A gust of air flapped a sheet of printed paper across the chaplain's ankles; he stooped to pick it up with a kind of instinctive outrage —leaving paper unsecured, perhaps to blow overboard and be lost forever to the ship's economy! Then he flushed at his silliness. "So much to unlearn," he said, and spread the paper to look at it. A moment later he crumpled it in a ball and hurled it from him as hard and as far as he could, and wiped his hands with loathing on his jacket. His face was utterly shocked.

The others stared. It was Mrs. Graves who went for the paper.

"Don't look at it," said the chaplain.

"I think she'd better," Salter said.

The maintenancewoman spread the paper, studied it and said: "Just some nonsense. Captain, what do you make of it?"

It was a large page torn from a book, and on it were simple polychrome drawing and some lines of verse in the style of a child's first reader. Salter repressed a shocked guffaw. The picture was of a little boy and a little girl quaintly dressed locked in murderous combat, using teeth and nails. *"Jack and Jill went up the hill,"* said the text, *"to fetch a pail of water. She threw Jack down and broke his crown; it was a lovely slaughter."*

Jewel Flyte took the page from his hands. All she said was, after a long pause: "I suppose they couldn't start them too young." She dropped the page and she too wiped her hands.

"Come along," the captain said. "We'll try the stairs."

The stairs were dust, rat-dung, cobwebs and two human skeletons. Murderous knuckledusters fitted loosely the bones of the two right hands. Salter hardened himself to pick up one of the weapons, but could not bring himself to try it on. Jewel Flyte said apolo-

getically: "Please be careful, captain. It might be poisoned. That seems to be the way they were."

Salter froze. By God, but the girl was right! Delicately, handling the spiked steel thing by its edges, he held it up. Yes; stains—it *would* be stained, and perhaps with poison also. He dropped it into the thoracic cage of one skeleton and said: "Come on." They climbed in quest of a dusty light from above; it was a doorway onto a corridor of many doors. There was evidence of fire and violence. A barricade of queer pudgy chairs and divans had been built to block the corridor, and had been breached. Behind it were sprawled three more heaps of bones.

"They have no heads," the chaplain said hoarsely. "Captain Salter, this is not a place for human beings. We must go back to the ship, even if it means honorable death. This is not a place for human beings."

"Thank you, chaplain," said Salter. "You've cast your vote. Is anybody with you?"

"Kill your own children, chaplain," said Mrs. Graves. "Not mine."

Jewel Flyte gave the chaplain a sympathetic shrug and said: "No."

One door stood open, its lock shattered by blows of a fire axe. Salter said: "We'll try that one." They entered into the home of an ordinary middle-class death-worshipping family as it had been a century ago, in the one hundred and thirty-first year of Merdeka the Chosen.

Merdeka the Chosen, the All-Foreigner, the Ur-Alien, had never intended any of it. He began as a retail mail-order vendor of movie and television stills, eight-by-ten glossies for the fan trade. It was a hard dollar; you had to keep an immense stock to cater to a tottery Mae Bush admirer, to the pony-tailed screamer over Rip Torn, and to everybody in between. He would have no truck with pinups. "Dirty, lascivious pictures!" he snarled when broadly-hinting letters arrived. "Filth! Men and women kissing, ogling, pawing each other! Orgies! Bah!" Merdeka kept a neutered dog, a spayed cat, and a crumpled uncomplaining housekeeper who was technically his wife. He was poor; he was very poor. Yet he never neglected his charitable duties, contributing every year to the Planned Parenthood Federation and the Midtown Hysterectomy Clinic.

They knew him in the Third Avenue saloons where he talked every night, arguing with Irishmen, sometimes getting asked outside to be knocked down. He let them knock him down, and sneered

from the pavement. Was *this* their argument? *He* could argue. He spewed facts and figures and clichés in unanswerable profusion. Hell, man, the Russians'll have a bomb base on the moon in two years and in two years the Army and the Air Force will still be beating each other over the head with pigs' bladders. Just a minute, let me tell you: the goddammycin's making idiots of us all; do you know of any children born in the past two years that're healthy? And: 'flu be go to hell; it's our own germ warfare from Camp Crowder right outside Baltimore that got out of hand, and it happened the week of the 24th. And: the human animal's obsolete; they've proved at M.I.T., Steinwitz and Kohlmann *proved* that the human animal cannot survive the current radiation levels. And: enjoy your lung-cancer, friend; for every automobile and its stinking exhaust there will be two-point-seven-oh-three cases of lung cancer, and we've got to have our automobiles, don't we? And: delinquency my foot; they're insane and it's got to the point where the economy cannot support mass insanity; they've got to be castrated; it's the only way. And: they should dig up the body of Metchnikoff and throw it to the dogs; he's the degenerate who invented venereal prophylaxis and since then vice without punishment has run hog-wild through the world; what we need on the streets is a few of those old-time locomotor ataxia cases limping and drooling to show the kids where vice leads.

He didn't know where he came from. The delicate New York way of establishing origins is to ask: "Merdeka, hah? What kind of a name is that now?" And to this he would reply that he wasn't a lying Englishman or a loudmouthed Irishman or a perverted Frenchman or a chiseling Jew or a barbarian Russian or a toadying German or a thickheaded Scandihoovian, and if his listener didn't like it, what did he have to say in reply?

He was from an orphanage, and the legend at the orphanage was that a policeman had found him, two hours old, in a garbage can coincident with the death by hemorrhage on a trolley car of a luetic young woman whose name appeared to be Merdeka and who had certainly been recently delivered of a child. No other facts were established, but for generation after generation of orphanage inmates there was great solace in having one of their number who indisputably had got off to a worse start than they.

A watershed of his career occurred when he noticed that he was, for the seventh time that year, re-ordering prints of scenes from Mr. Howard Hughes' production *The Outlaw*. These were not the off-the-bust stills of Miss Jane Russell, surprisingly, but were group

scenes of Miss Russell suspended by her wrists and about to be whipped. Merdeka studied the scene, growled "Give it to the bitch!" and doubled the order. It sold out. He canvassed his files for other whipping and torture stills from *Desert Song*-type movies, made up a special assortment, and it sold out within a week. Then he knew.

The man and the opportunity had come together, for perhaps the fiftieth time in history. He hired a model and took the first specially posed pictures himself. They showed her cringing from a whip, tied to a chair with a clothesline, and herself brandishing the whip.

Within two months Merdeka had cleared six thousand dollars and he put every cent of it back into more photographs and direct-mail advertising. Within a year he was big enough to attract the post-office obscenity people. He went to Washington and screamed in their faces: "My stuff isn't obscene and I'll sue you if you bother me, you stinking bureaucrats! You show me one breast, you show me one behind, you show me one human being touching another in my pictures! You can't and you know you can't! I don't believe in sex and I don't push sex, so you leave me the hell alone! Life is pain and suffering and being scared so people like to look at my pictures; my pictures are about *them,* the scared little jerks! You're just a bunch of goddam perverts if you think there's anything dirty about my pictures!"

He had them there; Merdeka's girls always wore at least full panties, bras and stockings; he had them there. The post-office obscenity people were vaguely positive that there was *something* wrong with pictures of beautiful women tied down to be whipped or burned with hot irons, but what?

The next year they tried to get him on his income tax; those deductions for the Planned Parenthood Federation and the Midtown Hysterectomy Clinic were preposterous, but he proved them with canceled checks to the last nickel. "In fact," he indignantly told them, "I spend a lot of time at the Clinic and sometimes they let me watch the operations. *That's* how highly they think of me at the Clinic."

The next year he started *DEATH: the Weekly Picture Magazine* with the aid of a half-dozen bright young grads from the new Harvard School of Communicationeering. As *DEATH's* Communicator in Chief (only yesterday he would have been its Publisher, and only fifty years before he would have been its Editor) he slumped biliously in a pigskin-panelled office, peering suspiciously at the closed-circuit TV screen which had a hundred wired eyes throughout *DEATH's* offices, sometimes growling over the voice circuit:

"You! What's your name? Boland? You're through, Boland. Pick up your time at the paymaster." For any reason; for no reason. He was a living legend in his narrow-lapel charcoal flannel suit and stringy bullfighter neckties; the bright young men in their Victorian Revival frock coats and pearl-pinned cravats wondered at his—not "obstinacy"; not when there might be a mike even in the corner saloon; say, his "timelessness."

The bright young men became bright young-old men, and the magazine which had been conceived as a vehicle for deadheading house ads of the mail order picture business went into the black. On the cover of every issue of *DEATH* was a pictured execution-of-the-week, and no price for one was ever too high. A fifty-thousand-dollar donation to a mosque had purchased the right to secretly snap the Bread Ordeal by which perished a Yemenite suspected of tapping an oil pipeline. An interminable illustrated History of Flagellation was a staple of the reading matter, and the Medical Section (in color) was tremendously popular. So too was the weekly Traffic Report.

When the last of the Compact Ships was launched into the Pacific the event made *DEATH* because of the several fatal accidents which accompanied the launching; otherwise Merdeka ignored the ships. It was strange that he who had unorthodoxies about everything had no opinion at all about the Compact Ships and their crews. Perhaps it was that he really knew he was the greatest manslayer who ever lived, and even so could not face commanding total extinction, including that of the seaborne leaven. The more articulate Sokei-an, who in the name of Rinzei Zen Buddhism was at that time depopulating the immense area dominated by China, made no bones about it: "Even I in my Hate may err; let the celestial vessels be." The opinions of Dr. Spät, European member of the trio, are forever beyond recovery due to his advocacy of the "one-generation" plan.

With advancing years Merdeka's wits cooled and gelled. There came a time when he needed a theory and was forced to stab the button of the intercom for his young-old Managing Communicator and growl at him: "Give me a theory!" And the M.C. reeled out: "The structural intermesh of *DEATH: the Weekly Picture Magazine* with Western culture is no random point-event but a rising world-line. Predecessor attitudes such as the Hollywood dogma 'No breasts—blood!' and the tabloid press' exploitation of violence were floundering and empirical. It was Merdeka who sigma-ized the convergent traits of our times and asymptotically congruentizes with

them publication-wise. Wrestling and the roller-derby as blood sports, the routinization of femicide in the detective tale, the standardization at one million per year of traffic fatalities, the wholesome interest of our youth in gang rumbles, all point toward the Age of Hate and Death. The ethic of Love and Life is obsolescent, and who is to say that Man is the loser thereby? Life and Death compete in the marketplace of ideas for the Mind of Man—"

Merdeka growled something and snapped off the set. Merdeka leaned back. Two billion circulation this week, and the auto ads were beginning to Tip. Last year only the suggestion of a dropped shopping basket as the Dynajetic 16 roared across the page, this year a hand, limp on the pictured pavement. Next year, blood. In February the Sylphella Salon chain ads had Tipped, with a crash. "—and the free optional judo course for slenderized Madame or Mademoiselle: learn how to kill a man with your lovely bare hands, with or without mess as desired." Applications had risen 28 per cent. By *God* there was a structural intermesh for you!

It was too slow; it was still too slow. He picked up a direct-line phone and screamed into it: "Too slow! What am I paying you people for? The world is wallowing in filth! Movies are dirtier than ever! Kissing! Pawing! Ogling! Men and women together—obscene! Clean up the magazine covers! Clean up the ads!"

The person at the other end of the direct line was Executive Secretary of the Society for Purity in Communications; Merdeka had no need to announce himself to him, for Merdeka was S.P.C.'s principal underwriter. He began to rattle off at once: "We've got the Mothers' March on Washington this week, sir, and a mass dummy pornographic mailing addressed to every Middle Atlantic State female between the ages of six and twelve next week, sir; I believe this one-two punch will put the Federal Censorship Commission over the goal line before recess—"

Merdeka hung up. "Lewd communications," he snarled. "Breeding, breeding, breeding, like maggots in a garbage can. Burning and breeding. But we will make them clean."

He did not need a Theory to tell him that he could not take away Love without providing a substitute.

He walked down Sixth Avenue that night, for the first time in years. In this saloon he had argued; outside that saloon he had been punched in the nose. Well, he was winning the argument, all the arguments. A mother and daughter walked past uneasily, eyes on the shadows. The mother was dressed Square; she wore a sheath dress that showed her neck and clavicles at the top and her legs

from mid-shin at the bottom. In some parts of town she'd be spat on, but the daughter, never. The girl was Hip; she was covered from neck to ankles by a loose, unbelted sack-culotte. Her mother's hair floated; hers was hidden by a cloche. Nevertheless the both of them were abruptly yanked into one of those shadows they prudently had eyed, for they had not watched the well-lit sidewalk for waiting nooses.

The familiar sounds of a Working Over came from the shadows as Merdeka strolled on. "I mean cool!" an ecstatic young voice—boy's, girl's, what did it matter?—breathed between crunching blows.

That year the Federal Censorship Commission was created, and the next year the old Internment Camps in the southwest were filled to capacity by violators, and the next year the First Church of Merdeka was founded in Chicago. Merdeka died of an aortal aneurism five years after that, but his soul went marching on.

"The Family that Prays together Slays together," was the wall-motto in the apartment, but there was no evidence that the implied injunction had been observed. The bedroom of the mother and the father were secured by steel doors and terrific locks, but Junior had got them all the same; somehow he had burned through the steel.

"Thermite?" Jewel Flyte asked herself softly, trying to remember. First he had got the father, quickly and quietly with a wire garotte as he lay sleeping, so as not to alarm his mother. To her he had taken her own spiked knobkerry and got in a mortal stroke, but not before she reached under her pillow for a pistol. Junior's teen-age bones testified by their arrangement to the violence of that leaden blow.

Incredulously they looked at the family library of comic books, published in a series called "The Merdekan Five-Foot Shelf of Classics". Jewel Flyte leafed slowly through one called *Moby Dick* and found that it consisted of a near-braining in a bedroom, agonizingly-depicted deaths at sea, and for a climax the eating alive of one Ahab by a monster. "Surely there must have been more," she whispered.

Chaplain Pendleton put down *Hamlet* quickly and held onto a wall. He was quite sure that he felt his sanity slipping palpably away, that he would gibber in a moment. He prayed and after a while felt better; he rigorously kept his eyes away from the Classics after that.

Mrs. Graves snorted at the waste of it all, at the picture of the ugly, pop-eyed, busted-nose man labeled MERDEKA THE

CHOSEN, THE PURE, THE PURIFIER. There were *two* tables, which was a folly. Who needed two tables? Then she looked closer, saw that one of them was really a bloodstained flogging bench and felt slightly ill. Its name-plate said *Correctional Furniture Corp. Size 6, Ages 10–14*. She had, God knew, slapped her children more than once when they deviated from her standard of perfection, but when she saw those stains she felt a stirring of warmth for the parricidal bones in the next room.

Captain Salter said: "Let's get organized. Does anybody think there are any of them left?"

"I think not," said Mrs. Graves. "People like that can't survive. The world must have been swept clean. They, ah, killed one another but that's not the important point. This couple had one child, age ten to fourteen. This cabin of theirs seems to be built for one child. We should look at a few more cabins to learn whether a one-child family is—was—normal. If we find out that it was, we can suspect that they are—gone. Or nearly so." She coined a happy phrase: "By race suicide."

"The arithmetic of it is quite plausible," Salter said. "If no factors work except the single-child factor, in one century of five generations a population of two billion will have bred itself down to 125 million. In another century, the population is just under four million. In another, 122 thousand . . . by the thirty-second generation the last couple descended from the original two billion will breed one child, and that's the end. And there are the other factors. Besides those who do not breed by choice"—his eyes avoided Jewel Flyte—"there are the things we have seen on the stairs, and in the corridor, and in these compartments."

"Then there's our answer," said Mrs. Graves. She smacked the obscene table with her hand, forgetting what it was. "We beach the ship and march the ship's company onto dry land. We clean up, we learn what we have to to get along—" Her words trailed off. She shook her head. "Sorry," she said gloomily. "I'm talking nonsense."

The chaplain understood her, but he said: "The land is merely another of the many mansions. Surely they could learn!"

"It's not politically feasible," Salter said. "Not in its present form." He thought of presenting the proposal to the Ship's Council in the shadow of the mast that bore the Compact, and twitched his head in an involuntary negative.

"There is a formula possible," Jewel Flyte said.

The Brownells burst in on them then, all eighteen of the Brownells. They had been stalking the shore party since its landing. Nine

sack-culotted women in cloches and nine men in penitential black, they streamed through the gaping door and surrounded the sea people with a ring of spears. Other factors had indeed operated, but this was not yet the thirty-second generation of extinction.

The leader of the Brownells, a male, said with satisfaction: "Just when we needed--new blood." Salter understood that he was not speaking in genetic terms.

The females, more verbal types, said critically: "Evil-doers, obviously. Displaying their limbs without shame, brazenly flaunting the rotted pillars of the temple of lust. Come from the accursed sea itself, abode of infamy, to seduce us from our decent and regular lives."

"We know what to do with the women," said the male leader. The rest took up the antiphon.

"We'll knock them down."

"And roll them on their backs."

"And pull one arm out and tie it fast."

"And pull the other arm out and tie it fast."

"And pull one limb out and tie it fast."

"And pull the other limb out and tie it fast."

"And then--"

"We'll beat them to death and Merdeka will smile."

Chaplain Pemberton stared incredulously. "You must look into your hearts," he told them in a reasonable voice. "You must look deeper than you have, and you will find that you have been deluded. This is not the way for human beings to act. Somebody has misled you dreadfully. Let me explain--"

"Blasphemy," the leader of the females said, and put her spear expertly into the chaplain's intestines. The shock of the broad, cold blade pulsed through him and felled him. Jewel Flyte knelt beside him instantly, checking heart beat and breathing. He was alive.

"Get up," the male leader said. "Displaying and offering yourself to such as we is useless. We are pure in heart."

A male child ran to the door. "Wagners!" he screamed. "Twenty Wagners coming up the stairs!"

His father roared at him: "Stand straight and don't mumble!" and slashed out with the butt of his spear, catching him hard in the ribs. The child grinned, but only after the pure-hearted eighteen had run to the stairs.

Then he blasted a whistle down the corridor while the sea-people stared with what attention they could divert from the bleeding chaplain. Six doors popped open at the whistle and men and women

emerged from them to launch spears into the backs of the Brownells clustered to defend the stairs. "Thanks, pop!" the boy kept screaming while the pure-hearted Wagners swarmed over the remnants of the pure-hearted Brownells; at last his screaming bothered one of the Wagners and the boy was himself speared.

Jewel Flyte said: "I've had enough of this. Captain, please pick the chaplain up and come along."

"They'll kill us."

"You'll have the chaplain," said Mrs. Graves. "One moment." She darted into a bedroom and came back hefting the spiked knobkerry.

"Well, perhaps," the girl said. She began undoing the long row of buttons down the front of her coveralls and shrugged out of the garment, then unfastened and stepped out of her underwear. With the clothes over her arm she walked into the corridor and to the stairs, the stupefied captain and inspector following.

To the pure-hearted Merdekans she was not Phryne winning her case; she was Evil incarnate. They screamed, broke and ran wildly, dropping their weapons. That a human being could do such a thing was beyond their comprehension; Merdeka alone knew what kind of monster this was that drew them strangely and horribly, in violation of all sanity. They ran as she had hoped they would; the other side of the coin was spearing even more swift and thorough than would have been accorded to her fully clothed. But they ran, gibbering with fright and covering their eyes, into apartments and corners of the corridor, their backs turned on the awful thing.

The sea-people picked their way over the shambles at the stairway and went unopposed down the stairs and to the dock. It was a troublesome piece of work for Salter to pass the chaplain down to Mrs. Graves in the boat, but in ten minutes they had cast off, rowed out a little and set sail to catch the land breeze generated by the differential twilight cooling of water and brick. After playing her part in stepping the mast, Jewel Flyte dressed.

"It won't always be that easy," she said when the last button was fastened. Mrs. Graves had been thinking the same thing, but had not said it to avoid the appearance of envying that superb young body.

Salter was checking the chaplain as well as he knew how. "I think he'll be all right," he said. "Surgical repair and a long rest. He hasn't lost much blood. This is a strange story we'll have to tell the Ship's Council."

Mrs. Graves said: "They've no choice. We've lost our net and

the land is there waiting for us. A few maniacs oppose us—what of it?"

Again a huge fish lazily surfaced; Salter regarded it thoughtfully. He said: "They'll propose scavenging bronze ashore and fashioning another net and going on just as if nothing had happened. And really, we could do that, you know."

Jewel Flyte said: "No. Not forever. This time it was the net, at the end of harvest. What if it were three masts in midwinter, in mid-Atlantic?"

"Or," said the captain, "the rudder—any time. Anywhere. But can you imagine telling the Council they've got to walk off the ship onto land, take up quarters in those brick cabins, change *everything?* And fight maniacs, and learn to *farm?"*

"There must be a way," said Jewel Flyte. "Just as Merdeka, whatever it was, was a way. There were too many people, and Merdeka was the answer to too many people. There's always an answer. Man is a land mammal in spite of brief excursions at sea. We were seed stock put aside, waiting for the land to be cleared so we could return. Just as these offshore fish are waiting very patiently for us to stop harvesting twice a year so they can return to deep water and multiply. What's the way, captain?"

He thought hard. "We could," he said slowly, "begin by simply sailing in close and fishing the offshore waters for big stuff. Then tie up and build a sort of bridge from the ship to the shore. We'd continue to live aboard the ship but we'd go out during daylight to try farming."

"It sounds right."

"And keep improving the bridge, making it more and more solid, until before they notice it it's really a solid part of the ship and a solid part of the shore. It might take . . . mmm . . . ten years?"

"Time enough for the old shellbacks to make up their minds," Mrs. Graves unexpectedly snorted.

"And we'd relax the one-to-one reproduction rule, and some young adults will simply be crowded over the bridge to live on the land—" His face suddenly fell. "And then the whole damned farce starts all over again, I suppose. I pointed out that it takes thirty-two generations bearing one child apiece to run a population of two billion into zero. Well, I should have mentioned that it takes thirty-two generations bearing four children apiece to run a population of two into two billion. Oh, what's the use, Jewel?"

She chuckled. "There was an answer last time," she said. "There will be an answer the next time."

"It won't be the same answer as Merdeka," he vowed. "We grew up a little at sea. This time we can do it with brains and not with nightmares and superstition."

"I don't know," she said. "Our ship will be the first, and then the other ships will have their accidents one by one and come and tie up and build their bridges hating every minute of it for the first two generations and then not hating it, just living it . . . and who will be the greatest man who ever lived?"

The captain looked horrified.

"Yes, you! Salter, the Builder of the Bridge; Tommy, do you know an old word for 'bridge-builder'? *Pontifex.*"

"Oh, my God!" Tommy Salter said in despair.

A flicker of consciousness was passing through the wounded chaplain; he heard the words and was pleased that somebody aboard was praying.

Two Dooms

IT WAS MAY, not yet summer by five weeks, but the afternoon heat under the corrugated roofs of Manhattan Engineer District's Los Alamos Laboratory was daily less bearable. Young Dr. Edward Royland had lost fifteen pounds from an already meager frame during his nine-month hitch in the desert. He wondered every day while the thermometer crawled up to its 5:45 peak whether he had made a mistake he would regret the rest of his life in accepting work with the Laboratory rather than letting the local draft board have his carcass and do what they pleased with it. His University of Chicago classmates were glamorously collecting ribbons and wounds from Saipan to Brussels; one of them, a first-rate mathematician named Hatfield, would do no more first-rate mathematics. He had gone down, burning, in an Eighth Air Force Mitchell bomber ambushed over Lille.

"And what, Daddy, did you do in the war?"

"Well, kids, it's a little hard to explain. They had this stupid atomic bomb project that never came to anything, and they tied up a lot of us in a Godforsaken place in New Mexico. We figured

and we calculated and we fooled with uranium and some of us got radiation burns and then the war was over and they sent us home."

Royland was not amused by this prospect. He had heat rash under his arms and he was waiting, not patiently, for the Computer Section to send him his figures on Phase 56c, which was the (goddamn childish) code designation for Element Assembly Time. Phase 56c was Royland's own particular baby. He was under Rotschmidt, supervisor of WEAPON DESIGN TRACK III, and Rotschmidt was under Oppenheimer, who bossed the works. Sometimes a General Groves came through, a fine figure of a man, and once from a window Royland had seen the venerable Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, walking slowly down their dusty street, leaning on a cane and surrounded by young staff officers. That's what Royland was seeing of the war.

Laboratory! It had sounded inviting, cool, bustling but quiet. So every morning these days he was blasted out of his cot in a barracks cubicle at seven by "Oppie's whistle," fought for a shower and shave with thirty-seven other bachelor scientists in eight languages, bolted a bad cafeteria breakfast and went through the barbed-wire Restricted Line to his "office"—another matchboard-walled cubicle, smaller and hotter and noisier, with talking and typing and clack of adding machines all around him.

Under the circumstances he was doing good work, he supposed. He wasn't happy about being restricted to his one tiny problem, Phase 56c, but no doubt he was happier than Hatfield had been when his Mitchell got it.

Under the circumstances . . . they included a weird haywire arrangement for computing. Instead of a decent differential analyzer machine they had a human sea of office girls with Burroughs' desk calculators; the girls screamed "Banzai!" and charged on differential equations and swamped them by sheer volume; they clicked them to death with their little adding machines. Royland thought hungrily of Conant's huge, beautiful analog differentiator up at M.I.T.; it was probably tied up by whatever the mysterious "Radiation Laboratory" there was doing. Royland suspected that the "Radiation Laboratory" had as much to do with radiation as his own "Manhattan Engineer District" had to do with Manhattan engineering. And the world was supposed to be trembling on the edge these days of a New Dispensation of Computing which would obsolete even the M.I.T. machine—tubes, relays and binary arithmetic at blinding speed instead of the suavely turning cams and the smoothly extruding rods and the elegant scribed curves of Conant's masterpiece. He

decided that he wouldn't like that; he would like it even less than he liked the little office girls clacking away, pushing lank hair from their dewed brows with undistracted hands.

He wiped his own brow with a sodden handkerchief and permitted himself a glance at his watch and the thermometer. Five-fifteen and 103 Fahrenheit.

He thought vaguely of getting out, of fouling up just enough to be released from the project and drafted. No; there was the post-war career to think of. But one of the big shots, Teller, had been irrepressible; he had rambled outside of his assigned mission again and again until Oppenheimer let him go; now Teller was working with Lawrence at Berkeley on something that had reputedly gone sour at a reputed quarter of a billion dollars—

A girl in khaki knocked and entered. "Your material from the Computer Section, Dr. Royland. Check them and sign here, please." He counted the dozen sheets, signed the clipboarded form she held out and plunged into the material for thirty minutes.

When he sat back in his chair, the sweat dripped into his eyes unnoticed. His hands were shaking a little, though he did not know that either. Phase 56c of WEAPON DESIGN TRACK III was finished, over, done, successfully accomplished. The answer to the question "Can U_{235} slugs be assembled into a critical mass within a physically feasible time?" was in. The answer was "Yes."

Royland was a theory man, not a Wheatstone or a Kelvin; he liked the numbers for themselves and had no special passion to grab for wires, mica, and bits of graphite so that what the numbers said might immediately be given flesh in a wonderful new gadget. Nevertheless he could visualize at once a workable atomic bomb assembly within the framework of Phase 56c. You have so many microseconds to assemble your critical mass without it boiling away in vapor; you use them by blowing the subassemblies together with shaped charges; lots of microseconds to spare by that method; practically foolproof. Then comes the Big Bang.

Oppie's whistle blew; it was quitting time. Royland sat still in his cubicle. He should go, of course, to Rotschmidt and tell him; Rotschmidt would probably clap him on the back and pour him a jigger of Bols Geneva from the tall clay bottle he kept in his safe. Then Rotschmidt would go to Oppenheimer. Before sunset the project would be redesigned! TRACK I, TRACK II, TRACK IV and TRACK V would be shut down and their people crammed into TRACK III, the one with the paydirt! New excitement would boil through the project; it had been torpid and souring for three months.

Phase 56c was the first good news in at least that long; it had been one damned blind alley after another. General Groves had looked sour and dubious last time around.

Desk drawers were slamming throughout the corrugated, sun-baked building; doors were slamming shut on cubicles; down the corridor, somebody roared with laughter, strained laughter. Passing Royland's door somebody cried impatiently: "*—aber was kan Man tun?*"

Royland whispered to himself: "You damned fool, what are you thinking of?"

But he knew—he was thinking of the Big Bang, the Big Dirty Bang, and of torture. The judicial torture of the old days, incredibly cruel by today's lights, stretched the whole body, or crushed it, or burned it, or shattered the fingers and legs. But even that old judicial torture carefully avoided the most sensitive parts of the body, the generative organs, though damage to these, or a real threat of damage to these, would have produced quick and copious confessions. You have to be more or less crazy to torture somebody that way; the sane man does not think of it as a possibility.

An M.P. corporal tried Royland's door and looked in. "Quitting time, professor," he said.

"Okay," Royland said. Mechanically he locked his desk drawers and his files, turned his window lock and set out his waste-paper basket in the corridor. Click the door; another day, another dollar.

Maybe the project *was* breaking up. They did now and then. The huge boner at Berkeley proved that. And Royland's barracks was light two physicists now; their cubicles stood empty since they had been drafted to M.I.T. for some anti-submarine thing. Groves had *not* looked happy last time around; how did a general make up his mind anyway? Give them three months, then the axe? Maybe Stimson would run out of patience and cut the loss, close the District down. Maybe F.D.R. would say at a cabinet meeting, "By the way, Henry, what ever became of—?" and that would be the end if old Henry could say only that the scientists appear to be optimistic of eventual success, Mr. President, but that as yet there seems to be nothing *concrete*—

He passed through the barbed wire of the Line under scrutiny of an M.P. lieutenant and walked down the barracks-edged company street of the maintenance troops to their motor pool. He wanted a jeep and a trip ticket; he wanted a long desert drive in the twilight; he wanted a dinner of *frijoles* and egg plant with his old friend Charles Miller Nahataspe, the medicine man of the ad-

joining Hopi reservation. Royland's hobby was anthropology; he wanted to get a little drunk on it—he hoped it would clear his mind.

Nahataspe welcomed him cheerfully to his hut; his million wrinkles all smiled. "You want me to play informant for a while?" he grinned. He had been to Carlisle in the 1880's and had been laughing at the white man ever since; he admitted that physics was funny, but for a real joke give him cultural anthropology every time. "You want some nice unsavory stuff about our institutionalized homosexuality? Should I cook us a dog for dinner? Have a seat on the blanket, Edward."

"What happened to your chairs? And the funny picture of McKinley? And—and everything?" The hut was bare except for cooking pots that simmered on the stone-curbed central hearth.

"I gave the stuff away," Nahataspe said carelessly. "You get tired of things."

Royland thought he knew what that meant. Nahataspe believed he would die quite soon; these particular Indians did not believe in dying encumbered by possessions. Manners, of course, forbade discussing death.

The Indian watched his face and finally said: "Oh, it's all right for *you* to talk about it. Don't be embarrassed."

Royland asked nervously: "Don't you feel well?"

"I feel terrible. There's a snake eating my liver. Pitch in and eat. You feel pretty awful yourself, don't you?"

The hard-learned habit of security caused Royland to evade the question. "You don't mean that literally about the snake, do you Charles?"

"Of course I do," Miller insisted. He scooped a steaming gourd full of stew from the pot and blew on it. "What would an untutored child of nature know about bacteria, viruses, toxins and neoplasms? What would I know about break-the-sky medicine?"

Royland looked up sharply; the Indian was blandly eating. "Do you hear any talk about break-the-sky medicine?" Royland asked.

"No talk, Edward. I've had a few dreams about it." He pointed with his chin toward the Laboratory. "You fellows over there shouldn't dream so hard; it leaks out."

Royland helped himself to stew without answering. The stew was good, far better than the cafeteria stuff, and he did not *have* to guess the source of the meat in it.

Miller said consolingly: "It's only kid stuff, Edward. Don't get so worked up about it. We have a long dull story about a horned toad

who ate some loco-weed and thought he was the Sky God. He got angry and he tried to break the sky but he couldn't so he slunk into his hole ashamed to face all the other animals and died. But they never knew he tried to break the sky at all."

In spite of himself Royland demanded: "Do you have any stories about anybody who did break the sky?" His hands were shaking again and his voice almost hysterical. Oppie and the rest of them were going to break the sky, kick humanity right in the crotch, and unleash a prowling monster that would go up and down by night and day peering in all the windows of all the houses in the world, leaving no sane man ever unterrified for his life and the lives of his kin. Phase 56c, God damn it to blackest hell, made sure of that! Well done, Royland; you earned your dollar today!

Decisively the old Indian set his gourd aside. He said: "We have a saying that the only good paleface is a dead paleface, but I'll make an exception for you, Edward. I've got some strong stuff from Mexico that will make you feel better. I don't like to see my friends hurting."

"Peyote? I've tried it. Seeing a few colored lights won't make me feel better, but thanks."

"Not peyote, this stuff. It's God Food. I wouldn't take it myself without a month of preparation; otherwise the Gods would scoop me up in a net. That's because my people see clearly, and your eyes are clouded." He was busily rummaging through a clay-chinked wicker box as he spoke; he came up with a covered dish. "You people have your sight cleared just a little by the God Food, so it's safe for you."

Royland thought he knew what the old man was talking about. It was one of Nahataspe's biggest jokes that Hopi children understood Einstein's relativity as soon as they could talk—and there was some truth to it. The Hopi language—and thought—had no tenses and therefore no concept of time-as-an-entity; it had nothing like the Indo-European speech's subjects and predicates, and therefore no built-in metaphysics of cause and effect. In the Hopi language and mind all things were frozen together forever into one great relationship, a crystalline structure of space-time events that simply were because they were. So much for Nahataspe's people "seeing clearly." But Royland gave himself and any other physicist credit for seeing as clearly when they were working a four-dimensional problem in the X Y Z space variables and the T time variable.

He could have spoiled the old man's joke by pointing that out, but of course he did not. No, no; he'd get a jag and maybe a belly-

ache from Nahataspe's herb medicine and then go home to his cubicle with his problem unresolved: to kick or not to kick?

The old man began to mumble in Hopi, and drew a tattered cloth across the door-frame of his hut; it shut out the last rays of the setting sun, long and slanting on the desert, pink-red against the adobe cubes of the Indian settlement. It took a minute for Royland's eyes to accommodate to the flickering light from the hearth and the indigo square of the ceiling smoke hole. Now Nahataspe was "dancing," doing a crouched shuffle around the hut holding the covered dish before him. Out of the corner of his mouth, without interrupting the rhythm, he said to Royland: "Drink some hot water now." Royland sipped from one of the pots on the hearth; so far it was much like peyote ritual, but he felt calmer.

Nahataspe uttered a loud scream, added apologetically: "Sorry, Edward," and crouched before him whipping the cover off the dish like a headwaiter. So God Food was dried black mushrooms, miserable, wrinkled little things. "You swallow them all and chase them with hot water," Nahataspe said.

Obediently Royland choked them down and gulped from the jug; the old man resumed his dance and chanting.

A little old self-hypnosis, Royland thought bitterly. Grab some imitation sleep and forget about old 56c, as if you could. He could see the big dirty one now, a hell of a fireball, maybe over Munich, or Cologne, or Tokyo, or Nara. Cooked people, fused cathedral stone, the bronze of the big Buddha running like water, perhaps lapping around the ankles of a priest and burning his feet off so he fell prone into the stuff. He couldn't see the gamma radiation, but it would be there, invisible sleet doing the dirty unthinkable thing, coldly burning away the sex of men and women, cutting short so many fans of life at their points of origin. Phase 56c could snuff out a family of Bachs, or five generations of Bernoullis, or see to it that the great Huxley-Darwin cross did not occur.

The fireball loomed, purple and red and fringed with green—

The mushrooms were reaching him, he thought fuzzily. He could really see it. Nahataspe, crouched and treading, moved through the fireball just as he had the last time, and the time before that. Déjà vu, extraordinarily strong, stronger than ever before, gripped him. Royland knew all this had happened to him before, and remembered perfectly what would come next; it was on the very tip of his tongue, as they say—

The fireballs began to dance around him and he felt his strength

drain suddenly out; he was lighter than a feather; the breeze would carry him away; he would be blown like a dust mote into the circle that the circling fireballs made. And he knew it was wrong. He croaked with the last of his energy, feeling himself slip out of the world: "Charlie! Help!"

Out of the corner of his mind as he slipped away he sensed that the old man was pulling him now under the arms, trying to tug him out of the hut, crying dimly into his ear: "You should have told me you did not see through smoke! You see clear; I never knew; I nev—"

And then he slipped through into blackness and silence.

Royland awoke sick and fuzzy; it was morning in the hut; there was no sign of Nahataspe. Well. Unless the old man had got to a phone and reported to the Laboratory, there were now jeeps scouring the desert in search of him and all hell was breaking loose in Security and Personnel. He would catch some of that hell on his return, and avert it with his news about assembly time.

Then he noticed that the hut had been cleaned of Nahataspe's few remaining possessions, even to the door cloth. A pang went through him; had the old man died in the night? He limped from the hut and looked around for a funeral pyre, a crowd of mourners. They were not there; the adobe cubes stood untenanted in the sunlight, and more weeds grew in the single street than he remembered. And his jeep, parked last night against the hut, was missing.

There were no wheeltracks, and uncrushed weeds grew tall where the jeep had stood.

Nahataspe's God Food had been powerful stuff. Royland's hand crept uncertainly to his face. No; no beard.

He looked about him, looked hard. He made the effort necessary to see details. He did not glance at the hut and because it was approximately the same as it had always been, concluded that it was unchanged, eternal. He looked and saw changes everywhere. Once-sharp adobe corners were rounded; protruding roof beams were bleached bone-white by how many years of desert sun? The wooden framing of the deep fortress-like windows had crumbled; the third building from him had wavering soot-stains above its window-boles and its beams were charred.

He went to it, numbly thinking: Phase 56c at least is settled. Not old Rip's baby now. They'll know me from fingerprints, I guess. One year? Ten? I *feel* the same.

The burnt-out house was a shambles. In one corner were piled

dry human bones. Royland leaned dizzily against the door-frame; its charcoal crumbled and streaked his hand. Those skulls were Indian—he was anthropologist enough to know that. Indian men, women and children, slain and piled in a heap. Who kills Indians? There should have been some sign of clothes, burnt rags, but there were none. Who strips Indians naked and kills them?

Signs of a dreadful massacre were everywhere in the house. Bulletpocks in the walls, high and low. Savage nicks left by bayonets—and swords? Dark stains of blood; it had run two inches high and left its mark. Metal glinted in a rib cage across the room. Swaying, he walked to the boneheap and thrust his hand into it. The thing bit him like a razor blade; he did not look at it as he plucked it out and carried it to the dusty street. With his back turned to the burnt house he studied his find. It was a piece of swordblade six inches long, hand-honed to a perfect edge with a couple of nicks in it. It had stiffening ribs and the usual blood gutters. It had a perceptible curve that would fit into only one shape: the Samurai sword of Japan.

However long it had taken, the war was obviously over.

He went to the village well and found it choked with dust. It was while he stared into the dry hole that he first became afraid. Suddenly it all was real; he was no more an onlooker but a frightened and very thirsty man. He ransacked the dozen houses of the settlement and found nothing to his purpose—a child's skeleton here, a couple of cartridge cases there.

There was only one thing left, and that was the road, the same earth track it had always been, wide enough for one jeep or the rump-sprung station wagon of the Indian settlement that once had been. Panic invited him to run; he did not yield. He sat on the well-curb, took off his shoes to meticulously smooth wrinkles out of his khaki G.I. socks, put the shoes on and retied the laces loosely enough to allow for swelling, and hesitated a moment. Then he grinned, selected two pebbles carefully from the dust and popped them in his mouth. "Beaver Patrol, forward march," he said, and began to hike.

Yes, he was thirsty; soon he would be hungry and tired; what of it? The dirt road would meet state-maintained blacktop in three miles and then there would be traffic and he'd hitch a ride. Let them argue with his fingerprints if they felt like it. The Japanese had got as far as New Mexico, had they? Then God help their home islands when the counterblow had come. Americans were

a ferocious people when trespassed on. Conceivably, there was not a Japanese left alive . . .

He began to construct his story as he hiked. In large parts it was a repeated "I don't know." He would tell them: "I don't expect you to believe this, so my feelings won't be hurt when you don't. Just listen to what I say and hold everything until the F.B.I. has checked my fingerprints. My name is—" And so on.

It was midmorning then, and he would be on the highway soon. His nostrils, sharpened by hunger, picked up a dozen scents on the desert breeze: the spice of sage, a whiff of acetylene stink from a rattler dozing on the shaded side of a rock, the throat-tightening reek of tar suggested for a moment on the air. That would be the highway, perhaps a recent hotpatch on a chuckhole. Then a startling tang of sulfur dioxide drowned them out and passed on, leaving him stung and sniffling and groping for a handkerchief that was not there. What in God's name had that been, and where from? Without ceasing to trudge he studied the horizon slowly and found a smoke pall to the far west dimly smudging the sky. It looked like a small city's, or a fair-sized factory's, pollution. A city or a factory where "in his time"—he formed the thought reluctantly—there had been none.

Then he was at the highway. It had been improved; it was a two-laner still, but it was nicely graded now, built up by perhaps three inches of gravel and tar beyond its old level, and lavishly ditched on either side.

If he had a coin he would have tossed it, but you went for weeks without spending a cent at Los Alamos Laboratory; Uncle took care of everything, from cigarettes to tombstones. He turned left and began to walk westward toward that sky-smudge.

I am a reasonable animal, he was telling himself, and I will accept whatever comes in a spirit of reason. I will control what I can and try to understand the rest—

A faint siren scream began behind him and built up fast. The reasonable animal jumped for the ditch and hugged it for dear life. The siren howled closer, and motors roared. At the ear-splitting climax Royland put his head up for one glimpse, then fell back into the ditch as if a grenade had exploded in his middle.

The convoy roared on, down the *center* of the two-lane highway, straddling the white line. First the three little recon cars with the twin-mount machine guns, each filled brimful with three helmeted Japanese soldiers. Then the high-profiled, armored car of state, six-wheeled, with a probably ceremonial gun turret astern—

nickel-plated gunbarrels are impractical—and the Japanese admiral in the fore-and-aft hat taking his lordly ease beside a rawboned, hatchet-faced SS officer in gleaming black. Then, diminuendo, two more little recon jobs . . .

"We've lost," Royland said in his ditch meditatively. "Ceremonial tanks with glass windows—we lost a *long* time ago." Had there been a Rising Sun insignia or was he now imagining that?

He climbed out and continued to trudge westward on the improved blacktop. You couldn't say "I reject the universe"; not when you were as thirsty as he was.

He didn't even turn when the put-putting of a westbound vehicle grew loud behind him and then very loud when it stopped at his side.

"Zeegail," a curious voice said. "What are you doing here?"

The vehicle was just as odd in its own way as the ceremonial tank. It was minimum motor transportation, a kid's sled on wheels, powered by a noisy little air-cooled outboard motor. The driver sat with no more comfort than a cleat to back his coccyx against, and behind him were two twenty-five pound flour sacks that took up all the remaining room the little buckboard provided. The driver had the leathery Southwestern look; he wore a baggy blue outfit that was obviously a uniform and obviously unmilitary. He had a name-tape on his breast above an incomprehensible row of dull ribbons: MARTFIELD, E., 1218824, P/7 NQOTD43. He saw Royland's eyes on the tape and said kindly: "My name is Martfield —Paymaster Seventh, but there's no need to use my rank here. Are you all right, my man?"

"Thirsty," Royland said. "What's the NQOTD43 for?"

"You can read!" Martfield said, astounded. "Those clothes—"

"Something to drink, please," Royland said. For the moment nothing else mattered in the world. He sat down on the buckboard like a puppet with cut strings.

"See here, fellow!" Martfield snapped in a curious, strangled way, forcing the words through his throat with a stagy, conventional effect of controlled anger. "You can stand until I invite you to sit!"

"Have you any water?" Royland asked dully.

With the same bark: "Who do you think you are?"

"I happen to be a theoretical physicist—" tiredly arguing with a dim seventh-carbon-copy imitation of a drill sergeant.

"Oh-*hoh!*" Martfield suddenly laughed. His stiffness vanished; he actually reached into his baggy tunic and brought out a pint canteen that gurgled. He then forgot all about the canteen in his hand,

roguishly dug Royland in the ribs and said: "I should have suspected. You scientists! Somebody was supposed to pick you up—but he was another scientist, eh? Ah-hah-hah-hah!"

Royland took the canteen from his hand and sipped. So a scientist was supposed to be an idiot-savant, eh? Never mind now; drink. People said you were not supposed to fill your stomach with water after great thirst; it sounded to him like one of those puritanical rules people make up out of nothing because they sound reasonable. He finished the canteen while Martfield, Paymaster Seventh, looked alarmed, and wished only that there were three or four more of them.

"Got any food?" he demanded.

Martfield cringed briefly. "Doctor, I regret extremely that I have nothing with me. However if you would do me the honor of riding with me to my quarters—"

"Let's go," Royland said. He squatted on the flour sacks and away they chugged at a good thirty miles an hour; it was a fair little engine. The Paymaster Seventh continued deferential, apologizing over his shoulder because there was no windscreen, later dropped his cringing entirely to explain that Royland was seated on flour—"*white* flour, understand?" An over-the-shoulder wink. He had a friend in the bakery at Los Alamos. Several buckboards passed the other way as they traveled. At each encounter there was a peering examination of insignia to decide who saluted. Once they met a sketchily-enclosed vehicle which furnished its driver with a low seat instead of obliging him to sit with legs straight out, and Paymaster Seventh Martfield almost dislocated his shoulder saluting first. The driver of that one was a Japanese in a kimono. A long curved sword lay across his lap.

Mile after mile the smell of sulfur and sulfides increased; finally there rose before them the towers of a Frasch Process layout. It looked like an oilfield, but instead of ground-laid pipelines and bass-drum storage tanks there were foothills of yellow sulfur. They drove between them—more salutes from baggily-uniformed workers with shovels and yard-long Stillson wrenches. Off to the right were things that might have been Solvay Process towers for sulfuric acid, and a glittering horror of a neo-Roman administration-and-labs building. The Rising Sun banner fluttered from its central flagstaff.

Music surged as they drove deeper into the area; first it was a welcome counterirritant to the pop-pop of the two-cycle buckboard engine, and then a nuisance by itself. Royland looked, annoyed, for the loudspeakers, and saw them everywhere—on power

poles, buildings, gateposts. Schmaltzy Strauss waltzes bathed them like smog, made thinking just a little harder, made communication just a little more blurry even after you had learned to live with the noise.

"I miss music in the wilderness," Martfield confided over his shoulder. He throttled down the buckboard until they were just rolling; they had passed some line unrecognized by Royland beyond which one did not salute everybody—just the occasional Japanese walking by in business suit with blueprint-roll and slide rule, or in kimono with sword. It was a German who nailed Royland, however: a classic jack-booted German in black broadcloth, black leather, and plenty of silver trim. He watched them roll for a moment after exchanging salutes with Martfield, made up his mind, and said: "Halt."

The Paymaster Seventh slapped on the brake, killed the engine, and popped to attention beside the buckboard. Royland more or less imitated him. The German said, stiffly but without accent: "Whom have you brought here, Paymaster?"

"A scientist, sir. I picked him up on the road returning from Los Alamos with personal supplies. He appears to be a minerals prospector who missed a rendezvous, but naturally I have not questioned the Doctor."

The German turned to Royland contemplatively. "So, Doctor. Your name and specialty."

"Dr. Edward Royland," he said. "I do nuclear power research." If there was no bomb he'd be damned if he'd invent it now for these people.

"So? That is very interesting, considering that there is no such thing as nuclear power research. Which camp are you from?" The German threw an aside to the Paymaster Seventh, who was literally shaking with fear at the turn things had taken. "You may go, Paymaster. Of course you will report yourself for harboring a fugitive."

"At once, sir," Martfield said in a sick voice. He moved slowly away pushing the little buckboard before him. The Strauss waltz oom-pah'd its last chord and instantly the loudspeakers struck up a hoppity-hoppity folk dance, heavy on the brass.

"Come with me," the German said, and walked off, not even looking behind to see whether Royland was obeying. This itself demonstrated how unlikely any disobedience was to succeed. Royland followed at his heels, which of course were garnished with silver spurs. Royland had not seen a horse so far that day.

A Japanese stopped them politely inside the administration building, a rimless-glasses, office-manager type in a grey suit. "How nice to see you again, Major Kappel! Is there anything I might do to help you?"

The German stiffened. "I didn't want to bother your people, Mr. Ito. This fellow appears to be a fugitive from one of our camps; I was going to turn him over to our liaison group for examination and return."

Mr. Ito looked at Royland and slapped his face hard. Royland, by the insanity of sheer reflex, cocked his fist as a red-blooded boy should, but the German's reflexes operated also. He had a pistol in his hand and pressed against Royland's ribs before he could throw the punch.

"All right," Royland said, and put down his hand.

Mr. Ito laughed. "You are at least partly right, Major Kappel; he certainly is not from one of *our* camps! But do not let me delay you further. May I hope for a report on the outcome of this?"

"Of course, Mr. Ito," said the German. He holstered his pistol and walked on, trailed by the scientist. Royland heard him grumble something that sounded like "Damned extraterritoriality!"

They descended to a basement level where all the door signs were in German, and in an office labeled WISSENSCHAFTSLICHESICHERHEITSLIAISON Royland finally told his story. His audience was the major, a fat officer deferentially addressed as Colonel Biederman, and a bearded old civilian, a Dr. Piqueron, called in from another office. Royland suppressed only the matter of bomb research, and did it easily with the old security habit. His improvised cover story made the Los Alamos Laboratory a research center only for the generation of electricity.

The three heard him out in silence. Finally, in an amused voice, the colonel asked: "Who was this Hitler you mentioned?"

For that Royland was not prepared. His jaw dropped.

Major Kappel said: "Oddly enough, he struck on a name which does figure, somewhat infamously, in the annals of the Third Reich. One Adolf Hitler was an early Party agitator, but as I recall it he intrigued against the Leader during the War of Triumph and was executed."

"An ingenious madman," the colonel said. "Sterilized, of course?"

"Why, I don't know. I suppose so. Doctor, would you—?"

Dr. Piqueron quickly examined Royland and found him all there, which astonished them. Then they thought of looking for his camp

tattoo number on the left bicep, and found none. Then, thoroughly upset, they discovered that he had no birth number above his left nipple either.

"And," Dr. Piqueron stammered, "his shoes are odd, sir—I just noticed. Sir, how long since you've seen sewn shoes and braided laces?"

"You must be hungry," the colonel suddenly said. "Doctor, have my aide get something to eat for—for the doctor."

"Major," said Royland, "I hope no harm will come to the fellow who picked me up. You told him to report himself."

"Have no fear, er, doctor," said the major. "Such humanity! You are of German blood?"

"Not that I know of; it may be."

"It *must* be!" said the colonel.

A platter of hash and a glass of beer arrived on a tray. Royland postponed everything. At last he demanded: "Now. Do you believe me? There must be fingerprints to prove my story still in existence."

"I feel like a fool," the major said. "You still could be hoaxing us. Dr. Piqueron, did not a German scientist establish that nuclear power is a theoretical and practical impossibility, that one always must put more into it than one can take out?"

Piqueron nodded and said reverently: "Heisenberg. 1953, during the War of Triumph. His group was then assigned to electrical weapons research and produced the blinding bomb. But this fact does not invalidate the doctor's story; he says only that his group was *attempting* to produce nuclear power."

"We've got to research this," said the colonel. "Dr. Piqueron, entertain this man, whatever he is, in your laboratory."

Piqueron's laboratory down the hall was a place of astounding simplicity, even crudeness. The sinks, reagents and balance were capable only of simple qualitative and quantitative analyses; various works in progress testified that they were not even strained to their modest limits. Samples of sulfur and its compounds were analyzed here. It hardly seemed to call for a "doctor" of anything, and hardly even for a human being. Machinery should be continuously testing the products as they flowed out; variations should be scribed mechanically on a moving tape; automatic controls should at least stop the processes and signal an alarm when variation went beyond limits; at most it might correct whatever was going wrong. But here sat Piqueron every day, titrating, precipitating and weighing, entering results by hand in a ledger and telephoning them to the works!

Piqueron looked about proudly. "As a physicist you wouldn't understand all this, of course," he said. "Shall I explain?"

"Perhaps later, doctor, if you'd be good enough. If you'd first help me orient myself—"

So Piqueron told him about the War of Triumph (1940–1955) and what came after.

In 1940 the realm of der Fuehrer (Herr Goebbels, of course—that strapping blond fellow with the heroic jaw and eagle's eye whom you can see in the picture there) was simultaneously and treacherously invaded by the misguided French, the sub-human Slavs and the perfidious British. The attack, for which the shocked Germans coined the name *blitzkrieg,* was timed to coincide with an internal eruption of sabotage, well-poisoning and assassination by the *Zigeunerjuden,* or Jewpsies, of whom little is now known; there seem to be none left.

By Nature's ineluctable law, the Germans had necessarily to be tested to the utmost so that they might fully respond. Therefor Germany was overrun from East and West, and Holy Berlin itself was taken; but Goebbels and his court withdrew like Barbarossa into the mountain fastnesses to await their day. It came unexpectedly soon. The deluded Americans launched a million-man amphibious attack on the homeland of the Japanese in 1945. The Japanese resisted with almost Teutonic courage. Not one American in twenty reached shore alive, and not one in a hundred got a mile inland. Particularly lethal were the women and children who lay in camouflaged pits hugging artillery shells and aircraft bombs, which they detonated when enough invaders drew near to make it worth while.

The second invasion attempt, a month later, was made up of second-line troops scraped up from everywhere, including occupation duty in Germany.

"Literally," Piqueron said, "the Japanese did not know how to surrender so they did not. They could not conquer, but they could and did continue suicidal resistance, consuming manpower of the allies and their own womanpower and childpower—a shrewd bargain for the Japanese! The Russians refused to become involved in the Japanese war; they watched with apish delight while two future enemies, as they supposed, were engaged in mutual destruction.

"A third assault wave broke on Kyushu and gained the island at last. What lay ahead? Only another assault on Honshu, the main island, home of the Emperor and the principal shrines. It was 1946; the volatile, child-like Americans were war weary and mutinous; the

best of them were gone by then. In desperation the Anglo-American leaders offered the Russians an economic sphere embracing the China coast and Japan as the price of participation."

The Russians grinned and assented; they would take that—at *least* that. They mounted a huge assault for the spring of 1947; they would take Korea and leap off from there for Northern Honshu while the Anglo-American forces struck in the south. Surely this would provide at last a symbol before which the Japanese might without shame bow down and admit defeat!

And then, from the mountain fastnesses, came the radio voice: "Germans! Your Leader calls upon you again!" Followed the Hundred Days of Glory during which the German Army reconstituted itself and expelled the occupation troops—by then, children without combat experience, and leavened by not-quite-disabled veterans. Followed the seizure of the airfields; the Luftwaffe in business again. Followed the drive, almost a dress parade, to the Channel Coast, gobbling up immense munition dumps awaiting shipment to the Pacific Theater, millions of warm uniforms, good boots, mountains of rations, piles of shells and explosives that lined the French roads for scores of miles, thousands of two-and-a-half-ton trucks, and lakes of gasoline to fuel them. The shipyards of Europe, from Hamburg to Toulon, had been turning out, furiously, invasion barges for the Pacific. In April of 1947 they sailed against England in their thousands.

Halfway around the world, the British Navy was pounding Tokyo, Nagasaki, Kobe, Hiroshima, Nara. Three quarters of the way across Asia the Russian Army marched stolidly on; let the decadent British pickle their own fish; the glorious motherland at last was gaining her long-sought, long-denied, warm-water seacoast. The British, tired women without their men, children fatherless these eight years, old folks deathly weary, deathly worried about their sons, were brave but they were not insane. They accepted honorable peace terms; they capitulated.

With the Western front secure for the first time in history, the ancient Drive to the East was resumed; the immemorial struggle of Teuton against Slav went on.

His spectacles glittering with rapture, Dr. Piqueron said: "We were worthy in those days of the Teutonic Knights who seized Prussia from the sub-men! On the ever-glorious Twenty-First of May, Moscow was ours!"

Moscow and the monolithic state machinery it controlled, and all the roads and rail lines and communication wires which led only

to—and from—Moscow. Detroit-built tanks and trucks sped along those roads in the fine, bracing spring weather; the Red Army turned one hundred and eighty degrees at last and countermarched halfway across the Eurasian landmass, and at Kazan it broke exhausted against the Frederik Line.

Europe at last was One and German. Beyond Europe lay the dark and swarming masses of Asia, mysterious and repulsive folk whom it would be better to handle through the non-German, but chivalrous, Japanese. The Japanese were reinforced with shipping from Birkenhead, artillery from the Putilov Works, jet fighters from Chateauroux, steel from the Ruhr, rice from the Po valley, herring from Norway, timber from Sweden, oil from Romania, laborers from India. The American forces were driven from Kyushu in the winter of 1948, and bloodily back across their chain of island steppingstones that followed.

Surrender they would not; it was a monstrous affront that shield-shaped North America dared to lie there between the German Atlantic and the Japanese Pacific threatening both. The affront was wiped out in 1955.

For one hundred and fifty years now the Germans and the Japanese had uneasily eyed each other across the banks of the Mississippi. Their orators were fond of referring to that river as a vast frontier unblemished by a single fortification. There was even some interpenetration; a Japanese colony fished out of Nova Scotia on the very rim of German America; a sulfur mine which was part of the Farben system lay in New Mexico, the very heart of Japanese America—this was where Dr. Edward Royland found himself, being lectured to by Dr. Piqueron, Dr. Gaston Pierre Piqueron, true-blue German.

"Here, of course," Dr. Piqueron said gloomily, "we are so damned provincial. Little ceremony and less manners. Well, it would be too much to expect them to assign *German* Germans to this dreary outpost, so we French Germans must endure it somehow."

"You're all French?" Royland asked, startled.

"French *Germans,*" Piqueron stiffly corrected him. "Colonel Biederman happens to be a French German also; Major Kappel is —hrrmph—an Italian German." He sniffed to show what he thought of that.

The Italian German entered at that point, not in time to shut off the question: "And you all come from Europe?"

They looked at him in bafflement. "My grandfather did," Dr. Piqueron said. Royland remembered; so Roman legions used to guard their empire—Romans born and raised in Britain, or on the Danube, Romans who would never in their lives see Italy or Rome.

Major Kappel said affably: "Well, this needn't concern us. I'm afraid, my dear fellow, that your little hoax has not succeeded. He clapped Royland merrily on the back. "I admit you've tricked us all nicely; now may we have the facts?"

Piqueron said, surprised: "His story is false? The shoes? The missing *geburtsnummer?* And he appears to understand some chemistry!"

"Ah-h-h—but he said his specialty was *physics,* doctor! Suspicious in itself!"

"Quite so. A discrepancy. But the rest—?"

"As to his birth number, who knows? As to his shoes, who cares? I took some inconspicuous notes while he was entertaining us and have checked thoroughly. There *was* no Manhattan Engineering District. There *was* no Dr. Oppenheimer, or Fermi, or Bohr. There *is* no theory of relativity, or equivalence of mass and energy. Uranium has one use only—coloring glass a pretty orange. There is such a thing as an isotope but it has nothing to do with chemistry; it is the name used in Race Science for a permissible variation within a subrace. And what have you to say to *that,* my dear fellow?"

Royland wondered first, such was the positiveness with which Major Kappel spoke, whether he had slipped into a universe of different physical properties and history entirely, one in which Julius Caeser discovered Peru and the oxygen molecule was lighter than the hydrogen atom. He managed to speak. "How did you find all that out, major?"

"Oh, don't think I did a skimpy job," Kappel smiled. "I looked it all up in the *big* encyclopedia."

Dr. Piqueron, chemist, nodded grave approval of the major's diligence and thorough grasp of the scientific method.

"You still don't want to tell us?" Major Kappel asked coaxingly.

"I can only stand by what I said."

Kappel shrugged. "It's not my job to persuade you; I wouldn't know how to begin. But I can and will ship you off forthwith to a work camp."

"What—is a work camp?" Royland unsteadily asked.

"Good heavens, man, a camp where one works! You're obviously an *ungleichgeschaltling* and you've got to be *gleichgeschaltet.*" He did not speak these words as if they were foreign; they were

obviously part of the everyday American working vocabulary. *Gleichgeschaltet* meant to Royland something like "coordinated, brought into tune with." So he would be brought into tune—with what, and how?

The Major went on: "You'll get your clothes and your bunk and your chow, and you'll work, and eventually your irregular vagabondish habits will disappear and you'll be turned loose on the labor market. And you'll be damned glad we took the trouble with you." His face fell. "By the way, I was too late with your friend the Paymaster. I'm sorry. I sent a messenger to Disciplinary Control with a stop order. After all, if you took us in for an hour, why should you not have fooled a Pay-Seventh?"

"Too late? He's *dead?* For picking up a *hitchhiker?*"

"I don't know what that last word means," said the Major. "If it's dialect for 'vagabond', the answer is ordinarily 'yes'. The man, after all, was a Pay-Seventh; he could read. Either you're keeping up your hoax with remarkable fidelity or you've been living in isolation. Could that be it? Is there a tribe of you somewhere? Well, the interrogators will find out; that's their job."

"The Dogpatch legend!" Dr. Piqueron burst out, thunderstruck. "He may be an Abnerite!"

"By Heaven," Major Kappel said slowly, "that might be it. What a feather in my cap to find a living Abnerite."

"*Whose* cap?" demanded Dr. Piqueron coldly.

"I think I'll look the Dogpatch legend up," said Kappel, heading for the door and probably the big encyclopedia.

"So will I," Dr. Piqueron announced firmly. The last Royland saw of them they were racing down the corridor, neck and neck.

Very funny. And they had killed simple-minded Paymaster Martfield for picking up a hitchhiker. The Nazis always had been pretty funny—fat Hermann pretending he was young Seigfried. As blond as Hitler, as slim as Goering and as tall as Goebbels. Immature guttersnipes who hadn't been able to hang a convincing frame on Dimitrov for the Reichstag fire; the world had roared at their bungling. Huge, corny party rallies with let's-play-detectives nonsense like touching the local flags to that hallowed banner on which the martyred Horst Wessel had had a nosebleed. And they had rolled over Europe, and they killed people. . . .

One thing was certain: life in the work camp would at least bore him to death. He was supposed to be an illiterate simpleton, so things were excused him which were not excused an exalted Pay-

Seventh. He poked through a closet in the corner of the laboratory—he and Piqueron were the same size—

He found a natty change of uniform and what must be a civilian suit: somewhat baggy pants and a sort of tunic with the neat, sensible Russian collar. Obviously it would be all right to wear it because here it was; just as obviously, it was all wrong for him to be dressed in chinos and a flannel shirt. He did not know exactly what this made him, but Martfield had been done to death for picking up a man in chinos and a flannel shirt. Royland changed into the civilian suit, stuffed his own shirt and pants far back on the top shelf of the closet; this was probably concealment enough from those murderous clowns. He walked out, and up the stairs, and through the busy lobby, and into the industrial complex. Nobody saluted him and he saluted nobody. He knew where he was going—to a good, sound Japanese laboratory where there were no Germans.

Royland had known Japanese students at the University and admired them beyond words. Their brains, frugality, doggedness and good humor made them, as far as he was concerned, the most sensible people he had ever known. Tojo and his warlords were not, as far as Royland was concerned, essentially Japanese but just more damfool soldiers and politicians. The real Japanese would courteously listen to him, calmly check against available facts—

He rubbed his cheek and remembered Mr. Ito and his slap in the face. Well, presumably Mr. Ito was a damfool soldier and politician —and demonstrating for the German's benefit in a touchy border area full of jurisdictional questions.

At any rate, he would *not* go to a labor camp and bust rocks or refinish furniture until those imbeciles decided he was *gleichgeschaltet;* he would go mad in a month.

Royland walked to the Solvay towers and followed the glass pipes containing their output of sulfuric acid along the ground until he came to a bottling shed where beetle-browed men worked silently filling great wicker-basketed carboys and heaving them outside. He followed other men who levered them up onto hand trucks and rolled them in one door of a storage shed. Out the door at the other end more men loaded them onto enclosed trucks which were driven up from time to time.

Royland settled himself in a corner of the storage shed behind a barricade of carboys and listened to the truck dispatcher swear at his drivers and the carboy handlers swear at their carboys.

"Get the goddam Frisco shipment *loaded,* stupid! I don't *care* if you gotta go, we gotta get it out by *midnight!*"

So a few hours after dark Royland was riding west, without much air, and in the dangerous company of one thousand gallons of acid. He hoped he had a careful driver.

A night, a day, and another night on the road. The truck never stopped except to gas up; the drivers took turns and ate sandwiches at the wheel and dozed off shift. It rained the second night. Royland, craftily and perhaps a little crazily, licked the drops that ran down the tarpaulin flap covering the rear. At the first crack of dawn, hunched between two wicker carcasses, he saw they were rolling through irrigated vegetable fields, and the water in the ditches was too much for him. He heard the transmission shift down to slow for a curve, swarmed over the tailgate and dropped to the road. He was weak and limp enough to hit like a sack.

He got up, ignoring his bruises, and hobbled to one of the brimming five-foot ditches; he drank, and drank, and drank. This time puritanical folklore proved right; he lost it all immediately, or what had not been greedily absorbed by his shriveled stomach. He did not mind; it was bliss enough to *stretch.*

The field crop was tomatoes, almost dead ripe. He was starved for them; as he saw the rosy beauties he knew that tomatoes were the only thing in the world he craved. He gobbled one so that the juice ran down his chin; he ate the next two delicately, letting his teeth break the crispness of their skin and the beautiful taste ravish his tongue. There were tomatoes as far as the eye could see, on either side of the road, the green of the vines and the red dots of the ripe fruit graphed by the checkerboard of silvery ditches that caught the first light. Nevertheless he filled his pockets with them before he walked on.

Royland was happy.

Farewell to the Germans and their sordid hash and murderous ways. *Look* at these beautiful fields! The Japanese are an innately artistic people who bring beauty to every detail of daily life. And they make damn good physicists, too. Confined in their stony home, cramped as he had been in the truck, they grew twisted and painful; why should they not have reached out for more room to grow, and what other way is there to reach but to make war? He could be very understanding about any people who had planted these beautiful tomatoes for him.

A dark blemish the size of a man attracted his attention. It lay on the margin of one of the swirling five-foot ditches out there to

his right. And then it rolled slowly into the ditch with a splash, floundered a little and proceeded to drown.

In a hobbling run Royland broke from the road and across the field. He did not know whether he was limber enough to swim. As he stood panting on the edge of the ditch, peering into the water, a head of hair surfaced near him. He flung himself down, stretched wildly and grabbed the hair—and yet had detachment enough to feel a pang when the tomatoes in his tunic pocket smashed.

"Steady," he muttered to himself, yanked the head toward him, took hold with his other hand and lifted. A surprised face confronted him and then went blank and unconscious.

For half an hour Royland, weak as he was, struggled, cursed feebly, and sweated to get that body out of the water. At last he plunged in himself, found it only chest-deep, and shoved the carcass over the mudslick bank. He did not know by then whether the man was alive or dead or much care. He knew only that he couldn't walk away and leave the job half-finished.

The body was that of a fat, middle-aged Oriental, surely Chinese rather than Japanese, though Royland could not say why he thought so. His clothes were soaked rags except for a leather wallet the size of a cigar box which he wore on a wide cloth belt. Its sole content was a handsome blue-glazed porcelain bottle. Royland sniffed at it and reeled. Some kind of super-gin! He sniffed again, and then took a conservative gulp of the stuff. While he was still coughing he felt the bottle being removed from his hand. When he looked he saw the Chinese, eyes still closed, accurately guiding the neck of the bottle to his mouth. The Chinese drank and drank and drank, then returned the bottle to the wallet and finally opened his eyes.

"Honorable sir," said the Chinese in flat, California American speech, "you have deigned to save my unworthy life. May I supplicate your honorable name?"

"Ah, Royland. Look, take it easy. Don't try to get up; you shouldn't even talk."

Somebody screamed behind Royland: "There has been thieving of tomatoes! There has been smasheeng and deestruction of thee vines! Chil-dren you, will bee weet-ness be-fore the Jappa-neese!"

Christ, now what?

Now a skinny black man, not a Negro, in a dirty loin-cloth, and beside him like a pan-pipes five skinny black loin-clothed offspring in descending order. All were capering, pointing and threatening. The Chinese groaned, fished in his tattered robes with one hand and pulled out a soggy wad of bills. He peeled one off, held it out

and said: "Begone pestilential barbarians from beyond Tian-Shang. My master and I give you alms, not tribute."

The Dravidian, or whatever he was, grabbed the bill and keened: "Een-suffee-cient for the terrible dommage! The Jappa-neese—"

The Chinese waved them away boredly. He said: "If my master will condescend to help me arise?"

Royland uncertainly helped him up. The man was wobbly, whether from the near-drowning or the terrific belt of alcohol he'd taken there was no knowing. They proceeded to the road, followed by shrieks to be careful about stepping on the vines.

On the road, the Chinese said: "My unworthy name is Li Po. Will my master deign to indicate in which direction we are to travel?"

"What's this master business?" Royland demanded. "If you're grateful, swell, but I don't *own* you."

"My master is pleased to jest," said Li Po. Politely, face-saving and third-personing Royland until hell wouldn't have it, he explained that Royland, having meddled with the Celestial decree that Li Po should, while drunk, roll into the irrigation ditch and drown, now had Li Po on his hands, for the Celestial Ones had washed theirs of him. "As my master of course will recollect in a moment or two." Understandingly, he expressed his sympathy with Royland's misfortune in acquiring him as an obligation, especially since he had a hearty appetite, was known to be dishonest, and suffered from fainting fits and spasms when confronted with work.

"I don't *know* about all this," Royland said fretfully. "Wasn't there another Li Po? A poet?"

"Your servant prefers to venerate his namesake as one of the greatest drunkards the Flowery Kingdom has ever known," the Chinese observed. And a moment later he bent over, clipped Royland behind the knees so that he toppled forward and bumped his head, and performed the same obeisance himself, more gracefully. A vehicle went sputtering and popping by on the road as they kowtowed.

Li Po said reproachfully: "I humbly observe that my master is unaware of the etiquette our noble overlords exact. Such negligence cost the head of my insignificant elder brother in his twelfth year. Would my master be pleased to explain how he can have reached his honorable years without learning what babes in their cradles are taught?"

Royland answered with the whole truth. Li Po politely begged clarification from time to time, and a sketch of his mental horizons

emerged from his questioning. That "magic" had whisked Royland forward a century or more he did not doubt for an instant, but he found it difficult to understand why the proper *fung shui* precautions had not been taken to avert a disastrous outcome to the God Food experiment. He suspected, from a description of Nahataspe's hut, that a simple wall at right angles to the door would have kept all really important demons out. When Royland described his escape from German territory to Japanese, and why he had effected it, he was very bland and blank. Royland judged that Li Po privately thought him not very bright for having left *any* place to come here.

And Royland hoped he was not right. "Tell me what it's like," he said.

"This realm," said Li Po, "under our benevolent and noble overlords, is the haven of all whose skin is not the bleached-bone hue which indicates the undying curse of the Celestial Ones. Hither flock men of Han like my unworthy self, and the sons of Hind beyond the Tian-Shang that we may till new soil and raise up sons, and sons of sons to venerate us when we ascend."

"What was that bit," Royland demanded, "about the bleached bones? Do they shoot, ah, white men on sight here, or do they not?"

Li Po said evasively: "We are approaching the village where I unworthily serve as fortune teller, doctor of *fung shui,* occasional poet and storyteller. Let my master have no fear about his color. This humble one will roughen his master's skin, tell a circumstantial and artistic lie or two, and pass his master off as merely a leper."

After a week in Li Po's village Royland knew that life was good there. The place was a wattle-and-clay settlement of about two hundred souls on the bank of an irrigation ditch large enough to be dignified by the name of "canal." It was situated nobody knew just where; Royland thought it must be the San Fernando Valley. The soil was thick and rich and bore furiously the year round. A huge kind of radish was the principal crop. It was too coarse to be eaten by man; the villagers understood that it was feed for chickens somewhere up north. At any rate they harvested the stuff, fed it through a great hand-powered shredder and shade-cured the shreds. Every few days a Japanese of low caste would come by in a truck, they would load tons of the stuff onto it, and wave their giant radish good-by forever. Presumably the chickens ate it, and the Japanese then ate the chickens.

The villagers ate chicken too, but only at weddings and funerals. The rest of the time they ate vegetables which they cultivated, a

quarter-acre to a family, the way other craftsmen facet diamonds. A single cabbage might receive, during its ninety days from planting to maturity, one hundred work-hours from grandmother, grandfather, son, daughter, eldest grandchild and on down to the smallest toddler. Theoretically the entire family line should have starved to death, for there are not one hundred energy-hours in a cabbage; somehow they did not. They merely stayed thin and cheerful and hard-working and fecund.

They spoke English by Imperial decree; the reasoning seemed to be that they were as unworthy to speak Japanese as to paint the Imperial Chrysanthemum Seal on their houses, and that to let them cling to their old languages and dialects would have been politically unwise.

They were a mixed lot of Chinese, Hindus, Dravidians and, to Royland's surprise, low-caste and outcaste Japanese; he had not known there were such things. Village tradition had it that a *samurai* named Ugetsu long ago said, pointing at the drunk tank of a Hong Kong jail, "I'll have that lot," and "that lot" had been the ancestors of these villagers transported to America in a foul hold practically as ballast and settled here by the canal with orders to start making their radish quota. The place was at any rate called The Ugetsu Village, and if some of the descendants were teetotallers, others like Li Po gave color to the legend of their starting point.

After a week the cheerful pretense that he was a sufferer from Housen's disease evaporated and he could wash the mud off his face. He had merely to avoid the upper-caste Japanese and especially the *samurai*. This was not exactly a stigma; in general it was a good idea for *everybody* to avoid the *samurai*.

In the village Royland found his first love and his first religion both false.

He had settled down; he was getting used to the Oriental work rhythm of slow, repeated, incessant effort; it did not surprise him any longer that he could count his ribs. When he ate a bowl of artfully-arranged vegetables, the red of pimiento played off against the yellow of parsnip, a slice of pickled beet adding visual and olfactory tang to the picture, he felt full enough; he *was* full enough for the next day's feeble work in the field. It was pleasant enough to play slowly with a wooden mattock in the rich soil; did not people once buy sand so their children might do exactly what he did, and envy their innocent absorption? Royland was innocently absorbed, then, and the radish truck had collected six times since his arrival, when he began to feel stirrings of lust. On the edge of starvation

(but who knew this? For everybody was) his mind was dulled, but not his loins. They burned, and he looked about him in the fields, and the first girl he saw who was not repulsive he fell abysmally in love with.

Bewildered, he told Li Po, who was also Ugetsu Village's go-between. The storyteller was delighted; he waddled off to seek information and returned. "My master's choice is wise. The slave on whom his lordly eye deigned to rest is known as Vashti, daughter of Hari Bose, the distiller. She is his seventh child and so no great dowry can be expected (I shall ask for fifteen kegs toddy, but would settle for seven), but all this humble village knows that she is a skilled and willing worker in the hut as in the fields. I fear she has the customary lamentable Hindu talent for concocting curries, but a dozen good beatings at the most should cause her to reserve it to appropriate occasions, such as visits from her mother and sisters."

So, according to the sensible custom of Ugetsu, Vashti came that night to the hut which Royland shared with Li Po, and Li Po visited with cronies by his master's puzzling request. He begged humbly to point out that it would be dark in the hut, so this talk of lacking privacy was inexplicable to say the least. Royland made it an order, and Li Po did not really object, so he obeyed it.

It was a damnably strange night during which Royland learned all about India's national sport and most highly developed art-form. Vashti, if she found him weak on the theory side, made no complaints. On the contrary, when Royland woke she was doing something or other to his feet.

"More?" he thought incredulously. "With *feet?*" He asked what she was doing. Submissively she replied: "Worshipping my lord husband-to-be's big toe. I am a pious and old-fashioned woman."

So she painted his toe with red paint and prayed to it, and then she fixed breakfast—curry, and excellent. She watched him eat, and then modestly licked his leavings from the bowl. She handed him his clothes, which she had washed while he still slept, and helped him into them after she helped him wash. Royland thought incredulously: "It's not possible! It must be a show, to sell me on marrying her—as if I had to be sold!" His heart turned to custard as he saw her, without a moment's pause, turn from dressing him to polishing his wooden rake. He asked that day in the field, roundabout fashion, and learned that this was the kind of service he could look forward to for the rest of his life after marriage. If the woman got

lazy he'd have to beat her, but this seldom happened more than every year or so. We have good girls here in Ugetsu Village.

So an Ugetsu Village peasant was in some ways better off than anybody from "his time" who was less than a millionaire!

His starved dullness was such that he did not realize this was true for only half the Ugetsu Village peasants.

Religion sneaked up on him in similar fashion. He went to the part-time Taoist priest because he was a little bored with Li Po's current after-dinner saga. He could have sat like all the others and listened passively to the interminable tale of the glorious Yellow Emperor, and the beautiful but wicked Princess Emerald, and the virtuous but plain Princess Moon Blossom; it just happened that he went to the priest of Tao and got hooked hard.

The kindly old man, a toolmaker by day, dropped a few pearls of wisdom which, in his foggy starvation-daze, Royland did not perceive to be pearls of undemonstrable nonsense, and showed Royland how to meditate. It worked the first time. Royland bunged right smack through into a 200-proof state of *samadhi*—the Eastern version of self-hypnotized Enlightenment—that made him feel wonderful and all-knowing and left him without a hangover when it wore off. He had despised, in college, the type of people who took psychology courses and so had taken none himself; he did not know a thing about self-hypnosis except as just demonstrated by this very nice old gentleman. For several days he was offensively religious and kept trying to talk to Li Po about the Eightfold Way, and Li Po kept changing the subject.

It took murder to bring him out of love and religion.

At twilight they were all sitting and listening to the storyteller as usual. Royland had been there just one month and for all he knew would be there forever. He soon would have his bride officially; he knew he had discovered The Truth About the Universe by way of Tao meditation; why should he change? Changing demanded a furious outburst of energy, and he did not have energy on that scale. He metered out his energy day and night; one had to save so much for tonight's love-play, and then one had to save so much for tomorrow's planting. He was a poor man; he could not afford to change.

Li Po had reached a rather interesting bit where the Yellow Emperor was declaiming hotly: "Then she shall die! Whoever dare transgress Our divine will—"

A flashlight began to play over their faces. They perceived that it was in the hand of a *samurai* with kimono and sword. Everybody

hastily kowtowed, but the *samurai* shouted irritably (all *samurai* were irritable, all the time): "Sit up, you fools! I want to see your stupid faces. I hear there's a peculiar one in this flea-bitten dung-heap you call a village."

Well, by now Royland knew his duty. He rose and with downcast eyes asked: "Is the noble protector in search of my unworthy self?"

"Ha!" the *samurai* roared. "It's true! A big nose!" He hurled the flashlight away (all *samurai* were nobly contemptuous of the merely material), held his scabbard in his left hand and swept out the long curved sword with his right.

Li Po stepped forward and said in his most enchanting voice: "If the Heaven-born would only deign to heed a word from this humble—" What he must have known would happen happened. With a contemptuous backhand sweep of the blade the *samurai* beheaded him and Li Po's debt was paid.

The trunk of the storyteller stood for a moment and then fell stiffly forward. The *samurai* stooped to wipe his blade clean on Li Po's ragged robes.

Royland had forgotten much, but not everything. With the villagers scattering before him he plunged forward and tackled the *samurai* low and hard. No doubt the *samurai* was a Brown Belt judo master; if so he had nobody but himself to blame for turning his back. Royland, not remembering that he was barefoot, tried to kick the *samurai's* face in. He broke his worshipful big toe, but its untrimmed horny nail removed the left eye of the warrior and after that it was no contest. He never let the *samurai* get up off the ground; he took out his other eye with the handle of a rake and then killed him an inch at a time with his hands, his feet, and the clownish rustic's traditional weapon, a flail. It took easily half an hour, and for the final twenty minutes the *samurai* was screaming for his mother. He died when the last light left the western sky, and in darkness Royland stood quite alone with the two corpses. The villagers were gone.

He assumed, or pretended, that they were within earshot and yelled at them brokenly: "I'm sorry, Vashti. I'm sorry, all of you. I'm going. Can I make you understand?

"Listen. You aren't living. This isn't life. You're not making anything but babies, you're not changing, you're not growing up. That's not enough! You've got to read and write. You can't pass on anything but baby-stories like the Yellow Emperor by word of mouth. The village is growing. Soon your fields will touch the fields of

Sukoshi Village to the west, and then what happens? You won't know what to do, so you'll fight with Sukoshi Village.

"Religion. No! It's just getting drunk the way you do it. You're set up for it by being half-starved and then you go into *samadhi* and you feel better so you think you understand everything. No! You've got to *do* things. If you don't grow up, you die. All of you.

"Women. *That's* wrong. It's good for the men, but it's wrong. Half of you are slaves, do you understand? Women are people too, but you use them like animals and you've convinced them it's right for them to be old at thirty and discarded for the next girl. For God's sake, can't you try to think of yourselves in their place?

"The breeding, the crazy breeding—it's got to stop. You frugal Orientals! But you aren't frugal; you're crazy drunken sailors. You're squandering the whole world. Every mouth you breed has got to be fed by the land, and the land isn't infinite.

"I hope some of you understood. Li Po would have, a little, but he's dead.

"I'm going away now. You've been kind to me and all I've done is make trouble. I'm sorry."

He fumbled on the ground and found the *samurai's* flashlight. With it he hunted the village's outskirts until he found the Japanese's buckboard car. He started the motor with its crank and noisily rolled down the dirt track from the village to the highway.

Royland drove all night, still westward. His knowledge of southern California's geography was inexact, but he hoped to hit Los Angeles. There might be a chance of losing himself in a great city. He had abandoned hope of finding present-day counterparts of his old classmates like Jimmy Ichimura; obviously they had lost out. Why shouldn't they have lost? The soldier-politicians had won the war by happenstance, so all power to the soldier-politicians! Reasoning under the great natural law *post hoc ergo propter hoc,* Tojo and his crowd had decided: fanatic feudalism won the war; therefore fanatic feudalism is a good thing, and it necessarily follows that the more fanatical and feudal it is, the better a thing it is. So you had Sukoshi Village, and Ugetsu Village; Ichi Village, Ni Village, San Village, Shi Village, dotting that part of Great Japan formerly known as North America, breeding with the good old fanatic feudalism and so feudally averse to new thought and innovations that it made you want to scream at them—which he had.

The single weak headlight of his buckboard passed few others on the road; a decent feudal village is self-contained.

Damn them and their suicidal cheerfulness! It was a pleasant trait; it was a fool in a canoe approaching the rapids saying: "Chin up! Everything's going to be all right if we just keep smiling."

The car ran out of gas when false dawn first began to pale the sky behind him. He pushed it into the roadside ditch and walked on; by full light he was in a tumble-down, planless, evil-smelling, paper-and-galvanized-iron city whose name he did not know. There was no likelihood of him being noticed as a "white" man by anyone not specifically looking for him. A month of outdoor labor had browned him, and a month of artistically-composed vegetable plates had left him gaunt.

The city was carpeted with awakening humanity. Its narrow streets were paved with sprawled-out men, women and children beginning to stir and hawk up phlegm and rub their rheumy eyes. An open sewer-latrine running down the center of each street was casually used, ostrich-fashion—the users hid their own eyes while in action.

Every mangled variety of English rang in Royland's ears as he trod between bodies.

There had to be something more, he told himself. This was the shabby industrial outskirts, the lowest marginal-labor area. Somewhere in the city there was beauty, science, learning!

He walked aimlessly plodding until noon, and found nothing of the sort. These people in the cities were food-handlers, food-traders, food-transporters. They took in one another's washing and sold one another chop suey. They made automobiles (Yes! There were one-family automobile factories which probably made six buckboards a year, filing all metal parts by hand out of bar stock!) and orange crates and baskets and coffins; abacuses, nails and boots.

The Mysterious East has done it again, he thought bitterly. The Indians-Chinese-Japanese won themselves a nice sparse area. They could have laid things out neatly and made it pleasant for everybody instead of for a minute speck of aristocracy which he was unable even to detect in this human soup . . . but they had done it again. They had bred irresponsibly just as fast as they could until the land was *full*. Only famines and pestilence could "help" them now.

He found exactly one building which owned some clear space around it and which would survive an earthquake or a flicked cigarette butt. It was the German Consulate.

I'll give them the Bomb, he said to himself. Why not? None of this is mine. And for the Bomb I'll exact a price of some comfort

and dignity for as long as I live. *Let* them blow one another up! He climbed the consulate steps.

To the black-uniformed guard at the swastika-trimmed bronze doors he said: *"Wenn die Lichtstaerke der von einer Flaeche kommenden Strahlung dem Cosinus des Winkels zwischen Strahlrichtung und Flaechennormalen proportional ist, so nennen wir die Flaeche eine volkommen streunde Flaeche."* Lambert's Law, Optics I. All the Goethe he remembered happened to rhyme, which might have made the guard suspicious.

Naturally the German came to attention and said apologetically: "I don't speak German. What is it, sir?"

"You may take me to the consul," Royland said, affecting boredom.

"Yes, sir. At once, sir. Er, you're an *agent* of course, sir?"

Royland said witheringly: *"Sicherheit, bitte!"*

"Yessir. This way, sir!"

The consul was a considerate, understanding gentleman. He was somewhat surprised by Royland's true tale, but said from time to time: "I see; I see. Not impossible. Please go on."

Royland concluded: "Those people at the sulfur mine were, I hope, unrepresentative. One of them at least complained that it was a dreary sort of backwoods assignment. I am simply gambling that there is intelligence in your Reich. I ask you to get me a real physicist for twenty minutes of conversation. You, Mr. Consul, will not regret it. I am in a position to turn over considerable information on —atomic power." So he had not been able to say it after all; the Bomb was still an obscene kick below the belt.

"This has been very interesting, Dr. Royland," said the consul gravely. "You referred to your enterprise as a gamble. I too shall gamble. What have I to lose by putting you *en rapport* with a scientist of ours if you prove to be a plausible lunatic?" He smiled to soften it. "Very little indeed. On the other hand, what have I to gain if your extraordinary story is quite true? A great deal. I will go along with you, doctor. Have you eaten?"

The relief was tremendous. He had lunch in a basement kitchen with the Consulate guards—a huge lunch, a rather nasty lunch of stewed *lungen* with a floured gravy, and cup after cup of coffee. Finally one of the guards lit up an ugly little spindle-shaped cigar, the kind Royland had only seen before in the caricatures of George Grosz, and as an afterthought offered one to him.

He drank in the rank smoke and managed not to cough. It stung

his mouth and cut the greasy aftertaste of the stew satisfactorily. One of the blessings of the Third Reich, one of its gross pleasures. They were just people, after all—a certain censorious, busy-body type of person with altogether too much power, but they were human. By which he meant, he supposed, members of Western Industrial Culture like him.

After lunch he was taken by truck from the city to an airfield by one of the guards. The plane was somewhat bigger than a B-29 he had once seen, and lacked propellers. He presumed it was one of the "jets" Dr. Piqueron had mentioned. His guard gave his dossier to a Luftwaffe sergeant at the foot of the ramp and said cheerfully: "Happy landings, fellow. It's all going to be all right."

"Thanks," he said. "I'll remember you, Corporal Collins. You've been very helpful." Collins turned away.

Royland climbed the ramp into the barrel of the plane. A bucket-seat job, and most of the seats were filled. He dropped into one on the very narrow aisle. His neighbor was in rags; his face showed signs of an old beating. When Royland addressed him he simply cringed away and began to sob.

The Luftwaffe sergeant came up, entered and slammed the door. The "jets" began to wind up, making an unbelievable racket; further conversation was impossible. While the plane taxied, Royland peered through the windowless gloom at his fellow-passengers. They all looked poor and poorly.

God, were they so quickly and quietly airborne? They were. Even in the bucket seat, Royland fell asleep.

He was awakened, he did not know how much later, by the sergeant. The man was shaking his shoulder and asking him: "Any joolery hid away? Watches? Got some nice fresh water to sell to people that wanna buy it."

Royland had nothing, and would not take part in the miserable little racket if he had. He shook his head indignantly and the man moved on with a grin. He would not last long!—petty chiselers were leaks in the efficient dictatorship; they were rapidly detected and stopped up. Mussolini made the trains run on time, after all. (But naggingly Royland recalled mentioning this to a Northwestern University English professor, one Bevans. Bevans had coldly informed him that from 1931 to 1936 he had lived under Mussolini as a student and tourist guide, and therefore had extraordinary opportunities for observing whether the trains ran on time or not, and could definitely state that they did not; that railway timetables under Mussolini were best regarded as humorous fiction.)

And another thought nagged at him, a thought connected with a pale, scarred face named Bloom. Bloom was a young refugee physical chemist working on WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT TRACK I, and he was somewhat crazy, perhaps. Royland, on TRACK III, used to see little of him and could have done with even less. You couldn't say hello to the man without it turning into a lecture on the horrors of Nazism. He had wild stories about "gas chambers" and crematoria which no reasonable man could believe, and was a blanket slanderer of the German medical profession. He claimed that trained doctors, certified men, used human beings in experiments which terminated fatally. Once, to try and bring Bloom to reason, he asked what sort of experiments these were, but the monomaniac had heard that worked out: piffling nonsense about reviving mortally frozen men by putting naked women into bed with them! The man was probably sexually deranged to believe that; he naively added that one variable in the series of experiments was to use women immediately after sexual intercourse, one hour after sexual intercourse, et cetera. Royland had blushed for him and violently changed the subject.

But that was not what he was groping for. Neither was Bloom's crazy story about the woman who made lampshades from the tattooed skin of concentration camp prisoners; there were people capable of such things, of course, but under no regime whatever do they rise to positions of authority; they simply can't do the work required in positions of authority because their insanity gets in the way.

"Know your enemy," of course—but making up pointless lies? At least Bloom was not the conscious prevaricator. He got letters in Yiddish under friends and relations in Palestine, and these were laden with the latest wild rumors supposed to be based on the latest word from "escapees."

Now he remembered. In the cafeteria about three months ago Bloom had been sipping tea with somewhat shaking hand and rereading a letter. Royland tried to pass him with only a nod, but the skinny hand shot out and held him.

Bloom looked up with tears in his eyes: "It's cruel, I'm tellink you, Royland, it's cruel. They're not givink them the right to scream, to strike a futile blow, to sayink prayers *Kiddush ha Shem* like a Jew should when he is dyink for Consecration of the Name! They trick them, they say they go to farm settlements, to labor camps, so four-five of the stinkink bastards can handle a whole trainload Jews. They trick the clothes off of them at the camps, they sayink

they delouse them. They trick them into room says showerbath over the door and then is too late to sayink prayers; *then goes on the gas.*"

Bloom had let go of him and put his head on the table between his hands. Royland had mumbled something, patted his shoulder and walked on, shaken. For once the neurotic little man might have got some straight facts. That was a very circumstantial touch about expediting the handling of prisoners by systematic lies—always the carrot and the stick.

Yes, everybody had been so goddam agreeable since he climbed the Consulate steps! The friendly door guard, the Consul who nodded and remarked that his story was not an impossible one, the men he'd eaten with—all that quiet optimism. "Thanks. I'll remember you, Corporal Collins. You've been very helpful." He had felt positively benign toward the corporal, and now remembered that the corporal had turned around *very* quickly after he spoke. *To hide a grin?*

The guard was working his way down the aisle again and noticed that Royland was awake. "Changed your mind by now?" he asked kindly. "Got a good watch, maybe I'll find a piece of bread for you. You won't need a watch where you're going, fella."

"What do you mean?" Royland demanded.

The guard said soothingly: "Why they got clocks all over them work camps, fella. Everybody knows what time it is in them work camps. You don't need no watches there. Watches just get in the way at them work camps." He went on down the aisle, quickly.

Royland reached across the aisle and, like Bloom, gripped the man who sat opposite him. He could not see much of him; the huge windowless plane was lit only by half a dozen stingy bulbs overhead. "What are you here for?" he asked.

The man said shakily: "I'm a Laborer Two, see? A Two. Well, my father he taught me to read, see, but he waited until I was ten and knew the score? See? So I figured it was a family tradition, so I taught my own kid to read because he was a pretty smart kid, ya know? I figured he'd have some fun reading like I did, no harm done, who's to know, ya know? But I should of waited a couple years, I guess, because the kid was too young and got to bragging he could read, ya know how kids do? I'm from St. Louis, by the way. I should of said first I'm from St. Louis a track maintenance man, see, so I hopped a string of returning empties for San Diego because I was scared like you get."

He took a deep sigh. "Thirsty," he said. "Got in with some Chinks, nobody to trouble ya, ya stay outta the way, but then one of

them cops-like seen me and he took me to the Consul place like they do, ya know? Had me scared, they always tole me illegal reading they bump ya off, but they don't, ya know? Two years work camp, how about that?"

Yes, Royland wondered. How about it?

The plane decelerated sharply; he was thrown forward. Could they brake with those "jets" by reversing the stream or were the engines just throttling down? He heard gurgling and thudding; hydraulic fluid to the actuators letting down the landing gear. The wheels bumped a moment later and he braced himself; the plane was still and the motors cut off seconds later.

Their Luftwaffe sergeant unlocked the door and bawled through it: "Shove that goddam ramp, willya?" The sergeant's assurance had dropped from him; he looked like a very scared man. He must have been a very brave one, really, to have let himself be locked in with a hundred doomed men, protected only by an eight-shot pistol and a chain of systematic lies.

They were herded out of the plane onto a runway of what Royland immediately identified as the Chicago Municipal Airport. The same reek wafted from the stockyards; the row of airline buildings at the eastern edge of the field was ancient and patched but unchanged; the hangars though were now something that looked like inflated plastic bags. A good trick. Beyond the buildings surely lay the dreary red-brick and painted-siding wastes of Cicero, Illinois.

Luftwaffe men were yapping at them: "Form up, boys; make a line! Work means freedom! Look tall!" They shuffled and were shoved into columns of fours. A snappy majorette in shiny satin panties and white boots pranced out of an administration building twirling her baton; a noisy march blared from louvers in her tall fur hat. Another good trick.

"Forward march, boys," she shrilled at them. "Wouldn't y'all just like to follow me?" Seductive smile and a wiggle of the rump; a Judas ewe. She strutted off in time to the music; she must have been wearing earstopples. They shuffled after her. At the airport gate they dropped their blue-coated Luftwaffe boys and picked up a waiting escort of a dozen black-coats with skulls on their high-peaked caps.

They walked in time to the music, hypnotized by it, through Cicero. Cicero had been bombed to hell and not rebuilt. To his surprise Royland felt a pang for the vanished Poles and Slovaks of Al's old bailiwick. There were *German* Germans, French Germans and

even Italian Germans, but he knew in his bones that there were no Polish or Slovakian Germans. . . . And Bloom had been right all along.

Deathly weary after two hours of marching (the majorette was indefatigable) Royland looked up from the broken pavement to see a cockeyed wonder before him. It was a Castle; it was a Nightmare; it was the Chicago Parteihof. The thing abutted Lake Michigan; it covered perhaps sixteen city blocks. It frowned down on the lake at the east and at the tumbled acres of bombed-out Chicago at the north, west and south. It was made of steel-reinforced concrete grained and grooved to look like medieval masonry. It was walled, moated, portcullis-ed, towered, ramparted, crenellated. The death's-head guards looked at it reverently and the prisoners with fright. Royland wanted only to laugh wildly. It was a Disney production. It was as funny as Hermann Goering in full fig, and probably as deadly.

With a mumbo-jumbo of passwords, heils and salutes they were admitted, and the majorette went away, no doubt to take off her boots and groan.

The most bedecked of the death's-head lined them up and said affably: "Hot dinner and your beds presently, my boys; first a selection. Some of you, I'm afraid, aren't well and should be in sick bay. Who's sick? Raise your hands, please."

A few hands crept up. Stooped old men.

"That's right. Step forward, please." Then he went down the line tapping a man here and there—one fellow with glaucoma, another with terrible varicose sores visible through the tattered pants he wore. Mutely they stepped forward. Royland he looked thoughtfully over. "You're thin, my boy," he observed. "Stomach pains? Vomit blood? Tarry stools in the morning?"

"Nossir!" Royland barked. The man laughed and continued down the line. The "sick bay" detail was marched off. Most of them were weeping silently; they knew. Everybody knew; everybody pretended that the terrible thing would not, might not, happen. It was much more complex than Royland had realized.

"Now," said the death's-head affably, "we require some competent cement workers—"

The line of remaining men went mad. They surged forward almost touching the officer but never stepping over an invisible line surrounding him. "Me!" some yelled. "Me! Me!" Another cried: "I'm good with my hands, I can learn, I'm a machinist too, I'm strong and young, I can learn!" A heavy middle-aged one waved

his hands in the air and boomed: "Grouting and tile-setting! Grouting and tile-setting!" Royland stood alone, horrified. They knew. They knew this was an offer of real work that would keep them alive for a while.

He knew suddenly how to live in a world of lies.

The officer lost his patience in a moment or two, and whips came out. Men with their faces bleeding struggled back into line. "Raise your hands, you cement people, and no lying, please. But you wouldn't lie, would you?" He picked half a dozen volunteers after questioning them briefly, and one of his men marched them off. Among them was the grouting-and-tile man, who looked pompously pleased with himself; such was the reward of diligence and virtue, he seemed to be proclaiming; pooh to those grasshoppers back there who neglected to learn A Trade.

"Now," said the officer casually, "we require some laboratory assistants." The chill of death stole down the line of prisoners. Each one seemed to shrivel into himself, become poker-faced, imply that he wasn't really involved in all this.

Royland raised his hand. The officer looked at him in stupefaction and then covered up quickly. "Splendid," he said. "Step forward, my boy. You," he pointed at another man. "You have an intelligent forehead; you look as if you'd make a fine laboratory assistant. Step forward."

"Please, no!" the man begged. He fell to his knees and clasped his hands in supplication. "Please no!" The officer took out his whip meditatively; the man groaned, scrambled to his feet and quickly stood beside Royland.

When there were four more chosen, they were marched off across the concrete yard into one of the absurd towers, and up a spiral staircase and down a corridor, and through the promenade at the back of an auditorium where a woman screamed German from the stage at an audience of women. And through a tunnel, and down the corridor of an elementary school with empty classrooms full of small desks on either side. And into a hospital area where the fake-masonry walls yielded to scrubbed white tile and the fake flagstones underfoot to composition flooring and the fake pinewood torches in bronze brackets that had lighted their way to fluorescent tubes.

At the door marked RASSENWISSENSCHAFT the guard rapped and a frosty-faced man in a laboratory coat opened up. "You requisitioned a demonstrator, Dr. Kalten," the guard said. "Pick any one of these."

Dr. Kalten looked them over. "Oh, this one, I suppose," he said. Royland. "Come in, fellow."

The Race Science Laboratory of Dr. Kalten proved to be a decent medical setup with an operating table, intricate charts of the races of men and their anatomical, mental, and moral makeups. There was also a phrenological head diagram and a horoscope on the wall, and an arrangement of glittering crystals on wire which Royland recognized. It was a model of one Hans Hoerbiger's crackpot theory of planetary formation, the *Welteislehre*.

"Sit there," the doctor said, pointing to a stool. "First I've got to take your pedigree. By the way, you might as well know that you're going to end up dissected for my demonstration in Race Science III for the Medical School, and your degree of co-operation will determine whether the dissection is performed under anaesthesia or not. Clear?"

"Clear, doctor."

"Curious—no panic. I'll wager we find you're a proto-Hamitoidal hemi-Nordic of at *least* degree five . . . but let's get on. Name?"

"Edward Royland."

"Birthdate?"

"July second, 1923."

The doctor threw down his pencil. "If my previous explanation was inadequate," he shouted, "let me add that if you continue to be difficult I may turn you over to my good friend Dr. Herzbrenner. Dr. Herzbrenner happens to teach interrogation technique at the Gestapo School. *Do—you—now—understand?*"

"Yes, doctor. I'm sorry I cannot withdraw my answer."

Dr. Kalten turned elaborately sarcastic. "How then do you account for your remarkable state of preservation at your age of approximately 180 years?"

"Doctor, I am twenty-three years old. I have travelled through time."

"Indeed?" Kalten was amused. "And how was this accomplished?"

Royland said steadily: "A spell was put on me by a satanic Jewish magician. It involved the ritual murder and desanguination of seven beautiful Nordic virgins."

Dr. Kalten gaped for a moment. Then he picked up his pencil and said firmly: "You will understand that my doubts were logical under the circumstances. Why did you not give me the sound scientific basis for your surprising claim at once? Go ahead; tell me all about it."

He was Dr. Kalten's prize; he was Dr. Kalten's treasure. His peculiarities of speech, his otherwise-inexplicable absence of a birth number over his left nipple, when they got around to it the gold filling in one of his teeth, his uncanny knowledge of Old America, now had a simple scientific explanation. He was from 1944. What was so hard to grasp about that? Any sound specialist knew about the lost Jewish Kabbalah magic, golems and such.

His story was that he had been a student Race Scientist under the pioneering master William D. Pully. (A noisy whack who used to barnstorm the chaw-and-gallus belt with the backing of Deutches Neues Buro; sure enough they found him in Volume VII of the standard *Introduction to a Historical Handbook of Race Science.*) The Jewish fiends had attempted to ambush his master on a lonely road; Royland persuaded him to switch hats and coats; in the darkness the substitution was not noticed. Later, in their stronghold he was identified, but the Nordic virgins had already been ritually murdered and drained of their blood, and it wouldn't keep. The dire fate destined for the master had been visited upon the disciple.

Dr. Kalten loved that bit. It tickled him pink that the sub-men's "revenge" on their enemy had been to precipitate him into a world purged of the sub-men entirely, where a Nordic might breathe freely!

Kalten, except for discreet consultations with such people as Old America specialists, a dentist who was stupefied by the gold filling, and a dermatologist who established that there was not and never had been a *geburtsnummer* on the subject examined, was playing Royland close to his vest. After a week it became apparent that he was reserving Royland for a grand unveiling which would climax the reading of a paper. Royland did not want to be unveiled; there were too many holes in his story. He talked with animation about the beauties of Mexico in the spring, its fair mesas, cactus and mushrooms. Could they make a short trip there? Dr. Kalten said they could not. Royland was becoming restless? Let him study, learn, profit by the matchless arsenal of the sciences available here in Chicago Parteihof. Dear old Chicago boasted distinguished exponents of the World Ice Theory, the Hollow World Theory, Dowsing, Homeopathic Medicine, Curative Folk Botany—

This last did sound interesting. Dr. Kalten was pleased to take his prize to the Medical School and introduce him as a protege to Professor Albiani, of Folk Botany.

Albiani was a bearded gnome out of the Arthur Rackham illustrations for *Das Rheingold.* He loved his subject. "Mother Nature,

the all-bounteous one! Wander the fields, young man, and with a seeing eye in an hour's stroll you will find the ergot that aborts, the dill that cools fever, the tansy that strengthens the old, the poppy that soothes the fretful teething babe!"

"Do you have any hallucinogenic Mexican mushrooms?" Royland demanded.

"We may," Albiani said, surprised. They browsed through the Folk Botany museum and pored over dried vegetation under glass. From Mexico there were peyote, the buttons and the root, and there was marihuana, root, stem, seed and stalk. No mushrooms.

"They may be in the storeroom," Albiani muttered.

All the rest of the day Royland mucked through the storeroom where specimens were waiting for exhibit space on some rotation plan. He went to Albiani and said, a little wild-eyed: "They're not there."

Albiani had been interested enough to look up the mushrooms in question in the reference books. "See?" he said happily, pointing to a handsome color plate of the mushroom: growing, mature, sporing and dried. He read: "'. . . superstitiously called *God Food,*'" and twinkled through his beard at the joke.

"They're not there," Royland said.

The professor, annoyed at last, said: "There might be some uncatalogued in the basement. Really, we don't have room for everything in our limited display space—just the *interesting* items."

Royland pulled himself together and charmed the location of the department's basement storage space out of him, together with permission to inspect it. And, left alone for a moment, ripped the color plate from the professor's book and stowed it away.

That night Royland and Dr. Kalten walked out on one of the innumerable tower-tops for a final cigar. The moon was high and full; its light turned the cratered terrain that had been Chicago into another moon. The sage and his disciple from another day leaned their elbows on a crenellated rampart two hundred feet above Lake Michigan.

"Edward," said Dr. Kalten, "I shall read my paper tomorrow before the Chicago Academy of Race Science." The words were a challenge; something was wrong. He went on: "I shall expect you to be in the wings of the auditorium, and to appear at my command to answer a few questions from me and, if time permits, from our audience."

"I wish it could be postponed," Royland said.

"No doubt."

"Would you explain your unfriendly tone of voice, doctor?" Royland demanded. "I think I've been completely co-operative and have opened the way for you to win undying fame in the annals of Race Science."

"Co-operative, yes. Candid—I wonder? You see, Edward, a dreadful thought struck me today. I have always thought it amusing that the Jewish attack on Reverend Pully should have been for the purpose of precipitating him into the future and that it should have mis-fired." He took something out of his pocket: a small pistol. He aimed it casually at Royland. "Today I began to wonder *why* they should have done so. Why did they not simply murder him, as they did thousands, and dispose of him in their secret crematoria, and permit no mention in their controlled newspapers and magazines of the disappearance?

"Now, the blood of seven Nordic virgins can have been no cheap commodity. One pictures with ease Nordic men patrolling their precious enclaves of humanity, eyes roving over every passing face, noting who bears the stigmata of the sub-men, and following those who do most carefully indeed lest race-defilement be committed with a look or an 'accidental' touch in a crowded street. Nevertheless the thing was done; your presence here is proof of it. It must have been done at enormous cost; hired Slavs and Negroes must have been employed to kidnap the virgins, and many of them must have fallen before Nordic rage.

"This merely to silence one small voice crying in the wilderness? *I—think—not.* I think, Edward Royland, or whatever your real name may be, that Jewish arrogance sent you, a Jew yourself, into the future as a greeting from the Jewry of that day to what it foolishly thought would be the triumphant Jewry of this. At any rate, the public questioning tomorrow will be conducted by my friend Dr. Herzbrenner, whom I have mentioned to you. If you have any little secrets, they will not remain secrets long. No, no! Do not move towards me. I shall shoot you disablingly in the knee if you do."

Royland moved toward him and the gun went off; there was an agonizing hammer blow high on his left shin. He picked up Kalten and hurled him, screaming, over the parapet two hundred feet into the water. And collapsed. The pain was horrible. His shinbone was badly cracked if not broken through. There was not much bleeding; maybe there would be later. He need not fear that the shot and scream would rouse the castle. Such sounds were not rare in the Medical Wing.

He dragged himself, injured leg trailing, to the doorway of

Kalten's living quarters; he heaved himself into a chair by the signal bell and threw a rug over his legs. He rang for the diener and told him very quietly: "Go to the medical storeroom for a leg U-brace and whatever is necessary for a cast, please. Dr. Kalten has an interesting idea he wishes to work out."

He should have asked for a syringe of morphine—no he shouldn't. It might affect the time-distortion.

When the man came back he thanked him and told him to turn in for the night.

He almost screamed getting his shoe off; his trouser leg he cut away. The gauze had arrived just in time; the wound was beginning to bleed more copiously. Pressure seemed to stop it. He constructed a sloppy walking cast on his leg. The directions on the several five-pound cans of plaster helped.

His leg was getting numb; good. His cast probably pinched some major nerve, and a week in it would cause permanent paralysis; who cared about *that?*

He tried it out and found he could get across the floor inefficiently. With a strong-enough bannister he could get downstairs but not, he thought, up them. That was all right. He was going to the basement.

God-damning the medieval Nazis and their cornball castle every inch of the way, he went to the basement; there he had a windfall. A dozen drunken SS men were living it up in a corner far from the censorious eyes of their company commander; they were playing a game which might have been called Spin the Corporal. They saw Royland limping and wept sentimental tears for poor ol' doc with a bum leg; they carried him two winding miles to the storeroom he wanted, and shot the lock off for him. They departed, begging him to call on ol' Company K any time, bes' fellas in Chicago, doc. Ol' Bruno here can tear the arm off a Latvik shirker with his bare hands, honest, doc! Jus' the way you twist a drumstick off a turkey. You wan' us to get a Latvik an' show you?

He got rid of them at last, clicked on the light and began his search. His leg was now ice cold, painfully so. He rummaged through the uncatalogued botanicals and found after what seemed like hours a crate shipped from Jalasca. Royland opened it by beating its corners against the concrete floor. It yielded and spilled plastic envelopes; through the clear material of one he saw the wrinkled black things. He did not even compare them with the color plate in his pocket. He tore the envelope open and crammed them into his mouth, and chewed and swallowed.

Maybe there had to be a Hopi dancing and chanting, maybe there didn't have to be. Maybe one had to be calm, if bitter, and fresh from a day of hard work at differential equations which approximated the Hopi mode of thought. Maybe you only had to fix your mind savagely on what you desired, as his was fixed now. Last time he had hated and shunned the Bomb; what he wanted was a world without the Bomb. He had got it, all right!

. . . his tongue was thick and the fireballs were beginning to dance around him, the circling circles . . .

Charles Miller Nahataspe whispered: "Close. Close. I was so frightened."

Royland lay on the floor of the hut, his leg unsplinted, unfractured, but aching horribly. Drowsily he felt his ribs; he was merely slender now, no longer gaunt. He mumbled: "You were working to pull me back from this side?"

"Yes. You, you were there?"

"I was there. God, let me sleep."

He rolled over heavily and collapsed into complete unconsciousness.

When he awakened it was still dark and his pains were gone. Nahataspe was crooning a healing song very softly. He stopped when he saw Royland's eyes open. "Now you know about break-the-sky medicine," he said.

"Better than anybody. What time is it?"

"Midnight."

"I'll be going then." They clasped hands and looked into each others' eyes.

The jeep started easily. Four hours earlier, or possibly two months earlier, he had been worried about the battery. He chugged down the settlement road and knew what would happen next. He wouldn't wait until morning; a meteorite might kill him, or a scorpion in his bed. He would go directly to Rotschmidt in his apartment, defy Vrouw Rotschmidt and wake her man up to tell him about 56c, tell him we have the Bomb.

We have a symbol to offer the Japanese now, something to which they can surrender, and will surrender.

Rotschmidt would be philosophical. He would probably sigh about the Bomb: "Ah, do we ever act responsibly? Do we ever know what the consequences of our decisions will be?"

And Royland would have to try to avoid answering him very sharply: "Yes. This once we damn well do."

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