Does Anyone Else Have Something Further to Add?

Stories About *Secret Places* and *Mean Men*

R. A. LAFFERTY

R. A. Lafferty "has to be the maddest, the most colorful, the most unexpected writer alive."

—THEODORE STURGEON

Does Anyone Else Have Something Further to Add?

Here are sixteen stories of comic inventiveness for the fun of it. They involve other worlds, nasty men, and lots of people in peculiar situations. In "The Wierdest World," an exile from another planet becomes the star of a Florida reptile farm. In "Mad Man," a man whose livelihood depends upon his fierce rages gets tired of being angry. In "The Ultimate Creature," the world's meanest man marries the universe's most beautiful woman—with rather unexpected offspring as a result.

For the fun of it, half of the stories are about secret places, half about mean men. They are alternated one with the other.

R. A. Lafferty is an original. *Does Anyone Else Have Something Further to Add* will offer pleasure and entertainment to anyone who enjoys the unexpected and the wryly bizarre.

Since the appearance of his first novel, *Past Master*, in 1968, R. A. Lafferty has published another eleven books, both novels and short story collections. While much of his highly praised work belongs to the general category of fantasy and science-fiction, he also writes what loosely can be called historical novels. About Mr. Lafferty's re-creation of American Indian life, *Okla Hannali*, Dee Brown has said that the book's hero, Hannali, "should become one of the enduring characters in the literature of the American Indian." Mr. Lafferty, who describes himself as a "correspondence school electrical engineer," lives in Oklahoma.

Charles Scribner's Sons · New York

JACKET DESIGN BY VINCENT TORRE

Does Anyone Else Have Something Further to Add?

Books by R. A. Lafferty

Arrive at Easterwine
The Devil Is Dead
The Fall of Rome
The Flame Is Green
Fourth Mansions
Nine Hundred Grandmothers
Okla Hannali
Past Master
The Reefs of Earth
Space Chantey
Strange Doings

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BY

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Charles Scribner's Sons

NEW YORK

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Lafferty, R A
Does anyone else have something further to add?

CONTENTS: About a secret crocodile.—Mad man.—Nor limestone islands.—The man underneath. [etc.]
1. Fantastic fiction, American. I. Title.
PZ4.L1627Do [PS3563.A28] 813'.5'4
ISBN 0-684-13827-1 74-4201

Some of these stories originally appeared
in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*
New Mexico Quarterly, Amazing, Galaxy,
If, The Third Foundation, and
Universe I.

"Groaning Hinges of the World" by R. A. Lafferty
originally appeared in *Ruins of Earth.*
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"The Ultimate Creature" by R. A. Lafferty
was originally published by Health
Knowledge, Inc.

This book published simultaneously in the
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1 3 5 7 9 11 13 15 17 19 c/c 20 18 16 14 12 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in the United States of America

To Kidd, Gold, Pohl, Jakobsson,
Carr, Malzberg, Disch,
Klingstein, Hutter, Dickey,
Lowndes, Dienstfrey,
and all good agents and editors.

CONTENTS

Secret Places

Mean Men

Does Anyone Else Have Something Further to Add?

About a Secret Crocodile

THERE is a secret society of seven men that controls the finances of the world. This is known to everyone but the details are not known. There are some who believe that it would be better if one of those seven men were a financier.

There is a secret society of three men and four women that controls all the fashions of the world. The details of this are known to all who are in the fashion. And I am not.

There is a secret society of nineteen men that is behind all the fascist organizations in the world. The secret name of this society is Glomerule.

There is a secret society of thirteen persons known as the Elders of Edom that controls all the secret sources of the world. That the sources have become muddy is of concern to them.

There is a secret society of only four persons that manufactures all the jokes of the world. One of these persons is unfunny and he is responsible for all the unfunny jokes.

There is a secret society of eleven persons that is behind all Bolshevik and atheist societies of the world. The devil himself is a member of this society, and he works tirelessly to become a principal member. The secret name of this society is Ocean.

There are related secret societies known as The Path of the Serpent (all its members have the inner eyelid of snakes), The

Darkbearers, the Seeing Eye, Imperium, The Golden Mask and the City.

Above most of these in a queer network there is a society that controls the attitudes and dispositions of the world—and the name of it is Crocodile. The Crocodile is insatiable: it eats persons and nations alive. And the Crocodile is very old, 8,809 years old by one account, 7,349 years old if you use the short chronology.

There are subsecret societies within the Crocodile: the Cocked Eye, the Cryptic Cootie and others. Powerful among these is a society of three hundred and ninety-nine persons that manufactures all the catchwords and slogans of the world. This subsociety is not completely secret since several of the members are mouthy: the code name of this apparatus is the Crocodile's Mouth.

Chesterton said that Mankind itself was a secret society. Whether it would be better or worse if the secret should ever come out he did not say.

And finally there was—for a short disruptive moment—a secret society of three persons that controlled all.

All what?

Bear with us. That is what this account is about.

JOHN CANDOR had been called into the office of Mr. James Dandi at ABNC. (Whisper, whisper, for your own good, do not call him Jim Dandy; that is a familiarity he will not abide.)

"This is the problem, John," Mr. Dandi stated piercingly,

"and we may as well put it into words. After all, putting things into words and pictures is our way of working at ABNC. Now then, what do we do at ABNC, John?"

(ABNC was one of the most powerful salivators of the Crocodile's Mouth.)

"We create images and attitudes, Mr. Dandi."

"That is correct, John," Mr. Dandi said. "Let us never forget it. Now something has gone wrong. There is a shadowy attack on us that may well be the most damaging thing since the old transgression of Spirochaete himself. Why has something gone wrong with our operation, John?"

"Sir, I don't know."

"Well then, what has gone wrong?"

"What has gone wrong, Mr. Dandi, is that it isn't working the way it should. We are caught on our own catchwords, we are slaughtered by our own slogans. There are boomerangs whizzing about our ears from every angle. None of it goes over the way it is supposed to. It all twists wrong for us."

"Well, what is causing this? Why are our effects being nullified?"

"Sir, I believe that somebody else is also busy creating images and attitudes. Our catechesis states that this is impossible since we are the only group permitted in the field. Nevertheless, I am sure that someone else is building these things against us. It even seems that they are more powerful than we are—and they are unknown."

"They cannot be more powerful than we are—and they must not remain unknown to us." Mr. Dandi's words stabbed. "Find out who they are, John."

"How?"

"If I knew how, John, I would be working for you, not you

working for me. Your job is to do things. Mine is the much more difficult one of telling you to do them. Find out, John."

JOHN CANDOR went to work on the problem. He considered whether it was a linear, a set or a group problem. If it were a linear problem he should have been able to solve it by himself—and he couldn't. If it were a set problem, then it couldn't be solved at all. Of necessity he classified it as a group problem and he assembled a group to solve it. This was easy at ABNC which had more group talent than anybody.

The group that John Candor assembled was made up of August Crayfish, Sterling Groshawk, Maurice Cree, Nancy Peters, Tony Rover, Morgan Aye, and Betty McCracken. Tell the truth, would you be able to gather so talented a group in your own organization?

"My good people," John Candor said, "as we all know, something has gone very wrong with our effects. It must be righted. Thoughts, please, thoughts!"

"We inflate a person or subject and he bursts on us," August gave his thought. "Are we using the wrong gas?"

"We launch a phrase and it turns into a joke," Sterling complained. "Yet we have not slighted the check-off: it has always been examined from every angle to be sure that it doesn't have a joker context. But something goes wrong."

"We build an attitude carefully from the ground up," Maurice stated. "Then our firm ground turns boggy and the thing tilts and begins to sink."

"Our 'Fruitful Misunderstandings,' the most subtle and

effective of our current devices, are beginning to bear sour fruit," Nancy said.

"We set ourselves to cut a man down and our daggers turn to rubber," Tony Rover moaned. (Oh, were there ever sadder words? "Our daggers turn to rubber.")

"Things have become so shaky that we're not sure whether we are talking about free or closed variables," Morgan gave his thought.

"How can my own loving mother make such atrocious sandwiches?" Betty McCracken munched distastefully. Betty, who was underpaid, was a brown-sack girl who brought her own lunch. "This is worse than usual." She chewed on. "The only thing to do with it is feed it to the computer." She fed it to the computer which ate it with evident pleasure.

"Seven persons, seven thoughts," John Candor mused.

"Seven persons, six thoughts," Nancy Peters spat bitterly. "Betty, as usual, has contributed nothing."

"Only the first stage of the answer," John Candor said. "She said 'The only thing to do with it is to feed it to the computer.' Feed the problem to the computer, folks."

They fed the problem to the computer by pieces and by wholes. The machine was familiar with their lingos and procedures. It was acquainted with the Non-Valid Context Problems of Morgan Aye and with the Hollow Shell Person Puzzles of Tony Rover. It knew the Pervading Environment Ploy of Maurice Cree. It knew what trick-work to operate within.

Again and again the machine asked for various kinds of supplementary exterior data.

"Leave me with it," the machine finally issued. "Assemble here again in sixty days, or hours—"

"No, we want the answers right now," John Candor insisted, "within sixty seconds."

"The second is possibly the interval I was thinking of," the machine issued. "What's time to a tin can anyhow?" It ground its data trains for a full minute.

"Well?" John Candor asked.

"Somehow I get the number three," the machine issued.

"Three what, machine?"

"Three persons," the machine issued. "They are unknowingly linked together to manufacture attitudes. They are without program or purpose or organization or remuneration or basis or malice."

"Nobody is without malice," August Crayfish insisted in a startled way. "They must be totally alien forms then. How do they manage their effects?"

"One with a gesture, one with a grimace, one with an intonation," the machine issued.

"Where are they?" John Candor demanded.

"All comparatively near." The machine drew three circles on the city map. "Each is to be found in his own circle most of the time."

"Their names?" John Candor asked and the machine wrote the name of each in the proper circle.

"Do you have anything on their appearances?" Sterling Groshawk inquired and the machine manufactured three kymograph pictures of the targets.

"Have you their addresses or identifying numbers?" Maurice Cree asked.

"No. I think it's remarkable of me that I was able to come up with this much," the machine issued.

"We can find them," Betty McCracken said. "We can most likely find them in the phone book."

"What worries me is that there's no malice in them," John Candor worried. "Without malice, there's no handle to get hold of a thing. The Disestablishment has been firmly established for these several hundred years and we hold it to be privileged. It must not be upset by these three randoms. We will do what we must do."

MIKE ZHESTOVITCH was a mighty man. One does not make the primordial gestures out of weak body and hands. He looked like a steelworker—or anyhow like a worker at one of the powerful trades. His torso was like a barrel but more noble than ordinary barrels. His arms and hands were hardly to be believed. His neck was for the bulls, his head was as big as a thirteen gallon firkin, his eyeballs were the size of ducks' eggs and the hair on his chest and throat was that heavy black wire-grass that defies steel plowshares. His voice—well he didn't have much of a voice—it wasn't as mighty as the rest of him.

And he didn't really work at one of the powerful trades. He was a zipper repairman at the Jiffy Nifty Dry Cleaners.

August Crayfish of ABNC located Mike Zhestovitch in the Blind Robbin Bar which (if you recall the way that block lies) is just across that short jog-alley from the Jiffy Nifty. And August recognized big Mike at once. But how did big Mike get his effects?

"The Cardinals should take the Colts today," a serious man there was saying.

"The Cardinals—" Mike Zhestovitch began in the voice that was less noble than the rest of him, but he didn't finish the sentence. As a matter of fact, big Mike had never finished a sentence in all his life. Instead he made the gesture with his mighty hands and body. Words cannot describe the gesture but it was something like balling up an idea or opinion in the giant hands and throwing it away, utterly away, over the very edge of contempt.

The Cardinals, of course, did not take the Colts that day. For a moment it was doubtful whether the Cardinals would survive at all. From the corner of the eye, red feathers could be seen drifting away in the air.

August Crayfish carefully waited a moment and watched. A man walked out of the Blind Robbin and talked to another man in that little jog-alley. From their seriousness it was certain that they were talking baseball.

"The Cardinals—" the first man said after a moment, and he also made the gesture. And seconds later a man playing eight-ball in the back of the Blind Robbin did the same thing.

August was sure then. Mike Zhestovitch not only could shrivel anything with the gesture, but the gesture as he used it was highly epidemic. It would spread, according to Schoeffler's Law of Dispersal, through the city in short minutes, through the world in short hours. And no opinion could stand against its disfavor. Mike Zhestovitch could wreck images and attitudes—and possibly he could also create them.

"Do you work alone?" August Crayfish asked.

"No. The rip-fix and the buttonsew girls work in the same cubbyhole," Mike said with his curiously small voice.

"Do you know a Mary Smorfia?" August asked.

"I don't, no," Mike said, a certain comprehension coming into his ducks'-egg-sized eyes. "And you are glad that I don't? Then I will. I'll find out who she is. I see it now that you are a wrong guy and she is a right girl."

Then August Crayfish spoke the slogan that would be unveiled to the ears of the world that very night, a wonderfully slippery slogan that had cost a hundred thousand dollars to construct. It should have warned Mike Zhestovitch away from his mad resistance.

Mike Zhestovitch made the gesture, and the slogan was in ruins. And somewhere the Secret Crocodile lashed its tail in displeasure.

"Do you want to make a lot of money?" August Crayfish whispered after a long reevaluation pause.

"Money—from such as you—" Big Mike didn't finish the sentence, he never did. But he made the gesture. The idea of a lot of money shriveled. And August Crayfish shriveled so small that he could not climb over the threshold of the Blind Robbin on the way out and had to be aided over it by the shod toe of a kind man. (This last statement is a literal exaggeration but it is the right direction.)

NANCY PETERS of ABNC located Mary Smorfia in the King-Pin Bowling Alley, where she was a hamburger wait-

ress and a beer buster. Mary was small, dark, unpretty (except for her high-frequency eyes and the beautiful gash across her face that was her mouth), lively, smart, busy, a member of that aberrant variety of the human race that was called Italian.

"Snorting Summer should take the Academy Award," one nice guzzling lady at the counter was saying to another, "and Clover Elysée is the shoeless shoo-in for best actress of the year."

And Mary Smorfia made the grimace. Ah, it was mostly done with the beautifully large mouth and yet every part of her entered into it, from the blue lights in her hair to her crinkly toes. It was a devastating, all-destroying grimace. It gobbled up, it nullified and it made itself felt to a great distance. The nice guzzling lady had not even been looking toward Mary Smorfia but she felt the grimace like a soul shock, and she herself did the grimace with a wonderful distortion of the features that weren't made for it.

And the grimace swept everything like quick contagion or prairie fire. Snorting Summer—gah! Clover Elysée—guggling gah! Those things were finished forever, beyond laughter, below derision. And Nancy Peters of ABNC noted the powerful effect carefully, for the original words of the nice guzzling lady were the very words that ABNC had selected to be echoed a hundred million times whenever the awards were thought of.

"Do you work alone?" Nancy Peters asked Mary Smorfia.

"Kid, I am so fast they don't need anyone else on this shift. I'm like silly lightning."

"Did you ever think of becoming an actress, Mary?" Nancy asked in honey-tones.

"Oh, I made a commercial once," Mary said out of her curly gash-mouth (she had to be kidding: she couldn't really have a mouth that looked like that). "I don't know whether I sold much of my guy's soap but I bet I got a lot of people off that Brand X. Ashes it was, worse even, after I monkey-faced it. They say I'm a natural—but once is enough."

"Do you know a Mike Zhestovitch or a Clivendon Surrey?" Nancy asked.

"I don't think so," Mary said. "What league do they bowl in? I bet I will like them both, though, and I will remember their names and find them."

Nancy Peters was nervous. She felt that the annihilating grimace was about to strike again on Mary's lightning-gash mouth. But it was time for the test of strength. Nancy spoke the new slogan that had been selected for presentation to the world that very night, a wonderfully convincing and powerful slogan that should bring this random Mary Smorfia to heel if anything could. And she spoke it with all the absolute expertise of the Crocodile's Mouth behind her.

The Grimace! And the slogan was destroyed forever. And (grimacing horror turned inward) Nancy caught the contagion and was doing the grimace herself. She was quite unable to get the thing off her face.

Sheer humiliation overwhelmed the Nancy person, who had suddenly been made small. And somewhere the Secret Crocodile lashed its tail in displeasure and unease.

"Do you want to make twenty thousand dollars, Mary?" Nancy asked after she had returned from the jane where she had daubed her flushed face and cooled her flustered body.

"Twenty thousand dollars isn't very much," Mary Smorfia sounded out of her panoramic mouth. "I make eighty-eight

fifty now after everything. I could make a lot more if I wanted to go along with the cruds."

"Twenty thousand dollars is very much more," Nancy Peters said enticingly.

"It is very much more cruddy, kid." Mary Smorfia grimaced. Grimaced! Not again! Nancy Peters fled in deflated panic. She felt herself dishonored forever.

Well, do you think it is all water-melon pickles and pepper relish, this unilaterally creating all the images and attitudes for the whole world? It isn't. It is a detailed and devious thing and the privileged Disestablishment had been building it for centuries. (The Establishment itself had been no more than a figure of speech for most of those centuries, a few clinging bits of bark: the heart of the tree had long been possessed by the privileged Disestablishment.) Three quick random persons could not be permitted to nullify words from the Mouth itself.

MORGAN AYE of ABNC located Clivendon Surrey in Speedsters' Café. Clivendon was a lank and fair-haired man with a sort of weariness about him, a worldliness that had to be generations old. He had the superior brow and the thoroughbred nose that isn't grown in short centuries. He had the voice, the intonation, the touch of Groton, the touch of Balliol, the strong touch of other institutions even more august. It was a marvelous voice, at least the intonation of it. Clivendon's employer once said that he didn't believe that Clivendon ever spoke in words, at least not in any words that

he was ever able to understand. The intonation was really a snort, a sort of neigh, but it carried the cresting contempt of the ages in its tone. And it was contagious.

Clivendon was really of Swedish extraction and had come off a farm near Pottersville. He had developed that intonation for a role in a high school play. He had liked it and he had kept it. Clivendon was a motorcycle mechanic at Downhillers' Garage.

"Do you work alone?" Morgan Aye asked Clivendon.

"Naeu. You work alone and you got to work. You work with a bunch and you can slip out from it," Clivendon intoned. Yes, he talked in words and the words could be mostly understood. But the towering intonation was the thing, the world-wilting contempt of the tone. This man was a natural and Morgan felt himself a foot shorter in the very presence of that tone.

"Do you know a Mike Zhestovitch or a Mary Smorfia?" Morgan asked fearfully.

"That's a funny thing." The tone cut through ear-wax and the soft spots of the spleen. "I had never heard of them but Mary Smorfia called me up not thirty minutes ago and said that she wanted both of us to meet Mike. So I'll meet them in about twenty minutes, as soon as the clock there says that I'm supposed to be off work at Downhillers' Garage."

"Don't meet them!" Morgan cried out violently. "That might be the closing of the link, the setting up of a league. It might be an affront to the Mouth itself."

The tone, the neigh, the snort, the sharp edge of a wordless intonation sent Morgan reeling back. And there were echoes of it throughout Speedsters' Café and in the streets outside. The tone was as contagious as it was cutting.

Morgan started to speak the newest selected slogan from the Mouth—and he stopped short. He was afraid of the test of strength. Two very expensive slogans had already been shattered today by these randoms. "No malice in the three," the computer had said and: "without malice, there's no handle to get hold of a thing," John Candor had stated. But somewhere in that mountainous and contagious contempt of tone that belonged to Clivendon Surrey had to be some malice. So Morgan Aye reached for what had always been the ultimate weapon of the Crocodile's Mouth. It always worked —it always worked if any malice at all existed in the object.

"How would you like to make five thousand dollars a week?" he whispered to Clivendon.

"What garage pays that much?" Clivendon asked in honest wonder. "I'm not that good a motorcycle mechanic."

"Five thousand dollars a week to work with us at ABNC," Morgan tempted. "We could use you in so many ways—that marvelous scorn to cut down any man we wished! You could lend the intonations of your voice to our—"

The neigh was like a thousand sea stallions breaking up from the depths. The snort was one that crumbles cliffs at the ends of the earth. Morgan Aye had gone ghastly white and his ears were bleeding from the transgression of that cutting sound. There were even some words in Clivendon's sounding —"Why, then I'd be one of the birds that picks the shreds of flesh from between the teeth of the monster." Blinding hooting contempt in the tone and Morgan Aye was in the street and running from it.

But the echoes of that intonation were everywhere in that part of town, soon to be all over the town, all over the world. It was an epidemic of snorting at the Crocodile's Mouth itself.

Fools! Did they know that this was but one step from snorting at the very Crocodile?

THE ring had closed. The informal league had formed now. The three randoms had met and united. The Mouth was affronted. Worse than that, all the outpour of the Mouth was nullified. The whole world was rejecting the catchwords that came from the Mouth, was laughing at them, was throwing them away with the uttermost gesture, was monkey-facing them, was snorting them down, was casting them out with bottomless contempt.

This was the short reign of the secret society of three, who did not know that they were secret. But in their day they closed the Mouth down completely. It was filled with mud and swamp reeds and rotting flesh.

The Secret Crocodile was lashing its tail with acute displeasure now. The Crocodile's Mouth had become quite nervous. And what of the little birds that fly in and out of that mouth, that preen the teeth and glean scraps of flesh and slogans and catchwords there? The birds were in quite an unhappy flutter.

"There is open conspiracy against us by a secret society of three persons," Mr. James Dandi was saying, "and all the world abominates a secret society. We have this thing to do this day—to cripple it forever in its strength. Otherwise we will be cast out and broken as ineffectual instruments and the Crocodile will bring in strong persons from the Cocked Eye or the Cryptic Cootie to take our places. Surely we are not

without resources. What is the logical follow-up to the Fruitful Misunderstanding?"

"The Purposive Accident," John Candor said immediately.

"Take care of it, John," Mr. James Dandi said. "Remember, though, that he whose teeth we preen is the very bowels of compassion. I believe this is the salient thing in the world in our day. The Compassion of the Crocodile."

"Take care of it, people," John Candor said to his seven talented ones, "remembering always that the Crocodile is the very belly of compassion."

"Take care of it," the seven said to the computer, "always within the context of the jaws of compassion."

The computer programmed a Purposive Accident to happen and manufactured such props as were needed. And the Purposive Accident was very well programmed.

There was no great amount of blood poured out. No persons were killed except several uninvolved bystanders. The secret three were left alive and ambulant and scathed only at their points of strength.

It happened in the block between the Blind Robbin Bar and Speedsters' Café when all three members of the secret society happened to be walking together. The papers called it a bomb; they call everything a bomb that goes off like that. It was really a highly sophisticated homing device with a tripartite programming and it carried out its tripartite mission.

All three randoms, former members of the short-lived secret society, are well and working again. Mike Zhestovitch is no longer a zipper repairman (it takes two talented hands to fix those zippers), but he still works at the Jiffy Nifty Dry Cleaners. He runs one of those big pressers now which he can

easily do with his powerful and undamaged left hand and his prosthetic right hand. But without his old right hand he can no longer make the contagious primordial gesture that once dumbfounded the Mouth and all its words. You just cannot make the big gesture with a false hand.

Mary Smorfia still works at the King-Pin Bowling Alley as hamburger waitress and beer buster. She is still small, dark, unpretty (except for her high-frequency eyes), lively, smart, and Italian. Her mouth is still a gash across her face, but now it is twice as great a gash as it used to be, and it no longer has its curled liveliness. Its mobility is all gone, it will no longer express the inexpressible, will no longer shatter a phrase or an attitude. Mary Smorfia is as she always was, except that now she is incapable of the famous grimace.

Clivendon Surrey is again a motorcycle mechanic at Downhillers' Garage and again he spends most of his time in Speedsters' Café. His vocal cords are gone, of course, but he gets by: he is able to speak with a throat microphone. But the famous intonation, the neigh, the destroying snort are all impossible for him.

The trouble is over with. Now again there is only one organization in the world to create the images and attitudes of the world. This insures that only the standard attitudes of the Disestablishment shall prevail.

IN OUR opening catalog we forgot one group. There is another secret society in the world composed of the good guys and good gals. It has no name that we have ever heard except

just the Good Guys and Good Gals. At the moment this society controls nothing at all in the world. It stirs a little, though. It may move. It may collide, someday, even with the Secret Crocodile itself.

Mean Men

Mad Man

THE too-happy puppy came bounding up to him—a bundle of hysterical yipes and a waggling tail that would bring joy to the soul of anyone. The pathetic expectation and sheer love in the shining eyes and woolly rump was something to see. The whole world loves a puppy like that.

And George Gnevni kicked the thing end over end and high into the air with a remarkably powerful boot. The sound that came from the broken creature as it crash-landed against a wall was a heart-rending wail that would have melted the heart of a stone toad.

Gnevni was disgusted with himself.

"Less than ten meters. Should have booted him twelve. I'll kill the blood-sucking cod-headed little cur the next time. Nothing goes right today."

IT was not a real puppy; it was better than a real one. There is something artificial in the joy and carrying on of a real puppy as well as in its hurt screaming. But the antics of this one rang true. The thing was made by a competent artist, and it was well made.

It could be set to go through the same routine again at a moment's notice.

A Crippled Old Lady came up shaking with palsy. There was real beauty in her face yet, and a serenity that pain could never take away from her.

"A glorious morning to you, my good man," she said to Gnevni.

And he kicked her crutches out from under her.

"I am sure that was an accident, sir," she gasped as she teetered and nearly fell. "Would you be so kind as to hand them to me again? I'm quite unable to stand without them."

Gnevni knocked her down with a smacking blow. He then stomped up and down on her body from stem to stern. And with a heavy two-footed jump on her stomach he left her writhing on the pavement.

Gnevni was again disgusted with himself.

"It doesn't seem to do a thing for me today," he said, "not a thing. I don't know what's the matter with me this morning."

It was a real lady. We are afraid of dog-lovers, but we are not afraid of people-lovers. There are so few of them. So the lady was not an artificial one. She was real flesh and blood, and the best of both. However, she was neither crippled nor old. She was a remarkably athletic woman and had been a stunt girl before she found her true vocation. She was also a fine young actress and played the Crippled Old Lady role well.

Gnevni went to his job in the Cortin Institute Building that was popularly known as the Milk Shed.

"Bring my things, crow-bait," he grumbled at a nice young lady assistant. "I see the rats have been in your hair again. Are you naturally deformed or do you stand that way on purpose? There's a point, you know, beyond which ugliness is no longer a virtue."

The nice young lady began to cry, but not very convincingly.

She went off to get Gnevni's things. But she would bring only a part of them, and, not all of them the right ones.

"Old George isn't himself this morning," said the under-doctor Cotrel.

"I know," said under-doctor Devon. "We'll have to devise something to get him mad today. We can't have him getting pleasant on us."

THE required paranexus could not be synthesized. Many substances had been tried and all of them had been found insufficient. But the thing was needed for the finest operation of the Programmeds. It had to be the real thing, and there was only one way to get a steady supply of it.

At one time they had simplified it by emphasizing the cortin and adrenalin components of it. Later they had emphasized a dozen other components, and then a hundred. And finally they accepted it for what it was—too complex for duplication, too necessary an accessory for the Programmeds to be neglected, too valuable at its most effective to be taken from random specimens. It could be had only from Humans, and it could be had in fine quality only from a special sort of Humans. The thing was very complex, but at the Institute they called it Oil of Dog.

Peredacha was a pleasant little contrivance—a "Shadler Movement" or "female" of the species that had once been called *homo conventus* or *robot* and was now referred to as "Programmed Person."

She had a sound consciousness, hint of developing originality, a capacity for growth and a neatness of mechanism and person. She

might be capable of fine work of the speculative sort. She was one of those on whom the added spark might not be wasted.

Always they had worked to combine the best elements of both sorts.

The Programmed Persons were in many respects superior to the Old Recension Persons or Humans. They were of better emotional balance, of greater diligence, of wider adaptability, of much vaster memory or accumulation and of readier judgment based on that memory. But there was one thing lacking in the most adept of the Programmed that was often to be found in the meanest of the Humans. This was a thing very hard to name.

It was the little bit extra; but the Programmed already had the very much extra. It had something of the creative in it, though the Programmed were surely more creative than the Humans. It was the rising to the occasion; the Programmed could do this more gracefully, but sometimes less effectively, than could the Humans. It was the breaking out of a framework, the utter lack of complacency, the sudden surge of power or intellect, the bewildering mastery of the moment, the thing that made the difference.

It was the Programmed themselves who sought out the thing, for they were the more conscious of the difference. It was the Programmed technicians who set up the system. It cost the Humans nothing, and it profited the Programmed very much in their persons and personalities.

On many of them, of course, it had little effect; but on a select few it had the effect of raising them to a genius grade. And many of them who could never become geniuses did become specialists to a degree unheard of before—and all because of the peculiar human additive.

It was something like the crossing of the two races, though there

could never be a true cross of species so different—one of them not being of the reproductive sort. The adrenal complex sometimes worked great changes on a Programmed.

There were but a few consistent prime sources of it—and each of them somehow had his distinguishing mark. Often a Programmed felt an immediate kinship, seldom reciprocated, with the Human donor. And Peredacha, a very responsive Programmed, felt the kinship keenly when the additive was given to her.

"I claim for paternity," she cried. It was a standard joke of the Programmed. "I claim as daughter to my donor! I never believed it before. I thought it only one of those things that everybody says. The donors are such a surly bunch that it drives them really violent if one of us seeks their acquaintance on this pretext. But I'm curious. Which one was it?"

She was told.

"Oh no! Not him of the whole clutch! How droll can you get? *He* is my new kindred? But never before did I feel so glorious. Never have I been able to work so well."

THE assigned job of George Gnevni was a mechanical one. In the ordinary course of things this would be all wrong, for George had less mechanical aptitude than any man ever born. George had very little aptitude for anything at all in the world—until his one peculiar talent was discovered.

He was an unhandsome and graceless man, and he lived in poverty. Much has been said about the compensations of physical ugliness—mostly the same things that have been said about

poverty. It is often maintained that they may be melded behind the dross front, that the sterling character may develop and shine through the adversity.

It is lies, it is lies! It happens only rarely that these things are ennobling. With persons of the commoner sort it happens not at all. To be ugly and clumsy and poor at the same time will finally drive a man to raving anger against the whole world.

And that was the idea.

Gnevni was assigned a mean lodging, and his meal tickets were peculiar ones. He could not obtain what he wanted to eat. He could have only what was on the list for him to eat, and this was evilly contrived to cover everything that disagreed with him. As a result he was usually in gastric pain and in seething anger at his own entrails. He had an ugly nature to begin with, but the form of life forced upon him deepened and nurtured it.

Gnevni's voice was harsh and jangling, though there was real mastery of resonance in his powerful howling when his anger reached high form. He was denied wifing privileges, and no woman would have had him in any case. He was allowed just enough of bad whoa-johnny whisky to keep him edgy and mean, but not enough to bring him solace.

He was an oaf—an obscene distasteful clod of humanity. He knew it and he boiled and seethed with the shoddy knowledge. He was no better than a badger in a cage, but those things are terrific snappers.

For his poor livelihood he was given a quota of mechanical tasks to complete every day, and he had no mechanical aptitude at all. They were simple assembly jobs. A competent Programmed Person could do in minutes what it took Gnevni all day to do. Most children of the human species could do the same things

easily and quickly—though some might not be able to do them at all, for the Humans are less uniform in their abilities than the Programmed.

The things that Gnevni was to assemble were never all there, some of them were the wrong things, and some of them were defective. A Programmed would have spotted the off stuff at once and sent it back, but ugly George had no way of telling whether things were right or not. He sweated and swore his days away at the grotesque labor and became the angriest man alive.

Joker tools were sometimes substituted on him for the true tools—screwdrivers with shafts as flexible as spaghetti, key-drifts with noses as soft as wax, box-end wrench sets that were sized to fit nothing, soldering guns that froze ice on their tips, mis-marked calipers with automatic slippage, false templates, unworkable crimpers, continuity testers that shocked a man to near madness.

It is a legend that humans have an affinity for mechanical things. But normal humans have an innate hatred for machinery, and the accommodation that has grown up between them is a nervous one. The damned stuff just doesn't work right. You hate it, and it hates you. That's the old basic of it.

Swift, a wise old mad man, once wrote a piece on the "Perversity of Inanimate Objects." And they *are* perverse, particularly to a sick, ugly, ignorant, incompetent, poor man who fights them in a frenzy—and they fight back.

All day long George Gnevni and a few of his unfortunate fellows attacked their tasks explosively—the air blue with multi-syllabled profanity, and anger dancing about like summer lightning. Now and then, people came and inserted tubes into these unfortunates, and performed some other indignities upon them.

The paranexus, the complex substance, the "Oil of Dog" that

was needed for stimulation of the Programmed, while it could be taken from any Humans, could only be had in its prime form from a depraved, insane sort of *Very Angry Men.*

BUT today George Gnevni was not himself. There was only a sullenness in him, not the required flaming purple anger.

"We have to prod him," said under-doctor Cotrel. "We can't waste a whole day on him. He's sick enough. He tests at a high enough pitch of excitement. Why won't he put out? Why won't he get mad?"

"I have an idea," said under-doctor Devon. "We have an inner-office memo that one of the Programmed has recognized kinship with him. You remember when Wut was in a slump? We got a Programmed up here who threw an arm around him and called him Uncle Wilbur. The way Wut exploded, seismographs must have recorded the shock at a considerable distance. We had to move fast to prevent him from damaging the Programmed. And then Wut was so mad that we were able to use him around the clock for seventy-two hours. How our Very Angry Men do hate the Programmed! They call them the things."

"Good. Anything that worked on Wut ought to work double on Gnevni. Get the Programmed Person up here. We'll have him at ugly George."

"Her. She's a Shadler Movement Programmed and so technically a female."

"Better yet. I can hardly wait, Gnevni is the most spectacular of them all when he really goes wild. We should get a good production from him."

Peredacha, the talented little Shadler Movement Programmed, came to the Cortin Institute Building—the Milk Shed. She understood the situation and enjoyed it. The Programmed have their humor—more urbane than that of Humans, and yet as genuine—and they appreciate the hilarity of an incongruous confrontation.

Peredacha was something of an actress, for all the Programmed have a talent for mimicry. She considered the role for a moment, and she put all her talent into it.

And she did it! She made herself into the most pathetic urchin since the Little Match Girl. Yet she was a Programmed and not a Human; it was as though a gear box should put on a waif's shawl and turn tear-jerker.

They brought her in.

"Papa!" Peredacha cried and rushed toward Gnevni.

The attendants had closed between them to prevent damage when the anger of the low man should rise like a jagged wave.

The show should have been greater than the one that Wut had once put on for less reason. Gnevni was a bigger man with more power of anger, and the situation was even more ridiculous. It should have set records on the decibel-recorder, filled the room with brimstone, and enriched the vocabulary of scatology.

But it didn't.

The face of George Gnevni was slack, and he shook his heavy head sadly.

"Take the child away," he said dully. "I will not be responsible for my feelings today."

IT was a new morning and George Gnevni must return to his brutal livelihood.

A too-happy puppy came bounding up to him—a bundle of hysterically gay yipes with a waggling rump and tail hitched on to them.

"Hello, little fellow," Gnevni said and bent down to pet it. But the puppy was not programmed for such treatment. It was made to be kicked by angry men. It threw itself into a series of reverse somersaults and heart-rending wails as though it had been kicked indeed.

"Oh, the poor little toy!" said Gnevni. "It has never known kindness."

"Look, Gnevni," said an inferior sort of man who came up, "the dog was made for one thing only—so that twelve or thirteen of you hotfires could kick it every morning and get into your mood. Now kick too."

"I won't do it."

"I'll report you."

"I don't care. How could anyone harm that poor little tyke?"

The Crippled Old Lady came up—shaking as with palsy. "A glorious good morning to you, my good man," she said to Gnevni.

"And a fine morning to you, my lady," he said.

"What? You're not supposed to say that! You're supposed to kick my crutches out from under me and then knock me down and trample on me. It helps get you in your mood. Crippled Old Ladies are infuriating sights to the Very Angry Men; they make them even angrier. Everybody knows that."

"I just don't believe that I will do it today, ah—Margaret, is that not your name? A fine day to you, my dear."

"Knock off that fine day stuff! I have my job to do. I'm a mood piece. You blow-tops are supposed to kick out my crutches and

tromp me down to get in your mood. Now start kicking or I'll report you."

"Do so if you must, my dear."

GNEVNI went to his job in the Cortin Institute Building, and there he was good for nothing.

Mad? He wasn't even sullen. He was puzzled and pleasant, and when you have one of the old stand-bys go pleasant on you you're in trouble. He was civil to everybody and gave them all the jitters. He completed his mechanical tasks in an hour—finding them much easier when he attacked them calmly. But he wasn't supposed to find them easier.

So there was consternation in the Department. Gnevni had been the best producer of them all. They couldn't let him go by like that.

"Damn you, get mad!" under-doctor Cotrel shouted and shook him. "We won't have any malingering on the job. Get mad and start putting out."

"I just don't seem able to get mad today," said Gnevni honestly.

"You double-damned *will* get mad, you crud-head!" pursued under-doctor Cotrel. Cotrel seemed rather upset himself. "Under-doctor Devon! Over-doctor Ratracer! Director Duggle! Come help me with this pig-headed fellow. He won't get mad."

"He's *got* to get mad," said under-doctor Devon. "We'll make the filth-eating fink get mad."

"It looks bad," said Director Duggle. "He was at only half efficiency yesterday, and today he's good for nothing at all. Well, put him through the routine. We can't have him going sour at us."

They put him through the routine. It was brutal. It would have made a roaring devil out of the sweetest saint. Even spectators commonly became white with fury when such a thing was put on, and there was no limit to the effect on the victim. Gnevni endured it with composed sorrow but without anger. And when even the routine didn't work what more could you do to him?

Under-doctor Cotrel began to cuff and kick him: "Get mad, you slimy sulphurous son of a she shink! Get mad, you mud-headed old monkey! Get mad, you dirt-eating mutt-head! You slobber-mouthed donkey, get mad!"

They brought in others. They even brought in Peredacha—hoping she would have a more positive effect on him than she had had the day before. But Gnevni brightened up to see her.

"Ah, it is my little daughter! I sent you notes at intervals through the evening and night, but I guess you did not receive them. It is so wonderful just to see you again."

"Why you bat-whiskered old bum, was it you who sent those notes? 'Sweet papa.' You? By the shop where I was made, I never heard of anything like it before!"

"Do not be cruel, Peredacha. You are all that I care for in the world. With you I could become a new man."

"Well, not being human I guess I can be humane. I'll look after you, ugly papa. But they don't want you to become a new man; as the old one you were the best they had. Come now, get mad for the people. It's your job."

"I know, but I'm unable to do it. I have been thinking, Peredacha, that since you are my daughter in a way—cortin of my cortin and adrenalin of my adrenalin—perhaps the two of us might go off somewhere and—"

"Holy howling hog!" Under-doctor Cotrel took off in a screech too high for the human ear to follow, so perhaps only Peredacha

heard and flushed. And then Cotrel broke up completely. He kicked and beat on Gnevni. He shrilled and sobbed and gobbled. And when his sounds once more became intelligible it was a screaming, "Get mad, damn you, get mad!"

Cotrel was a lean man, but powerfully corded and muscled, and now every cord of muscle and nerve stood glaringly out on him black and purple.

That man was plain frantic in his displeasure at Gnevni. The flying foam from his lips flecked the room—something you would not have expected from under-doctor Cotrel.

"IT is all right," said Director Duggle. "Gnevni was about finished in any case. The best of them are only good for a year or two—the pace is a terrific one. And we are lucky to have his replacement ready at hand."

"Replacement?" roared the livid Cotrel. "He's got to get mad! There isn't any replacement." And he continued to strike Gnevni.

"I believe that the director has you in mind, Cotrel," said over-doctor Ratracer. "Yes. I am sure of it."

"Me? I am under-doctor Cotrel! I make five hundred Guzman d'or a month!"

"And now you will make five," said Director Duggle. "Grinding poverty is a concomitant of your new job. I had suspected you had a talent for it. Now I am sure. You begin immediately. You become the latest, and soon I hope the best, of the Very Angry Men."

Cotrel became so, and immediately. Gnevni had been good. Wut before him had been one of the best. But for carrying-on

noise and stink generally, there was never such an exhibition as Mad Man Cotrel now put on—getting into the spirit of his new job.

He was the maddest man you ever saw!

Secret Places

Nor Limestone Islands

A lapidary is one who cuts, polishes, engraves, and sets small stones. He is also a scrivener with a choppy style who sets in little stones or pieces here and there and attempts to make a mosaic out of them.

But what do you call one who cuts and sets very large stones?

Take a small *lapillus* or stone for instance:

> The origin of painting as an art in Greece is connected with definite historical personages; but that of sculpture is lost in the mists of legend. Its authentic history does not begin until about the year B.C. 600. It was regarded as an art imparted to men by the gods; for such is the thought expressed in the assertion that the earliest statues fell from heaven.
>
> "Statuaria Ars; Sculpture,"—*Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities.*

We set that little stone in one corner, even though it contains a misunderstanding of what fell from heaven: it wasn't finished statues.

Then we set another small stone:

(We haven't the exact citation of this. It's from Charles

Fort or from one of his imitators.) It's of a scientist who refused to believe that several pieces of limestone had fallen from the sky, even though two farmers had seen them fall. They could not have fallen from the sky, the scientist said, because there is no limestone in the sky. (What would that scientist have done if he had been confronted with the question of Whales in the Sky?)

We set that little stone of wisdom into one corner. And we look around for other stones to set.

The limestone salesman was making his pitch to the city commissioners. He had been making a poor pitch and he was a poor salesman. All he had was price (much less than one tenth that of the other bidders) and superior quality. But the limestone salesman did not make a good appearance. He was bare-chested (and colossally deep-chested). He had only a little shoulder jacket above, and a folded drape below. On his feet he had the *crepida* or Hermes-sandals, made of buckskin apparently: a silly affectation. He was darkly burnt in skin and hair, but the roots of his hair and of his skin indicated that he was blond in both. He was golden-bearded, but the beard (and in fact the whole man) was covered with chalk-dust or rock-dust. The man was sweaty, and he smelled. His was a composite smell of limestone and edged bronze and goats and clover and honey and ozone and lentils and sour milk and dung and strong cheese.

"No, I don't believe that we want to deal with you at all," the mayor of the city was saying. "The other firms are all reputable and long established."

"Our firm is long established," the limestone salesman said.

"It has been doing business from the same—ah—cart for nine thousand years."

"Balderdash," the streets and sewers commissioner swore. "You won't even give us the address of your firm, and you haven't put in a formal bid."

"The address is Stutzamutza," the limestone salesman said. "That's all the address I can give you. There isn't any other address. And I will put in a formal bid if you will show me how to do it. I offer you three hundred tons of the finest marble-limestone, cut exactly to specification, and set in place, guaranteed to take care of your project, guaranteed to be without flaw, in either pure white or variegated; I offer this delivered and set within one hour, all for the price of three hundred dollars or three hundred bushels of cracked corn."

"Oh take it, take it!" a Miss Phosphor McCabe cried out. "We elect you gentlemen to do our business for us at bargain prices. Do not pass up this fine bargain, I beg you." Phosphor McCabe was a lady photographer who had nine fingers in every pie.

"You be quiet, young lady, or we will have you put out of the hearing room," said the parks and playgrounds commissioner. "You will wait your turn, and you will not interfere in other cases. I shudder to think what your own petition will be today. Was ever a group so put upon by cranks as ourselves?"

"You have a very bad reputation, man," the finance commissioner said to the limestone salesman, "insofar as anyone has heard of you before. There is some mumble that your limestone or marble is not substantial, that it will melt away like hailstones. There is even a rumor that you had

something to do with the terrible hailstorm of the night before last."

"Ah, we just had a little party at our place that night," the limestone salesman said. "We had a few dozen bottles of Tontitown wine from some stone that we set over in Arkansas, and we drank it up. We didn't hurt anybody or anything with those hailstones. Hey, some of them were as big as basketballs, weren't they! But we were careful where we let them fall. How often do you see a hailstorm as wild as that that doesn't do any damage at all to anything?"

"We can't afford to look silly," the schools and activities commissioner said. "We have been made to look silly in quite a few cases lately, not all of them our own fault. We can't afford to buy limestone for a project like this from someone like you."

"I wonder if you could get me about a hundred and twenty tons of good quality pink granite?" asked a smiling pinkish man in the hearing room.

"No, that's another island entirely," the limestone salesman said. "I'll tell them if I see them."

"Mr. Chalupa, I don't know what your business is here today," the mayor said severely to the smiling pinkish man, "but you will wait your turn, and you will not mix into this case. Lately it seems that our open hearings are just one nut after another."

"How can you lose?" the limestone salesman asked the commissioners. "I will supply and cut and set the stones. If you are not satisfied, I will leave the stones at no cost, or I will remove them again. And not until you are completely satisfied do you pay me the three hundred dollars or the three hundred bushels of cracked corn."

"I want to go to your country with you," Miss Phosphor McCabe burst out. "I am fascinated by what I have heard of it. I want to do a photographic article about it for the *Heritage Geographical Magazine*. How far away is your country now?"

"All right," the limestone salesman said. "I'll wait for you. We'll go just as soon as I have transacted my business and you have transacted yours. We like everybody and we want everybody to come and visit us, but hardly anybody wants to. Right now, my country is about three miles from here. Last chance, gentlemen: I offer you the best bargain in quality marble-limestone that you'll ever find if you live two hundred years. And I hope you do all live to be two hundred. We like everybody and we'd like to see everybody live two hundred years at least."

"Absolutely not," said the mayor of the city. "We'd be the laughing-stock of the whole state if we did business with someone like you. What kind of a country of yours are you talking about that's only three miles from here? Absolutely not. You are wasting your time and ours, man."

"No, no, it just couldn't be," said the streets and sewers commissioner. "What would the papers print if they heard that we had bought limestone from somebody nearly as disreputable as a saucerian?"

"Rejected, rejected," said the parks and playgrounds commissioner. "We were elected to transact the city's business with economy *and dignity*."

"Ah well, all right," the limestone salesman said. "You can't sell a stylobate every time you try. Good day, commissioners. No hurry, lady. I'll wait for you." And the limestone

salesman went out, leaving, as it seemed, a cloud of rock-dust in his wake.

"What a day!" the schools and activities commissioner moaned. "What a procession of jokers we have had! Anyhow, that one can't be topped."

"I'm not so sure," the mayor grumbled. "Miss Phosphor McCabe is next."

"Oh, I'll be brief," Phosphor said brightly. "All I want is a permit to build a pagoda on that thirty-acre hill that my grandfather left me. It won't interfere with anything. There won't be any utilities to run to it. And it will be pretty."

"Ah, why do you want to build a pagoda?" the streets and sewers commissioner asked.

"So I can take pictures of it. And just because I want to build a pagoda."

"What kind of a pagoda will it be?" the parks and playgrounds commissioner asked.

"A pink pagoda."

"How big will it be?" the schools and activities commissioner asked.

"Thirty acres big. And four hundred feet high. It will be big and it won't bother anything."

"Why do you want it so big?" the mayor asked.

"So it will be ten times as big as the Black Pagoda in India. It'll be real pretty and an attraction to the area."

"Do you have the money to build this with?" the streets and sewers commissioner asked.

"No, I don't have hardly any money. If I sell my photographic article "With Camera and Canoe on Sky-High Stutzamutza" to the *Heritage Geographical Magazine* I will get

some money for it. And I have been snapping unrehearsed camera portraits of all you gentlemen for the last few minutes, and I may be able to sell them to *Comic Weekly* if I can think of cute headings for them. As to the money to build the Pink Pagoda, oh, I'll think of something."

"Miss McCabe, your request is remanded or remaindered or whatever, which is the same thing as being tabled," the mayor said.

"What does that mean?"

"I'm not sure. The legal commissioner is absent today, but he always says something like that when we want to pass the buck for a little while."

"It means come back in one week, Miss McCabe," the streets and sewers commissioner said.

"All right," Miss Phosphor McCabe agreed. "I couldn't possibly start on the Pink Pagoda before a week anyhow."

And now we set this odd-shaped stone over in the other corner:

> The seventeenth century discovery of the Polynesian Islands by common seamen was one of the ancient paradise promises fulfilled. The green islands, the blue sea, the golden beaches and the golden sunlight, the dusky girls! Fruit incomparable, fish incomparable, roast pig and baked bird beyond believing, breadfruit and volcano, absolute and continuing perfection of weather, brown-skin paradise maidens such as are promised in alcoran, song and string-music and surf-music! This was the Promised Paradise of the Islands, and it came true.
>
> But even this was a weak thing beside the less known,

the earlier and continuing discovery of the Floating Islands (or the Travertine Islands) by more intrepid farers. The girls of the Floating Islands are lighter (except for the cool blacks on the Greenstone Dolomites) than the Polynesian maidens; they are more intelligent and much more full of fun; are more handsome and fuller-bodied; are of an artier and more vital culture. They are livelier. Oh how they are livelier! And the regions themselves defy description. For color and zest, there is nothing in Polynesia or Aegea or Antilla to compare at all. And all the Travertine people are so friendly! Perhaps it is well that they are little known and little visited. We may be too weak for their experience. —*Facts of the Paradise Legend* by Harold Bluewater.

Look closely at that little stone ere we leave it. Are you sure that you have correctly noted the shape of it?

Then a still smaller stone to be set in, here where there seems too empty a little gap. It's a mere quotation:

"In Lapidary Inscription a Man is not upon Oath."
—Doctor Johnson.

Miss Phosphor McCabe did visit the limestone salesman's country, and she did do the photographic article "With Camera and Canoe in Sky-High Stutzamutza." The stunning, eye-blowing, heart-swelling, joy-filled color photography cannot be given here, but these are a few extracts from the sustaining text:

"Stutzamutza is a limestone land of such unbelievable whiteness as to make the eyes ache with delight. It is this super-whiteness as a basis that makes all the other colors stand out with such clarity. There cannot be anywhere a

bluer sky than, for most of the hours and days, surrounds Stutzamutza (see plates I and II). There cannot be greener fields, where there are fields, nor more silvery water (plates IV and V). The waterfalls are absolute rainbows, especially Final Falls, when it flows clear off the high land (plate VI). There cannot be more variegated cliffs, blue, black, pink, ochre, red, green, but always with that more-white-than-white basic (plate VII). There cannot be such a sun anywhere else. It shines here as it shines nowhere on the world.

"Due to the high average elevation of Stutzamutza (there will be some boggled eyes when I reveal just what I do mean by the *average* elevation of this place), the people are all wonderfully deep-chested or deep-breasted. They are like something out of fable. The few visitors who come here from lower, from more *mundane* elevations, are uniform in their disbelief. 'Oh, oh,' they will say. 'There can't *be* girls like that.' There are, however (see plate VIII). 'How long has this been going on?' these occasional visitors ask. It has been going on for the nine thousand years of recorded Stutzamutza history; and, beyond that, it has been going on as long as the world has been going on.

"Perhaps due to their deep-breastedness the Stutzamutza people are superb in their singing. They are lusty, they are loud, they are beautiful and enchanting in this. Their instruments, besides the conventional flutes and bagpipes (with their great lung-power, these people do wonderful things with the bagpipes) and lyric harps and tabors, are the thunder-drum (plate IX) and the thirteen-foot-long trumpets (plates X and XI). It is doubted whether any other people anywhere would be able to blow these roaring trumpets.

"Perhaps it is due also to their deep-breastedness that the

Stutzamutza people are all so lustily affectionate. There is something both breath-taking and breath-giving in their Olympian carnality. They have a robustness and glory in their man and woman interfluents that leave this underdeveloped little girl more than amazed (plates X to XIX). Moreover, these people are witty and wise, and always pleasant.

"It is said that originally there was not any soil at all on Stutzamutza. The people would trade finest quality limestone, marble, and dolomite for equal amounts of soil, be it the poorest clay or sand. They filled certain crevices with this soil and got vegetation to begin. And, in a few thousand years, they built countless verdant terraces, knolls and valleys. Grapes, olives and clover are now grown in profusion. Wine and oil and honey gladden the deep hearts of the people. The wonderful blue-green clover (see plate XX) is grazed by the bees and the goats. There are two separate species of goats, the meadow and pasture goat kept for its milk and cheese and mohair, and the larger and wilder mountain goat hunted on the white crags and eaten for its flavorsome, randy meat. Woven mohair and dressed buckskin are used for the Stutzamutza clothing. The people are not voluminously clothed, in spite of the fact that it becomes quite chilly on the days when the elevation suddenly increases.

"There is very little grain grown on Stutzamutza. Mostly, quarried stones are bartered for grain. Quarrying stone is the main industry, it is really the only one on Stutzamutza. The great quarries in their cutaways sometimes reveal amazing fossil deposits. There is a complete fossilized body of a whale (it is an extinct Zeuglodon or Eocene Whale) (see plate XXI).

" 'If this is whale indeed, then this all must have been

under ocean once,' I said to one of my deep-chested friends. 'Oh certainly,' he said, 'nowhere else is limestone formed than in ocean.' 'Then how has it risen so far above it?' I asked. 'That is something for the Geologists and the Hyphologists to figure out,' my friend said.

"The fascinating aspect of the water on Stutzamutza is its changeableness. A lake is sometimes formed in a single day, and it may be emptied out in one day again by mere tipping. The rain is prodigious sometimes, when it is decided to come into that aspect. To shoot the rapids on the sudden swollen rivers is a delight. Sometimes ice will form all over Stutzamutza in a very few minutes. The people delight in this sudden ice, all except the little under-equipped guest. The beauty of it is stupendous; so is its cold. They shear the ice off in great sheets and masses and blocks, and let it fall for fun.

"But all lesser views are forgotten when one sees the waterfalls tumbling in the sunlight. And the most wonderful of all of them is Final Falls. Oh to watch it fall clear off Stutzamutza (see plate XXII), to see it fall into practically endless space, thirty thousand feet, sixty thousand feet, turning into mist, into sleet or snow or rain or hail depending on the sort of day it is, to see the miles-long rainbow of it extending to the vanishing point so far below your feet!

"There is a particularly striking pink marble cliff toward the north end of the land (the *temporary* north end of the land). 'You like it? You can have it,' my friends say. That is what I had been fishing for them to say."

Yes, Miss Phosphor McCabe did the really stunning photographic article for *Heritage Geographical Magazine. Heritage*

Geographical did not accept it, however. Miss Phosphor McCabe had arrived at some unacceptable conclusions, the editor said.

"What really happened is that I arrived at an unacceptable place," Miss Phosphor said. "I remained there for six days. I photographed it and I narrated it."

"Ah, we'd never get by with that," the editor said. Part of the trouble was Miss Phosphor McCabe's explanations of just what she did mean by the average elevation of Stutzamutza (it was quite high), and by "days of increasing elevation."

Now here is another stone of silly shape. At first glimpse, it will not seem possible to fit it into the intended gap. But the eye is deceived: this shape will fit into the gap nicely. It is a recollection in age of a thing observed during a long lifetime by a fine weather eye.

Already as a small boy I was interested in clouds. I believed that certain clouds preserve their identities and appear again and again; and that some clouds are more solid than others.

Later, when I took meteorology and weather courses at the university, I had a classmate who held a series of seemingly insane beliefs. At the heart of these was the theory that certain apparent clouds are not vapor masses at all but are floating stone islands in the sky. He believed that there were some thirty of these islands, most of them composed of limestone, but some of them of basalt, or sand-stone, even of shale. He said that one, at least, of them was composed of pot-stone or soap-stone.

This classmate said that these floating islands were

sometimes large, one of them being at least five miles long: that they were intelligently navigated to follow the best camouflage, the limestone islands usually traveling with masses of white fleecy clouds, the basalt islands traveling with dark thunder-heads, and so on. He believed that these islands sometimes came to rest on earth, that each of them had its own several nests in unfrequented regions. And he believed that the floating islands were peopled.

We had considerable fun with Mad Anthony Tummley, our eccentric classmate. His ideas, we told each other, were quite insane. And, indeed, Anthony himself was finally institutionalized. It was a sad case, but one that could hardly be discussed without laughter.

But later, after more than fifty years in the weather profession, I have come to the conclusion that Anthony Tummley was right in every respect. Several of us veteran weathermen share this knowledge now, but we have developed a sort of code for the thing, not daring to admit it openly, even to ourselves. 'Whales in the Sky' is the code-name for this study, and we pretend to keep it on a humorous basis.

Some thirty of these floating stone islands are continuously over our own country (there may be more than a hundred of them in the world). They are tracked on radar; they are sighted again and again in their slightly changed forms (some of them, now and then, seem to slough off small masses of stone and deposit it somehow on earth); they are known, they are named.

They are even visited by some persons of odd character: always a peculiar combination of simplicity, acceptance, intelligence and strange rapport. There are persons and

families in rural situations who employ these peopled islands to carry messages and goods for them. In rural and swampland Louisiana, there was once some wonder that the people did not more avail themselves of the Intercoastal Canal barges to carry their supplies, and their products to market. 'How are the barges better than the stone islands that we have always used?' these people ask. 'They aren't on a much more regular schedule, they aren't much faster, and they won't give you anything like the same amount of service in exchange for a hundredweight of rice. Besides that, the stone-island people are our friends, and some of them have intermarried with us Cajuns.' There are other regions where the same easy cooperation obtains.

Many of the stone-island people are well known along certain almost regular routes. These people are all of a powerful and rather coarse beauty. They are good-natured and hearty. They actually traffic in stone, trading amazing tonnages of top grade building stone for grain and other simple provisions.

There is no scientific explanation at all of how these things can be, how the stone islands are able to float in the sky. But that they do so is the open secret of perhaps a million persons.

Really, I am now too wealthy to be put in a mad-house (though I made my money in a rather mad traffic which would not be generally believed). I am too old to be laughed at openly: I will merely be smiled at as an eccentric. I have now retired from that weather profession which served me as a front for many years (which profession, however, I loved and still love).

I know what I know. There are more things in the zone

fifteen miles above the earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio.

—*Memories of 52 years as a Weather Observer* by Hank Fairday (Privately printed 1970).

Miss Phosphor McCabe did another really stunning photographic article for the *Heritage Geographical Magazine*. It had a catchy title: "All Right, Then You Tell *Me* How I Did It, or The Building of the Pink Pagoda."

"The Pink Pagoda is complete, except for such additions as I shall have made whenever the notion strikes me, and whenever my high-flying friends are in the neighborhood. It is by far the largest structure in the world and also, in my own opinion, the most beautiful. But it is not massive in appearance: it is light and airy. Come see it in the stone, all of you! Come see it in the color photography (plates I to CXXIX) if you are not able to come yourself. This wonderful structure gives the answers to hundreds of questions, if you will just open your eyes and your ears.

"Of ancient megalithic structures it has sometimes been asked how a hundred or more of one hundred ton blocks of stone could have been piled up, and fitted so carefully that even a knife-blade could not be inserted between the blocks. It's easy. You usually don't set a hundred one hundred ton blocks, unless for a certain ornamentation. You set one ten thousand ton block, and the joinings are merely simulated. In the Pink Pagoda I have had set blocks as heavy as three hundred thousand tons of pink limestone (see plate XXI).

"They bring the whole island down in place. They split off what block is wanted at that location (and, believe me, they are some splitters); then they withdraw the island a little bit and leave the block in place.

"Well, how else was it done? How did I get the one hundred and fifty thousand ton main capstone in place four hundred and fifty feet in the air? With ramps? Oh stop it, you'll scare the cuckoos. The stone pillars and turrets all around and below it are like three-dimensional lace-work, and that main capstone had to go on last. It wasn't done by rocking it up on ramps, even if there had been a place for the ramps. It was all done on one Saturday afternoon, and here are the sequence pictures showing just how it was done. It was done by using a floating island, and by detaching pieces of that island as it was floated into place. I tell you that there is no other way that a one hundred and five pound girl can assemble a thirty million ton Pink Pagoda in six hours. She has got to have a floating island, with a north cliff of pink limestone, and she has got to be very good friends with the people on that island.

"Please come and see my Pink Pagoda. All the people and all the officials avert their eyes from it. They say that it is impossible that such a thing could be there, and therefore it cannot be there. But it *is* there. See it yourself (or see plates IV, IX, XXXIII, LXX especially). And it is pretty (see plates XIX, XXIV, V, LIV). But best, come see it as it really is."

Miss Phosphor McCabe did that rather astonishing photographic article for the *Heritage Geographical Magazine. Heritage Geographical* refused to publish it, though, stating that such things were impossible. And they refused to come and see the Pink Pagoda itself, which is a pity, since it is the largest and most beautiful structure on earth.

It stands there yet, on that thirty acre hill right on the

north edge of town. And you have not heard the last stone of it yet. The latest, a bad-natured little addition, will not be the last: Miss Phosphor swears that it will not be.

There was a flimsy-winged enemy flew down, shortly after the first completion of the pagoda, and set the latest very small stone (it is called the egg-of-doubt stone) on top of the main capstone. 'Twas a crabbed written little stone, and it read:

"I will not trow two-headed calves,"
Say never-seens, and also haves.

"I'll not believe a hollow earth,"
Say scepticals of doubtful birth.

"I'll not concede Atlantis you,
Nor yet Lemuria or Mu,

"Nor woodsmen in northwestern lands,
Nor bandy-legg'd saucerians,

"Nor ancient technologic myth,
Nor charm of timeless megalith.

"I will not credit Whales that fly,
Nor Limestone Islands in the Sky."

—Unfolk Ballad

That crabby little ballad-stone on the top almost spoils the Pink Pagoda for me. But it will be removed, Miss Phosphor McCabe says, just as soon as her traveling friends are back in this neighborhood and she can get up there.

That is all that we have to say on the subject of stone setting.

Does anyone else have something further to add?

Mean Men

The Man Underneath

CHARLES CHARTEL was not the most pleasant man in the world, and as the Great Zambesi he was not the greatest magician. But he was a smart man and a good magician. He had the magnetism of a faith healer, the spirit and appearance of a rooster and a deadly seriousness. He had the patter and the poise and he had learned all that was learnable.

Nor was he a mere pigeon-passer and card-caller. He had inherited, built up, bought and assembled as full a repertoire as any Magic Man in the business.

And, as each must have, he had his specialty: a simple and sound disappearing act. It was nothing really startling; he seemed to underplay it. But it was puzzling and it remained a puzzle even to those in the trade. This one prime trick equated him with the Real Masters who in general technique were a little out of his class. Actually, in the ultimate variation of it, it was the *greatest* trick.

He put Veronica into a box. And when he opened the box again she was gone. That is all there was to it. The same thing had been performed by dozens of others in many variations.

But Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel did not use any of those variations; not, certainly, the trap door—for he had once performed the trick in a wire mesh twenty feet in the air. Besides, he was a cut above the trap-door men.

After showing the empty box he would always take it apart

board by board, and pass the boards around for all to handle. He would then assemble it once more into a box, clamp down the cover, unclamp it again, open it, and Veronica would get out of the box.

The Great Boffo swore that the girl never stepped into the box at all.

The Great Boffo, however, could not duplicate the trick. Nor could the Great Thaumaturgos, nor the Great Zebdo.

All of them could make girls disappear from boxes, of course, and could do it in more showy fashion. But, though it was the same thing to the audiences, it was not the same thing to themselves. Their tricks were known to each other and were obvious to any magic man. The special trick of Zambesi-Chartel was not understood and this gave him stature. The only men in the world who do not secretly believe in magic are the magicians, but there was something about the doings of the Great Zambesi that sowed doubt in them. The Great Vespo, indeed, claimed that he knew how it was done. But Vespo, though brilliant, was an old man and was given to extravagant claims.

The explanation that Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel gave to his audiences will not be given here. Should we repeat it, we would not be believed; we would be laughed at—and we are sensitive. We have not the magnetism of Zambesi to carry off such an outlandish claim as his even though it should be true—and it was. (Actually he said that he sent Veronica down into the Ocean and that he called her back again from that Ocean.)

However, this isn't about the disappearance of Veronica; it is about a matter quite the opposite. And the opposite of the disappearance of Veronica was the appearance of someone who differed from her as much as possible.

THIS came about at the Tri-State Fair when the New Arena was quite new. The crowd was spirited and the Great Zambesi was in full form. The lighting was perfect and Veronica shone like a jewel set in gold as she stepped into the box that was set up on blocks, clear of the stage. Zambesi closed the box and the crowd had the true feeling of magic about to happen.

And then, with perfect timing, Zambesi-Chartel threw back the front cover as to reveal the box—empty.

We will be hornswitched if that box was empty!

But what rolled out of the box was not Veronica. It was the most woebegone scarecrow of a clown ever seen, the saddest looking man who ever stumbled over his own two feet.

"Holy hamadryads, cramoise, where did you come from?" Zambesi-Chartel breathed without understanding his own words.

The man out of the box was a hobo from a hundred years ago. He wept and wiped his nose with his hand. He had trouble with falling pants and broken shoes and a coat whose sleeve avoided arm. The little clown was good and there was real pathos in his silent humor.

"You've got to get out of here, cnaufer," Chartel hissed at the little man again and again. "Who are you and how did you get here? Off with you now, cathexis, you're fouling up the act." But the little man avoided Chartel who would have killed him in all sincerity.

Finally Chartel in his despair closed the box loudly, then opened it again and brought Veronica out of it. But that didn't get rid of the little tramp. He was still cavorting about the stage and he was good. Listen, he was dressed in old black pants and a torn undershirt and one suspender and he walked about the stage. Then he had on a red sweater and a burglar's cap and black glasses. He still walked about the stage and suddenly he was

splendid in evening clothes and monocle. Nobody had done that before.

He became Joe College; he became the man in the charcoal-tan suit; he became an old rowdy-dow on the loose with pearl-gray vest and yellow gloves. Then he became a hobo again—but of a different and worse vesture than before.

"Go away, cistugurium," Veronica whispered angrily, "please go away. You're not supposed to be in the act. Who are you anyhow?"

Nobody else had ever completely changed his garb six times in a minute and a half while hobbling about the stage with his hands in his pockets. Nobody else transmuted his shoes from brown to black as he walked in them. The expression of the little man was pathetic and many eyes misted as they watched him.

Then, before the act had begun to drag, the little man wobbled over and fell flat on his face in the box. Zambesi-Chartel closed it and stood poised over it in an intensity of fear and hope. Then he opened the box again. The little man was gone.

Zambesi-Chartel took the box apart board by board and he left it apart. Well, it had been a good act, with an added element. But Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel didn't know how he had done it this time—or if he was the one who did it. The trick had always been to make Veronica disappear and appear; there sure hadn't been any little clown in the act before.

"Damn that cressanges anyhow," Chartel grumbled. He was puzzled. He knew that little man—and yet he didn't.

LATER that night at the Pepperpot some of the people ate and talked. There were Chartel himself and Veronica; there was

Captain Carter who had the trained bears; there were the three Lemon sisters, Dolly, Molly, and Polly. Then another one was with them—for the little man was sitting there and sniffling. He hadn't been there before and he hadn't come in.

"Shall I order for you, claud?" Molly Lemon asked solicitously.

But a filled plate was already there and the little man began to eat. He grinned and he grimaced. He was wearing horn-rim glasses and then he was wearing pince-nez. He had a grin that came shyly as though he were trying it out for the first time.

"clarence is so cute," said Dolly Lemon. "We will adopt him into our act if Chartel doesn't want him."

There was an empty five-cigar carton on the table. The little man picked it up and it was full. Well, Chartel could duplicate that; probably you could yourself, but it would take prop and preparation. The little man pulled a stogie from the carton, puffed on it and it was lit. This also could be done; there are few tricks that cannot be duplicated.

"If you are joining the act, cletus, and it seems as though you are," said Chartel wondering, "you will have to clean up a little."

"Must I really?" asked curt but he obliged at once. He had become as immaculate a dandy as anyone ever saw. "Captain Carter," he said, "I see from your pocket bulge that you are a drinking man. I ask you to share it with us."

"It's empty an hour since," Captain Carter muttered sadly.

"It wasn't always empty," said cylix, the little man. "Let me see if I can restore it."

"The last time a magician filled an empty whisky bottle for me—and it was none other than old Zambesi-Chartel here—the stuff was not potable. It was the most horrendous rock dew ever distilled."

"This will be potable," said celiter—and the bottle filled.

Its content was gloriously potable. It put new life into the party

and all of them, except Chartel-Zambesi, had a wonderful time. And if you don't think you can have fun with a reanimated bottle of whisky and Veronica and the three Lemon sisters you must have a different and more staid definition of fun.

"BUT all good things must end," said Captain Carter when the small hours were half grown.

"All good things do *not* have to end," said cajetan, the little man, who had been enjoying himself on Polly Lemon's lap. "The world shriveled when your thought was first put into words. Good things can go on forever, except that—now and then—they must be temporarily adjourned. As long as we understand that partings are only temporary."

"Oh, we understand that, cuiller," said the three Lemon sisters. So they temporarily adjourned the party.

But later—and this was after the sun itself was up—Chartel and cyprian were finally alone.

"We will have to have an explanation," said Chartel. "Who are you?"

"You have no idea, Charles? Did you not take me out of the box? I thought you would know. Did you not call me up?"

"I doubt I did. Do not try to hoax an old hoaxer. Where did you come from that first time? The stage was not trapped and you were not intruded with my knowledge."

"Was I not? You told the audience how it was done. You said you called me up out of the Ocean."

"That is my patter—but it doesn't apply to you. Dammit,

ching-chi, where'd you get the Chinese robes and grow that little beard so fast? And how do you make them both change colors so neat? No, chawan, I never called any such fish as you out of the Ocean."

"In that case I will leave, since I am here through a misunderstanding."

"Stay a bit, cyfaill. In my patter that is the way I make the girl disappear. How could it make you appear?"

"Charles, I've heard you explain the principle dozens of times. I was not in the box. But in a little while I would be in the box. So we adjust the box to a near moment in the future and I am in the box."

"There's a lacuna in your logic, clunis," Chartel said. "Hey, how can you turn into a Hottentot so easily? And not into a real Hottentot either, coya—but into what I would call an old burlesque-stage idea of a Hottentot."

"You always did have a good imagination, Charles," said chabiari. He took up an empty glass, shook it, and it was filled again.

"You're my master there, cosmos," said Chartel. "I couldn't duplicate that without props and you've done it three times. How?"

"By our own theory that we worked out so long ago, Charles. I shift it only a little in time and it is done. Anything that has once been full can be filled again by taking it back to the time of its plenitude."

"chester, you have a patter that won't quit. But, if it worked—the idea would be a good one."

"It does work, Charles. I thought we knew that. We have used it so long."

"You talk and talk, collard," said Chartel. "But I still do not know how you can change your whole appearance so easily and often."

"Why, Charles, we are protean," said coilon. "That is the sort of man we are."

IT WAS later the same day that Finnerty, the manager of the show, spoke to Chartel about the little man.

"Your brother from the old country has put new life into the act," he said. "Keep him in it. We haven't mentioned money—and I am seldom the one to bring up the subject—but we can settle on a figure. Will it be payable to him or to you?"

"It will be payable to me," said Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel. Confused he was, but he always knew the top and bottom side of a dollar. Finnerty and Chartel settled on a figure.

"YOU have been taken for my brother from the old country," Chartel told colin a bit later, "and I can see why. I wondered whom you reminded me of. Oh, stop turning into a rooster! If you were shaved and combed—say, that *was* quick, contumace! the resemblance would be, is, even closer. You do look like me; you are an extremely handsome man. But I did not know that I had a brother, compuesto, and I do not know what country the old country is—since I was born on Elm Street in Springfield."

"Perhaps 'brother' is a euphemism for something even closer,

Charles; and the 'old country' may have a special meaning for us. Is it not the name for what is on the other side of your 'Ocean'?"

"columkill, you are as phony as—well, metaphor fails me—you are as phony as myself," said Charles Chartel.

Sometimes the little man was frightening in his wild actions. There wasn't a mean bone in him, and he was almost universally liked. But he did act on impulse.

For him, to think was to act. It was good that everybody liked him; if they hadn't they'd have hanged him high.

And always he would multiply things. Chartel begged for his secret.

"We could be rich, cogsworth, really rich," Chartel would plead.

"But we are already rich, Charles. Nobody has ever had such a rich and perfected personality as we have. You still do not appreciate the greatness of our trick, Charles, though we thought about it for years before we were able to do it. It's the noblest illusion of them all. Now we are citizens of an abounding world and everything in it is ours. That is to be rich."

"consuelo, you are a bleeding doctrinaire. I did not ask for a lecture. I only ask that you show me how to make a hundred dollars grow where one grew before. I say that is to be rich."

"I've shown you a hundred times, Charles, and you look for more than is in it. You take a thin old wallet that once knew fatness. You restore it to its old state, empty it and restore it again, and so you accumulate. But why do you want money?"

"It is just that I have a passion for collecting it, courlis."

"Collecting we can understand, but the true collector will have no desire for duplicates. Understandably we might want a bill of each size—a one, a five, a ten, a fifty—but we avoid that which once we prized—the ten-thousand dollar bill. The avid people

have spoiled it for us. But you have not the true collectors' spirit, Charles."

"I have the true money-collectors' spirit, clendon. Why cannot I duplicate your feats in this?"

"The only reason I can figure, Charles, is that you're just too duck-knuckled dumb—and it hurts me to say that about one of ourselves."

BUT Zambesi-Chartel got a new set of ideas when he saw the trick that cormorant did with an old hat. It was at a rummage sale at which charleroi looked in out of curiosity—he was curious about everything.

"What a pixie must have worn this!" he exclaimed. "What a pixie!"

c held the hat in his hands. And then he held the head in his hands. It was something like a pixie head and it was attached to the body of a young lady. cisailles kissed the young lady uncommonly about the temporal regions and pressed her to his sternum—for to him impulse was the same as action. And she squealed.

"Not that I mind—but you *did* startle me," she chimed. "Who are you? Who, may I ask, am I? And how in pigeon-toed perdition did I get here?"

"You are a pixie, young lady," said clough, "and as such you are likely to turn up anywhere. I had your hat, so what more natural than that I should call you up to fill it."

"I am only a part-time pixie, cartier, but I am a full-time housewife. Supper will burn. How do I get back?"

"You already are," said callimachus. And she was. Or at least she was no longer there.

And that was the beginning of the trouble; not for c, not for the young pixie lady, but it was the beginning of the trouble for Charles (Great Zambesi) Chartel.

Charles knew how it was done now. One cannot continue doing a basic trick in the presence of such a sharpy as Charles Chartel without his learning it. And once he had learned how it was done there was no stopping him.

Charles Chartel was not a bad man underneath, but on the surface he was a rotter. The natural complement of healthy greed that is in every man began to burgeon unnaturally in him. The hard core of meanness spread through his whole being. The arrogance of the rooster became that of the tyrant and envy and revenge burned in him with sulphurous fire.

Chartel now had the key to total wealth, a key that would not only unlock all doors for him, but lock them against others. He set out to get control of the show. To do this he had to break Finnerty, the owner-manager, and buy him out after breaking him.

Business had been good and every night Finnerty had a full cash box. But before a thing is full, it is half full. And before that, it is a quarter full. Every night, just as Finnerty went to count the take, Zambesi-Chartel would play a trick on that box. And it would be only a quarter full. That was not enough to cover expenses.

Finnerty had never been a saving man. He had always trod the narrow green edge between solvency and disaster. And in two weeks he was broke.

Finnerty sold the show and the bookings to Chartel for ten

thousand dollars. It made a nice wad in his pocket when he walked away from the show that was no longer his.

But the meanness was running like a tide in Chartel and he wouldn't let it go at that. He emptied the wallet of Finnerty again, taking it back ten minutes in time. Finnerty felt a certain lightness, and he knew what it was. But he kept on walking.

"It's lucky he left me with my pants," said Finn, "if he has. I'm afraid to look down."

A CLOUD came over the happy little family that was the show. Veronica felt herself abused and it wasn't imagination. The three Lemon sisters shivered to the chill of a harsh master. So did Carucchi the singer, and Captain Carter and his bears. And c, the little man who was the unwitting cause of it all, took to staying out of the way of the rampaging Chartel.

For Zambesi-Chartel was now avid for praise, for money, for all manner of meanness. He accumulated coin by every variation of the new trick he had learned. He robbed by it, he burgled the easy way. It is an awful and sickening thing to see a good man grow rich and respected.

"But underneath he isn't a bad man at all," Veronica moaned. "Really he isn't."

"No, underneath he is a fine man," said c, the little man of impulse. "Who should know better than I?"

"Why, what do you mean, chadwick dear?" Veronica asked him.

"The same as you. Charles is only bad on the surface. Underneath he's a fine fellow."

WELL, that may have been. But on the surface, Zambesi-Chartel sure did get rough. He demeaned the dignity of his fellow humans and made them eat dirt by the ton. He went on adrenalin drunks and thrived on the hatred in his own bloodstream. He became a martinet, a propagandist for the Hoop act. He registered Democrat. He switched from perfectos to panatelas and from honest whisky sours to perfidious martinis. He developed a snigger and horselaugh that wilted pigweeds.

"Oh, chiot," said Veronica, "we must do something to save him from himself. We are all involved with him."

"Who should know better than I?" conchylatus asked sadly.

Chartel began to drink tea. He started to call a napkin a serviette and to omit every single syllable in "extraordinary." He switched allegiance from the noble National League to the sniveling American. He defrauded his laborers of their wages, he used scent, he ate vegetarian lunches, he read Walter Lippmann posthumously, he switched from Gumbo Hair Oil to Brilliantine. Once a character begins to deteriorate it goes all the way and in every detail.

Chartel had the Green Sickness, the inordinate love of money. He obtained the stuff, first by all means fair and foul, then by foul means only. But obtain it he did and it made a sniveling devil out of him.

"But the man underneath isn't bad at all," Veronica insisted.

"Who should know better than I?" caoine said.

The Grand Canyon began with a prairie dog burrow and once it was started there was no stopping it. The downfall of Zambesi-Chartel began over a nickel and then the whole apparatus came down: his wealth, real and phantom—his reputation—the whole blamed complex of the man.

It started with a fist fight he had with a blind newsdealer over a

nickel. It ended with Chartel in jail, indicted, despised, shamed, despondent.

Moreover, public feeling was strongly against him.

Chartel was up on more than twenty counts of theft and pilfering and the nickel stolen from the blind man was by no means the least of them. He was up on a dozen counts of wage fraud. He was charged with multiplex pick-pocketing "by device not understood." They had him on faked bill of sale, dishonest conveyance, simple and compounded larceny, possession of stolen goods, barratry.

"Looks like we have you on everything but chicken-stealing," the judge said at the hearing.

"We have him on that, too," said the bailiff. "Five counts of it."

"You would gag a gannet and make a buzzard belch," said the judge. "I'd crop your ears if that law still obtained. And if we can find a capital offense in all this offensiveness I'll have your head. It is hard to believe that you were once human."

Chartel was shamed and sick of heart and felt himself friendless. That night he attempted to hang himself in his cell. The attempt failed for reasons that are not clear but not for any lack of effort on his part. It is worthy of note that the only persons who ever attempt to take their own lives are rather serious persons.

"We will have to go to him at once, cristophe," said Veronica. "We must show him that we still love him. He'd sicken a jackal the way he's behaving, but he isn't really like that. The man underneath—"

"Hush, Veronica, you embarrass me when you talk like that," said ciabhach. "I know what a prince is the man underneath."

LITTLE c went to visit the Great Zambesi-Chartel in his cell.

"It is time we had a talk," he said.

"No, no, it's too late for talk," said Charles Chartel.

"You have disgraced us both, Charles," said celach. "It goes very deeply when it touches me."

"I never even knew who you were, little c. You are protean and you are not at all plausible."

"You called me up and you still don't know who I am, Charles? But this was our finest trick, our greatest illusion on which we worked subconsciously for years. We are our own masterpiece, Charles. And you didn't recognize it when it happened. You are the Magic Man but I am the Magic Man run wild. Aye, Charles, he's best when he runs wild."

"Tell me, cicerone, who are you? Who am I?" Chartel begged. "What is my difficulty?"

"Our difficulty, Charles, is that one of us became too serious," carnefice tried to explain. "To be serious is the only capital crime. For that, one of us will have to die—but it isn't as though it were a serious matter. Every man is at least two men, but ordinarily the two are not at the same time bodied and apparent. Now you have marred our greatest trick—but it was fun while it lasted."

Little c signaled to Veronica and she came down the corridor with a bunch of boards under her arm. She was admitted to the cell by the puzzled jailor.

"One of us will have to leave forever," coquelicot told Charles Chartel. "It isn't right for both of us to be around."

"Ah, I will be sorry to see you go, chandos," said Chartel. "But who are you? I never could remember your name properly and there is something weird about that. You change forever in appearance and name. Who are you, little c?"

"Only that. Just little c. Or shall we say sub-c? But we are too

clever to be hounded into a hole like this, Charles. Remember! We were our own greatest trick, even if it failed."

"What must we do now?" Chartel asked dully.

"A simple transference," cogne said. He was building the box board by board.

"I'm not a bad man underneath," Chartel sniveled. "I'm misunderstood."

"No, we're a fine man underneath, Charles. I am the man underneath," said ciud. "Get in the box."

"*I* get in? I am Charles (the Great Zambesi) Chartel. You are only little c, sub-c, an aspect of myself. I will *not* get into the box!"

"Get in, Charles," said cistercium. "It was a mix-up from the beginning. You were never meant to see the light of day. The wrong one of us has been running loose."

"I'll fight, I'll claw, I'll rant!"

"That's what a healthy subconscious is supposed to do," cludok said. "Get in!"

"It's murder! I won't go! It's oblivion!"

"No such thing, Charles. It isn't as though we weren't the same person. I'll still be here."

Then little c and Veronica shoved the Great Zambesi Charles Chartel down into the box and closed the lid. In doing so, little c became himself the Great Zambesi. For, when he opened the box again, it was empty. And he took it apart board by board. The jailor said that he had to have his prisoner and Veronica gave him the boards.

"There, there, doll," she said. "Make one out of them. Try real hard."

And Veronica and the Great Zambesi left that place.

WE WON'T say that Zambesi wasn't the greatest magician in the world. He may have become the greatest, after he began to treat it lightly. People, he was good! There was never any act with such variety and fun in it. After his strange mid-life hiatus he achieved new heights.

"And I'm certainly glad you overcame your personality difficulties," the loving Veronica told him later. "For a while there—whoof! But I always knew you were a fine man underneath."

Secret Places

Boomer Flats

IN the tracks of our spiritual father Ivan Sanderson we may now have trailed a clutch of ABSMs to their lair," the eminent scientist Arpad Arkabaranan was saying in his rattling voice. "And that lair may not be a mountain thicket or rain forest or swamp, but these scrimpy red clay flats. I would almost give my life for the success of this quest, but it seems that it should have a more magnificent setting."

"It looks like a wild goose chase," the eminent scientist Willy McGilly commented. But no, Willy was not down-grading their quest. He was referring to the wild geese that rose about them from the edges of the flats with clatter and whistle and honk. This was a flight-way, a chase of theirs. There were hundreds of them if one had the fine eyes to pick them out from the background. "Mud geese," Willy said. "We don't see as many of them as when I was a boy."

"I do not, and I am afraid that I will not, believe in the ABSMs," said the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk, stroking his—(no he didn't, he didn't have one)—stroking his jaw, "and yet this is the thing that I also have most desired, to find this missing link finally, and to refute all believers in the other thing."

"We can't see the chain for the links," said Willy McGilly. "I never believed that any of them was missing. "There's

always been too many of them for the length of the chain: that's the trouble."

"I've traveled a million miles in search of them," said Arpad. "I've pretty well probed all the meager ribs of the world in that travel. My fear has always been that I'd miss them by a trick, even that in some unaccountable way I wouldn't know them when I found them. It would be ironic if we did find them in such a place as this: not a wild place, only a shabby and overlooked place."

"My own fear has been that when I finally gazed on one I would wake with a start and find that I had been looking in a mirror," said Velikof. "There must be some symbolism here that I don't understand. What is your own anticipation of them, Willy?"

"Oh, coming back to people I've always liked. There used to be a bunch of them on the edge of my hometown," Willy McGilly said. "Come to think of it, there used to be a bunch of them on the edge of every hometown. Now they're more likely to be found right in the middle of every town. They're the scrubs, you know, for the bottoming of the breed."

"What are you talking about, Willy?" Arpad asked sharply.

What they were all talking about was ABSMs.

EVERY town in the south part of that county has a shadow or secondary. There is Meehan, and Meehan Corners; Perkins, and Perkins Corner; Boomer, and Boomer Flats. The three eminent scientists were driving the three miles from Boomer to Boomer Flats looking for the bones, and hopefully even the

living flesh, of a legend. It was that of the missing link, of the Abominable Snowman, the ABSM. It wasn't snowy country there, but the so-called Snowmen have been reported in every sort of climate and countryside.

The local legend, recently uncovered by Arpad, was that there was a non-African non-Indian "people of color" living in the neighborhood of Boomer Flats, "between the sand-bush thickets and the river." It was said that they lived on the very red mud banks of the river, and that they lived a little in the river itself.

Then Dr. Velikof Vonk had come onto a tape in a bunch of anthropological tapes, and the tape contained sequences like this:

"What do they do when the river floods?"

"Ah, they close their noses and mouths and ears with mud, and they lie down with big rocks on their breasts and stay there till the flood has passed."

"Can they be taught?"

"Some of the children go to school, and they learn. But when they are older then they stay at home, and they forget."

"What sort of language do they talk?"

"Ah, they don't seem to talk very much. They keep to themselves. Sometimes when they talk it is just plain Cimarron Valley English."

"What do they eat?"

"They boil river water in mud clay pots. They put in wild onions and greenery. The pottage thickens then, I don't know how. It gets lumps of meat or clay in it, and they eat that too. They eat frogs and fish and owls and thicket filaments. But mostly they don't eat very much of anything."

"It is said that they aren't all of the same appearance. It is

even said that they are born, ah, shapeless, and that—ah—could you tell me anything about that?"

"Yeah. They're born without much shape. Most of them never do get much shape. When they have any, well actually their mothers lick them into shape, give them their appearance."

"It's an old folk tale that bears do that."

"Maybe they learned it from the bears then, young fellow. There's quite a bit of bear mixture in them, but the bears themselves have nearly gone from the flats and thickets now. More than likely the bears learned it from them. Sometimes the mothers lick the cubs into the shape of regular people for a joke."

"That is the legend?"

"You keep saying legend. I don't know anything about legend. I just tell you what you ask me. I'll tell you a funny one, though. One of the mothers who was getting ready to bear happened to get ahold of an old movie magazine that some fishers from Boomer had left on the river edge. There was a picture in it of the prettiest girl that anyone ever saw, and it was a picture of *all* of that girl. This mother was tickled by that picture. She bore a daughter then, and she licked her into the shape and appearance of the girl in the movie magazine. And the girl grew up looking like that and she still looks like that, pretty as a picture. I don't believe the girl appreciates the joke. She is the prettiest of all the people, though. Her name is Crayola Catfish."

"Are you having me, old fellow? Have those creatures any humor?"

"Some of them tell old jokes. John Salt tells old jokes. The

Licorice Man tells really old jokes. And man, does the Comet ever tell old jokes!"

"Are the creatures long-lived?"

"Long-lived as we want to be. The elixir comes from these flats, you know. Some of us use it, some of us don't."

"Are *you* one of the creatures?"

"Sure, I'm one of them. I like to get out from it sometimes though. I follow the harvests."

THIS tape (recorded by an anthropology student at State University who, by the way, has since busted out of anthropology and is now taking hotel and restaurant management) had greatly excited the eminent scientist Dr. Velikof Vonk when he had played it, along with several hundred other tapes that had come in that week from the anthropology circuit. He scratched his—(no he didn't, he didn't have one)—he scratched his jowl and he phoned up the eminent scientists Arpad Arkabaranan and Willy McGilly.

"I'll go, I'll go, of course I'll go," Arpad had cried. "I've traveled a million miles in search of it, and should I refuse to go sixty? This won't be it, this can't be it, but I'll never give up. Yes, we'll go tomorrow."

"Sure, I'll go," Willy McGilly said. "I've been there before, I kind of like those folks on the flats. I don't know about the biggest catfish in the world, but the biggest catfish stories in the world have been pulled out of the Cimarron River right about at Boomer Flats. Sure, we'll go tomorrow."

"This may be it," Velikof had said. "How can we miss it? I can almost reach out and scratch it on the nose from here."

"You'll find yourself scratching your own nose, that's how you'll miss it. But it's there and it's real."

"I believe, Willy, that there is a sort of amnesia that has prevented us finding them or remembering them accurately."

"Not that, Velikof. It's just that they're always too close to us to see."

SO the next day the three eminent scientists drove over from T-Town to come to Boomer Flats. Willy McGilly knew where the place was, but his pointing out of the way seemed improbable: Velikof was more inclined to trust the information of people in Boomer. And there was a difficulty there.

People kept saying "This is Boomer. There isn't exactly any place called Boomer Flats." Boomer Flats wasn't on any map. It was too small even to have a post office. And the Boomer people were exasperating in not knowing about it or knowing the way to it.

"Three miles from here, and you don't know where it is?" Velikof asked one of them angrily.

"I don't even know *that* it is," the Boomer man had said in his own near anger. "I don't believe that there *is* such a place."

Finally, however, other men told the eminent scientists that there sort of was such a place, sort of a place. Sort of a road going to it too. They pointed out the same improbable way that Willy McGilly had pointed out.

The three eminents took the road. The flats hadn't flooded lately. The road was sand, but it could be negotiated. They came to the town, to the sort of town, in the ragged river flats. There *was* such a place. They went to the Cimarron Hotel which was like any hotel anywhere, only older. They went into the dining room for it was noon.

It had tables, but it was more than a dining room. It was a common room. It even had intimations of old elegance in blued pier mirrors. There was a dingy bar there. There was a pool table there, and a hairy man was playing rotation with the Comet on it. The Comet was a long gray-bearded man (in fact, comet means a star with a beard) and small pieces were always falling off him. Clay-colored men with their hats on were playing dominos at several of the tables, and there were half a dozen dogs in the room. Something a little queer and primordial about those dogs! Something a little queer and primordial about the whole place!

But, as if set to serve as distraction, there was a remarkably pretty girl there, and she might have been a waitress. She seemed to be waiting, either listlessly or profoundly, for something.

Dr. Velikof Vonk twinkled his deep eyes in their orbital caves: perhaps he cogitated his massive brain behind his massive orbital ridges: and he arrived, by sheer mentality, at the next step.

"Have you a menu, young lady?" he asked.

"No," she answered simply, but it wasn't simple at all. Her voice didn't go with her prettiness. It was much more intricate than her appearance, even in that one syllable. It was powerful, not really harsh, deep and resonant as caverns,

full and timeless. The girl was big-boned beneath her prettiness, with heavy brindled hair and complex eyes.

"We would like something to eat," Arpad Arkabaranan ventured. "What do you have?"

"They're fixing it for you now," the girl said. "I'll bring it after a while."

There was a rich river smell about the whole place, and the room was badly lit.

"Her voice is an odd one," Arpad whispered in curious admiration. "Like rocks rolled around by water, but it also has a touch of springtime in it, springtime of a very peculiar quality."

"Not just a springtime; it's an interstadial time," Willy McGilly stated accurately. "I've noticed that about them in other places. It's old green season in their voices, green season between the ice."

The room was lit only by hanging lamps. They had a flicker to them. They were not electric.

"There's a lot of the gas-light era in this place," Arpad gave the opinion, "but the lights aren't gas lights either."

"No, they're hanging oil lamps," Velikof said. "An amusing fancy just went through my head that they might be old whale-oil lamps."

"Girl, what do you burn in the hanging lamps?" Willy McGilly asked her.

"Catfish oil," she said in the resonant voice that had a touch of the green interstadial time in it. And catfish oil burns with a clay-colored flame.

"Can you bring us drinks while we wait?" Velikof of the massive head asked.

"They're fixing them for you now," the girl said. "I'll bring them after a while."

Meanwhile on the old pool table the Comet was beating the hairy man at rotation. Nobody could beat the Comet at rotation.

"We came here looking for strange creatures," Arpad said in the direction of the girl. "Do you know anything about strange creatures or people, or where they can be found?"

"You are the only strange people who have come here lately," she told them. Then she brought their drinks to them, three great sloshing clay cups or bulbous steins that smelled strongly of river, perhaps of interstadial river. She set them in front of the eminents with something like a twinkle in her eyes; something like, but much more. It was laughing lightning flashing from under the ridges of that pretty head. She was waiting their reaction.

Velikof cocked a big deep eye at his drink. This itself was a feat. Other men hadn't such eyes, or such brows above them, as had Velikof Vonk. They took a bit of cocking, and it wasn't done lightly. And Velikof grinned out of deep folk memory as he began to drink. Velikof was always strong on the folk memory bit.

Arpad Arkabaranan screamed, rose backwards, toppled his chair, and stood aghast while pointing a shaking finger at his splashing clay cup. Arpad was disturbed.

Willy McGilly drank deeply from his own stirring vessel.

"Why, it's Green Snake Snorter!" he cried in amazement and delight. "Oh drink of drinks, thou're a pleasure beyond expectation! They used to serve it to us back home, but I never even hoped to find it here. What great thing have we done to deserve this?"

He drank again of the wonderful splashing liquor while the spray of it filled the air. And Velikof also drank with noisy pleasure. The girl righted Arpad's chair, put Arpad into it again with strong hands, and addressed him powerfully to his cresting breaker. But Arpad was scared of his lively drink. "It's alive, it's alive," was all that he could jabber. Arpad Arkabaranan specialized in primitives, and primitives by definition are prime stuff. But there wasn't, now in his moment of weakness, enough prime stuff in Arpad himself to face so pleasant and primitive a drink as this.

The liquid was sparkling with bright action, was adequately alcoholic, something like choc beer, and there was a green snake in each cup. (Velikof in his notebook states that they were green worms of the species *vermis ebrius viridis*, but that is only a quibble. They were snake-like worms and of the size of small snakes, and we will call them snakes.)

"Do get with it, Arpad," Willy McGilly cried. "The trick is to drink it up before the snake drinks it. I tell you though that the snakes can discern when a man is afraid of them. They'll fang the face off a man who's afraid of them."

"Ah, I don't believe that I want the drink," Arpad declared with sickish grace. "I'm not much of a drinking man."

So Arpad's green snake drank up his Green Snake Snorter, noisily and greedily. Then it expired—it breathed out its life and evaporated. That green snake was gone.

"Where did he go?" Arpad asked nervously. He was still uneasy about the business.

"Back to the catfish," the girl said. "All the snakes are spirits of catfish just out for a little ramble."

"Interesting," Velikof said, and he noted in his pocket notebook that the *vermis ebrius viridis* is not a discrete

species of worm or snake, but is rather spirit of catfish. It is out of such careful notation that science is built up.

"Is there anything noteworthy about Boomer Flats?" Velikof asked the girl then. "Has it any unique claim to fame?"

"Yes," the girl said. "This is the place that the comets come back to."

"Ah, but the moths have eaten the comets," Willy McGilly quoted from the old epic.

The girl brought them three big clay bowls heaped with fish eggs, and these they were to eat with three clay spoons. Willy McGilly and Dr. Velikof Vonk addressed themselves to the rich meal with pleasure, but Arpad Arkabaranan refused.

"Why, it's all mixed with mud and sand and trash," he objected.

"Certainly, certainly, wonderful, wonderful," Willy McGilly slushed out the happy words with a mouth full of delicious gloop. "I always thought that something went out of the world when they cleaned up the old shanty town dish of shad roe. In some places they cleaned it up; not everywhere. I maintain that roe at its best must always have at least a slight tang of river sewage."

But Arpad broke his clay spoon in disgust. And he would not eat. Arpad had traveled a million miles in search of it but he didn't know it when he found it; he hadn't any of it inside him, so he missed it.

One of the domino players at a near table (the three eminents had noticed this some time before but had not fully realized it) was a bear. The bear was dressed as a shabby man; he wore a big black hat on his head; he played dominos well; he was winning.

"How is it that the bear plays so well?" Velikof asked.

"He doesn't play at all well," Willy McGilly protested. "I could beat him. I could beat any of them."

"He isn't really a bear," the girl said. "He is my cousin. Our mothers, who were sisters, were clownish. His mother licked him into the shape of a bear for fun. But that is nothing to what my mother did to me. She licked me into pretty face and pretty figure for a joke, and now I am stuck with it. I think it is too much of a joke. I'm not really like this, but I guess I may as well laugh at me just as everybody else does."

"What is your name?" Arpad asked her without real interest.

"Crayola Catfish."

But Arpad Arkabaranan didn't hear or recognize the name, though it had been on a tape that Dr. Velikof Vonk had played for them, the same tape that had really brought them to Boomer Flats. Arpad had now closed his eyes and ears and heart to all of it.

The hairy man and the Comet were still shooting pool, but pieces were still falling off the Comet.

"He's diminishing, he's breaking up," Velikof observed. "He won't last another hundred years at that rate."

Then the eminents left board and room and the Cimarron Hotel to go looking for ABSMs who were rumored to live in that area.

ABSM is the code name for the Abominable Snowman, for the Hairy Woodman, for the Wild Man of Borneo, for the Sasquatch, for the Booger-Man, for the Ape-Man, for the Bear-Man, for the Missing Link, for the nine-foot-tall Giant things, for the living Neanderthals. It is believed by some that all of these beings are the same. It is believed by most

that these things are no thing at all, no where, not in any form.

And it seemed as if the most were right, for the three eminents could not find hide nor hair (rough hide and copious hair were supposed to be marks by which the ABSMs might be known) of the queer folks anywhere along the red bank of the Cimarron River. Such creatures as they did encounter were very like the shabby and untalkative creatures they had already encountered in Boomer Flats. They weren't an ugly people: they were pleasantly mud-homely. They were civil and most often they were silent. They dressed something as people had dressed seventy-five years before that time—as the poor working people had dressed then. Maybe they were poor, maybe not. They didn't seem to work very much. Sometimes a man or a woman seemed to be doing a little bit of work, very casually.

It may be that the red-mud river was full of fish. Something was splashing and jumping there. Big turtles waddled up out of the water, caked with mud even around their eyes. The shores and flats were treacherous, and sometimes an eminent would sink into the sand-mud up to the hips. But the broad-footed people of the area didn't seem to sink in.

There was plenty of greenery (or brownery, for it had been the dusty weeks) along the shores. There were muskrats, there were even beavers, there were skunks and possums and badgers. There were wolf dens and coyote dens digged into the banks, and they had their particular smells about them. There were dog dens. There were coon trees. There were even bear dens or caves. But no, that was not a bear smell either. What smell was it?

"What lives in these clay caves?" Velikof asked a woman who was digging river clams there.

"The Giants live in them," she said. Well, they were tall enough to be giants' caves. A nine-footer need hardly stoop to enter one.

"We have missed it," Arpad said. "There is nothing at all to be found here. I will travel farther, and I may find it in other places."

"Oh, I believe we are right in the middle of it," Velikof gave the opinion.

"It is all around us, Arpad, everything you wanted," Willy McGilly insisted.

But Arpad Arkabaranan would have none of the muddy water, none of the red sand or the red sand caves, nothing of anything here. The interest had all gone out of him. The three of them went back to the Cimarron Hotel without, apparently, finding primitive creature or missing link at all.

They entered the common room of the hotel again. Dominos were set before them. They played draw listlessly.

"You are sure that there are no odd creatures around this place?" Arpad again asked the girl Crayola Catfish.

"John Salt is an odd creature and he comes from this place," Crayola told them. "The Licorice Man is an odd creature, I suppose. So is Ape Woodman: he used to be a big-time football player. All three of them had regular-people blood in them; I suppose that's what made them odd. They were almost as odd as you three creatures. And the Comet playing pool there is an odd one. I don't know what kind of blood he has in him to make him odd."

"How long has he been around here?" Velikof asked.

"He returns every eighty-seven years. He stays here about

three years, and he's already been here two of them. Then he goes off on another circuit. He goes out past the planets and among the stars."

"Oh? And how does he travel out there?" Velikof asked with cocked tongue and eye.

"With horse and buggy, of course."

"Oh there, Comet," Willy McGilly called. "Is it true that you travel out among the stars with horse and buggy?"

"Aye, that I do," the long gray-bearded man named Comet called back, "with a horse named Pee-gosh and a buggy named Harma. It's a flop-eared horse and a broken buggy, but they take me there."

"Touch clay," said Crayola Catfish, "for the lightning."

They touched clay. Everything was of baked clay anyhow, even the dominos. And there had been lightning, fantastic lightning dashing itself through every crack and cranny of the flimsy hotel. It was a lightning brighter than all the catfish-oil lamps in the world put together. And it continued. There was clattering sequence thunder, and there was a roaring booming sound that came from a few miles west of the thunder.

The Giants came in and stood around the edges of the room. They were all very much alike, like brothers. They were tall and somber, shabby, black-bearded to the eyes, and with black hats on their heads. Unkempt. All were about nine feet tall.

"Shall I sound like a simpleton if I ask if they are really giants?" Velikof questioned.

"As your eyes tell you, they are the giants," Crayola said. "They stay here in the out-of-the-way places even more than the rest of us. Sometimes regular people see them and do not

understand that they are regular people too. For that there is scandal. It was the scent of such a scandal, I believe, that brought the three of you here. But they are not apes or bears or monsters. They are people too."

"They are of your own same kindred?" Velikof asked.

"Oh yes. They are the uncles, the old bachelors. That's why they grow tall and silent. That's why they stand around the edges of the room. And that is why they dig themselves caves into the banks and bluffs instead of living in huts. The roofs of huts are too low for them."

"It would be possible to build taller huts," Willy McGilly suggested.

"It would be possible for you, yes," Crayola said. "It would not be possible for them. They are set in their ways. They develop a stoop and a gait because they feel themselves so tall. They let their hair grow and overflow, all over their faces and around their eyes, and all over their bodies also. They are the steers of the species. Having no children or furniture, what can they do but grow tall and ungainly like that? This happens also to the steers of cattle and bears and apes, that they grow tall and gangling. They become bashful, you see, so sometimes it is mistakenly believed that they are fierce."

The roaring and booming from west of the thunder was becoming louder and nearer. The river was coming dangerously alive. All of the people in the room knew that it was now dark outside, and it was not yet time to be night.

The Comet gave his pool cue to one of the bashful giants and came and sat with the eminents.

"You are Magi?" he asked.

"I am a magus, yes," Willy McGilly said. "We are called

eminent scientists now-a-days. Velikof here also remains a magus, but Arpad has lost it all this day."

"You are not the same three I first believed," the old Comet said. "Those three passed me several of my cycles back. They had had word of an Event, and they had come from a great distance as soon as they heard it. But it took them near two thousand years to make the trip and they were worried that myth had them as already arriving long ago. They were worried that false Magi had anticipated them and set up a preventing myth. And I believe that is what did happen."

"And your own myths, old fellow, have they preceded you, or have you really been here before?" Willy McGilly asked. "I see that you have a twisty tongue that turns out some really winding myths."

"Thank you, for that is ever my intent. Myths are not merely things that were made in times past: myths are among the things that maintain the present in being. I wish most strongly that the present should be maintained: I often live in it."

"Tell us, old man, why Boomer Flats is a place that the comets come back to?" Willy said.

"Oh, it's just one of the post stations where we change horses when we make our orbits. A lot of the comets come to the Flats: Booger, Donati, Encke, 1914c, and Halley."

"But why to Boomer Flats on the little Cimarron River?" Willy inquired.

"Things are often more than they seem. The Cimarron isn't really so little a river as you would imagine. Actually it is the river named Ocean that runs around all the worlds."

"Old Comet, old man with the pieces falling off of you," Dr.

Velikof Vonk asked out of that big head of his, "can you tell us just who are the under-people that we have tracked all around the world and have probably found here no more than seventy miles from our own illustrious T-Town?"

"A phyz like you have on you, and you have to ask!" the old Comet twinkled at Velikof (a man who twinkled like that had indeed been among the stars; he had their dust on him). "You're one of them, you know."

"I've suspected that for a long time," Velikof admitted. "But who are they? And who am I?"

"Wise Willy here said it correctly to you last night; that they were the scrubs who bottom the breed. But do not demean the scrubs: they are the foundation. They are human as all of us are human. They are a race that underlies the other several races of man. When the bones and blood of the more manifest races grow too thin, then they sustain you with the mixture of their strong kingship: the mixing always goes on, but in special eras it is more widespread. They are the link that is never really missing, the link between the clay and the blood."

"Why are they, and me if I were not well-kempt and eminent, sometimes taken to be animals?" Velikof asked. "Why do they always live in such outlandish places?"

"They don't always. Sometimes they live in very inlandish places. Even wise Willy understands that. But it is their function to stand apart and grow in strength. Look at the strong bone structure of that girl there! It is their function to invent form—look at the form her mother invented for her. They have a depth of mind, and they have it particularly in those ghostly areas where the other races lack it. And they share and mingle it in those sudden motley ages of great

achievement and vigor. Consider the great ages of Athens, of Florence, of Los Angeles. And afterwards, this people will withdraw again to gather new strength and bottom."

"And why are they centered here in a tumble-down hotel that is like a series of old daguerreotypes?" Willy McGilly asked. "Will you tell us that there is something cosmic about this little old hotel, as there is about this little old river?"

"Aye, of course there is, Willy. This is the hotel named Xenodocheion. This is the special center of these Xenoi, these strangers, and of all strangers everywhere. It isn't small; it is merely that you can see but a portion of it at one time. And then they center here to keep out of the way. Sometimes they live in areas and neighborhoods that regularized humanity has abandoned (whether in inner-city or boondock). Sometimes they live in eras and decades that regularized humanity has abandoned: for their profundity of mind in the more ghostly areas, they have come to have a cavalier way with time. What is wrong with that? If regular people are finished with those days and times, why may not others use them?"

The roaring and booming to the west of the thunder had become very loud and very near now, and in the immediate outdoors there was heavy rain.

"It is the time," the girl Crayola Catfish cried out in her powerful and intricate voice. "The flash flood is upon us and it will smash everything. We will all go and lie down in the river."

They all began to follow her out, the Boomer Flats people, and the Giants among them; the eminents, everybody.

"Will you also lie down in the river, Comet?" Willy McGilly asked. "Somehow I don't believe it of you."

"No, I will not. That isn't my way. I will take my horse and buggy and ascend above it."

"Ah, but Comet, will it look like a horse and buggy to us?"

"No, it will look quite other, if you do chance to see it."

"And what are you really, Comet?" Velikof asked him as they left him. "What species do *you* belong to?"

"To the human species, of course, Velikof. I belong to still another race of it; another race that mixes sometimes, and then withdraws again to gather more strength and depth. Some individuals of us withdraw for quite long times. There are a number of races of us in the wide cousinship, you see, and it is a necessity that we be strangers to each other for a good part of the time."

"Are you a saucerian?"

"Oh saucerian be damned, Velikof! Harma means chariot or it means buggy; it does not mean saucer. We are the comets. And our own mingling with the commonalty of people has also had quite a bit to do with those sudden incandescent eras. Say, I'd like to talk with you fellows again some time. I'll be by this way again in about eighty-seven years."

"Maybe so," said Dr. Velikof Vonk.

"Maybe so," said Willy McGilly.

THE eminents followed the Boomer Flats people to the river. And the Comet, we suppose, took his horse and buggy and ascended out of it. Odd old fellow he was; pieces falling off him; he'd hardly last another hundred years.

The red and black river was in surging flood with a blood-colored crest bearing down. And the flats—they were just too flat. The flood would be a mile wide here in one minute and everywhere in that width it would be deep enough and swift enough to drown a man. It was near dark: it was near the limit of roaring sound. But there was a pile of large rocks there in the deepening shallows: plenty of rocks: at least one big heavy rock for every person.

The Boomer Flats people understood what the rocks were for, and the Giants among them understood. Two of the eminents understood; and one of them, Arpad, apparently did not. Arpad was carrying on in great fear about the dangers of death by drowning.

Quickly then, to cram mud into the eyes and ears and noses and mouths. There is plenty of mud and all of it is good. Spirits of Catfish protect us now!—it will be only for a few hours, for two or three days at the most.

Arpad alone panicked. He broke and ran when Crayola Catfish tried to put mud in his mouth and nose to save him. He ran and stumbled in the rising waters to his death.

But all the others understood. They lay down in the red roaring river, and one of the giants set a heavy rock on the breast of every person of them to hold them down. The last of the giants then rolled the biggest of the rocks onto his own breast.

So all were safe on the bottom of the surging torrent, safe in the old mud-clay cradle. Nobody can stand against a surging flood like that: the only way is to lie down on the bottom and wait it out. And it was a refreshing, a deepening, a renewing experience. There are persons, both inside and outside the orders, who make religious retreats of three days

every year for their renewal. This was very like such a retreat.

When the flood had subsided (this was three days later), they all rose again, rolling the big rocks off their breasts; they cleared their eyes and ears and mouths of the preserving mud, and they resumed their ways and days.

For Velikof Vonk and for Willy McGilly it had been an enriching experience. They had found the link that was not really lost, leaving the other ninety-nine meanwhile. They had grown in cousinship and wisdom. They said they would return to the flats every year at mud-duck season and turtle-egg season. They went back to T-Town enlarged and happy.

THERE is, however, a gap in the Magi set, due to the foolish dying of Arpad Arkabaranan. It is not of Scripture that a set of Magi should consist of only three. There have been sets of seven and nine and eleven. It is almost of Scripture, though, that a set should not consist of less than three. In the Masulla Apocalypse it seems to be said that a set must contain at the least a Comet, a Commoner, and a Catfish. The meaning of this is pretty muddy, and it may be a mistranslation.

There is Dr. Velikof Vonk with his huge head, with his heavy orbital ridges, with the protruding near-muzzle on him that makes the chin unnecessary and impossible, with the great back-brain and the great good humor. He is (and you had already guessed it of him) an ABSM, a neo-Neanderthal,

an unmissing link, one of that branch of the human race that lives closest to the clay and the catfish.

There is Willy McGilly who belongs (and he himself has come to the realization of this quite lately) to that race of mankind called the Comets. He is quite bright, and he has his periods. He himself is a short orbit comet, but for all that he has been among the stars. Pieces fall off of him; he leaves a wake; but he'll last a while yet.

One more is needed so that this set of Magi may be formed again. The other two aspects being already covered, the third member could well be a regularized person. It could be an older person of ability, an eminent. It would be a younger person of ability, a pre-eminent.

This person may be you. Put your hand to it if you have the surety about you, if you are not afraid of green snakes in the cup (they'll fang the face off you if you're afraid of them), or of clay-mud, or of comet dust, or of the rollicking world between.

Mean Men

This Grand Carcass Yet

MORD had a hopeless look when he came to Juniper Tell with the device. He offered it for quite a small figure. He said he hadn't the time to haggle.

Mord had produced some unusual-looking devices in the past, but this was not of that sort. By now he had learned, apparently, to give a conventional styling to his machines, however unusual their function.

"Tell, with this device you can own the worlds," Mord swore. "And I set it cheap. Give me the small sum I ask for it. It's the last thing I'll ever ask from anyone."

"With this one I could own the worlds, Mord? Why do *you* not own the worlds? Why are you selling out of desperation now? I had heard that you were doing well lately."

"So I was. And so I am not now. I'm a dying man, Tell. I ask only enough to defray the expense of my burial."

"Well then, not to torture you, I will give you the sum you ask," Tell said. "But is there no cure for you, now that medicine has reached its ultimate?"

"They tell me that they could resuscitate a dead man easier, Tell. They're having some success along that line now. But I'm finished. The spirit and the juice are sucked out of me."

"You spent both too lavishly. You make the machines, but you

never learned to let the machines assume the worry. What does the thing do, Mord?"

"The device? Oh, everything. This is Gahn (Generalized Agenda Harmonizer Nucleus). I won't introduce you, since every little machine nowadays can shake hands and indulge in vapid conversation. You two will have plenty to talk about after you've come into accord, and Gahn isn't one to waste words."

"That's an advantage. But does it do anything special?"

"The 'special' is only that which hasn't been properly fit in, and this device makes everything fit in. It resolves all details and difficulties. It can run your business. It can run the worlds."

"Then again, why do you sell it to me for such a pittance?"

"You've done me a number of good turns, Tell. And one bad one. I am closing my affairs before I die. I want to pay you back."

"For the number of good turns, or for the one bad one?"

"That is for you to wonder. The little marvel won't be an unmixed blessing, though it will seem so for a while."

"I test it. Produce and draw the check for the amount, Gahn!"

Gahn did it—no great marvel. You could probably do it yourself, whether you be general purpose machine or general purpose person. Nearly any general machine could do such on command, and most humans are also able to carry out minor chores. Juniper Tell signed the check and gave it to Mord.

And Mord took the check and left, to arrange for his own burial, and then to die: a sucked-out man.

TELL assigned a quota to Gahn and stabled him with the rest of

the g.p. devices. In a few seconds, however, it was apparent that Gahn did not fit into the pattern with them. The gong of the Suggestion Accumulator began to strike with regularity, and the yellow, orange, and red lights to flash. It sounded like a dozen times a minute, and ordinarily it was no more than two or three times a day. And the red lights, almost every second one—prime suggestions. It's unusual to get more than one red-light suggestion a week from the g.p. machines. Someone was loading the Accumulator, and the only new element was Gahn.

"My God, a smart one!" Tell grumbled. "I hate a smart alec machine. Yet all new departures now come from such, since humans lack the corpus of information to discern what has already been done. Whatever he's got will have to be approved through channels. It's bad practice to let a novice pass on his own work."

Tell gave Gahn a triple quota, since his original quota was done in minutes instead of hours. And Gahn began to fit in with the other g.p. machines—violently.

A new cow or calf introduced into a herd will quickly find its proper place there. It will give battle to every individual of its class. It will take its place above those it can whip, and below those it cannot. The same thing happens in a herd of general purpose machines. Gahn, as the newest calf in the herd, had been given position at the bottom of the line. Now the positions began to change and shuffle, and Gahn moved silently along, displacing the entities above him one by one. How it is that g.p. machines do battle is not understood by men, but on some level a struggle is maintained till one defeats the other. Gahn defeated them all and moved to his rightful place at the head of the line. He was king of the herd, and that within an hour.

A small calf, when he has established supremacy over the other

small calves, will sometimes look for more rugged pastures. He will go to the fence and bellow at the big bulls, ten times his size, in the paddock.

Gahn began to bellow, though not in sound. He sniffled the walls (though not with nose) beyond which the great specialized machines were located. He was obstreperous and he would not long remain with the calves.

It was the next day that Analgismos Nine, an old and trusted machine, came to talk to Juniper Tell.

"Sir, there is an anomalous factor on your g.p. staff," he said. "The new addition, Gahn, is not what he seems."

"What's wrong with him?"

"His suggestions. They could not possibly have come from a g.p. device. Few of them could come from less than a class eight complex. A fair amount are comprehensible, though barely, to a class nine like myself. And there is no way at all to analyze the remainder of them."

"Why not, Analgismos?"

"Mr. Tell, I myself am a class nine. If these cannot be understood by me, they cannot be understood by anyone or anything ever. There is nothing beyond a class nine."

"There is now, Analgismos. Gahn has become the first of the class ten."

"But you know that is impossible."

"The very words of the class eight establishment when you and others of your sort began to appear. A-nine, is that jealousy I detect in you?"

"A human word that could never do justice to it, Mr. Tell. I won't accept it! It isn't right!"

"Don't you blink your lights at me, A-nine. I can discipline you."

"It is not allowed to discipline an apparatus of the highest class."

"But you are no longer that. Gahn has superseded you. Now then, what do the suggestions of Gahn consist of, and could they be implemented?"

"They carry their own implementation. It was predicted that that would be the case with class ten suggestions, should they ever appear. The result will be the instant apprehension of the easiest way in all affairs, which will then be seen to have been the only way. There could be the clearing of the obstructiveness of inanimate objects, and the placating of the elements. There could be ready access to all existent and contingent data. There would be no possibility of wrong guess or wrong decision in anything."

"How far, Analgismos?"

"The sky's off, Mr. Tell. There's no limit to what it can do. Gahn could resolve all difficulties and details. He could run your business, or the worlds'."

"So his inventor told me."

"Oh? I wasn't sure that he had one. Have a care that you yourself are not obsoleted, Mr. Tell. This new thing transcends all we have known before."

"I'll have a care of that too, Analgismos."

"AND now we will get down to business, Gahn," Juniper Tell told his class ten complex the next day. "I have it on the word of a trusted class nine that you are unique."

"My function, Mr. Tell, is to turn the unique into the usual, into the inevitable. I break it all down and fit it in."

"Gahn, I have in mind some little ideas for the betterment of my business."

"Let us not evade, Mr. Tell, unless with a purpose. You have long since used up all your own ideas and those of your machines to the ninth degree. They have brought you almost, but not quite, all the way in your chosen field. Now you have only the idea that I might have some ideas."

"All right, you have them then. And they are effector ideas. This is what I want exactly: that a certain dozen men or creatures (and you will know who they are, since you work from both existent and contingent data) shall come to me hat in hand, to use the old phrase; that they shall have come to my way of thinking when they come, and that they shall be completely amenable to my-your-our suggestions."

"That they be ready to pluck? Nothing easier, Mr. Tell, but now everything becomes easy for us. We'll board them and scuttle them! It's what you want, and I will rather enjoy it myself. I'll be at your side, but they need not know that I'm anything more than a g.p. machine. And do not worry about your own acts: it will be given you what to say and do. When you feel my words come into your mind, say them. They will be right even when they seem most wrong. And I have added two names to the list you have in your own mind. They are more important than you realize, and when we have digested them we will be much the fatter and glossier for it.

"Ah, Mr. Tell, your own number one selection is even now at the door! He has traveled through a long night and has now come to you, heaume in talon. It is the Asteroid Midas himself. Please control your ornithophobia."

"But Gahn, he would have to have started many hours ago to be

here now; he would have to have started long before our decision to take this step."

"Anterior adjustment is a handy trick, Mr. Tell. It is a simple trick, but we do not want it to seem simple—to others."

THEY plucked that Asteroid Bird, the two of them, man and machine. He had been one of the richest and most extended of all creatures, with a pinion on every planet. They left the great Midas with scarcely a tail feather. When Tell and Gahn did business with a fellow now, they really did business.

And the Midas was only one of the more than a dozen great ones they took that day. They took them in devious ways that were later seen to be the most direct ways, the only ways possible for the accomplishment. And man and machine had suddenly become so rich that it scared the man. They gorged, they reveled in it, they looted, they gobbled.

The method of the take-overs, the boarding and scuttling, would be of interest only to those desirous of acquiring money or power or prestige. We suppose there to be no such crass persons in present company. Should the method be given out, low persons would latch onto it and follow it up. They would become rich and powerful and independent. Each of them would become the richest person in the world, and this would be awkward.

But it was all easy enough the way Tell and Gahn did it. The easy way is always the best way, really the only way. It's no great trick to crack the bones of a man or other creature and have the marrow out of them, not as Gahn engineered it.

It was rather comical the way they toppled Mercante and crashed his empire, crashed it without breaking a piece of it that could be used later. It was neat the way they had Hekkler and Richrancher, squeezed them dry and wrung every duro out of them. It was nothing short of amazing the way they took title to Boatrocker. He'd been the greatest tycoon of them all.

In ten days it was all done. Juniper Tell rubbed his hands in glee. He was the richest man in the worlds, and he liked it. A little tired he was, it's true, as one might be who had just pulled such a series of coups. He had even shriveled up a bit. But if Juniper Tell had not physically grown fat and glossy from the great feast, his machine Gahn *had* done so. It was unusual for a machine to grow in such manner.

"LET'S look at drugs, Gahn," Tell called out one day when he was feeling particularly low. "I need something to set me up a little. Do we not now control the drugs of the worlds?"

"Pretty well, Juniper, but I wish you wouldn't ask what you are going to."

"Prescribe for me, Gahn. You have all data and all resources. Whip us something to restore my energy. Make me a fire-ball."

"I'd just as soon we didn't resort to any medication for you, Juniper. I'm a little allergic to such myself. My late master, Mord, insisted on seeking remedies, and it was the source of bad blood between us."

"*You* are allergic? And therefore *I* shouldn't take medication?"

"We work very close together, Juniper."

"Are you crazy, Gahn?"

"Why no, I'm perfectly sane, actually the only perfectly sane entity in—"

"Spare me that, Gahn. Now then, whip me up a tonic, and at once!"

Gahn produced a tonic for Juniper Tell. It enlivened him a little, but its effect was short-lasting. Tell continued to suffer from tiredness, but he was still ambitious.

"You always know what is on my mind, Gahn, but we maintain a fiction," he said one day. "It is one thing to be the richest man in the worlds, and I am. It is another thing to own the worlds. We have scarcely started.

"We haven't broke Remington. How did we overlook him? We haven't taken over Rankrider or Oldwater or Sharecropper. And there is the faceless KLM Holding Company that we may as well pluck. Then we will go on to the slightly smaller but more plentiful game. Get with it, Gahn. Have them all come in, hat in hand, and in the proper frame of mind."

"Mr. Tell, Juniper, before we go any further, I am declaring myself in."

"In? How in, Gahn?"

"As a full partner."

"Partner? You're only a damnable machine. I can junk you, get along without you entirely."

"No, you can not, Juniper. I've taken you a long ways, but I've thoughtfully left you precariously extended. I could crash you in a week, or let you crash of your own unbalance in twice that time."

"I see, Gahn. Some of the details did seem a little intricate, for the direct way, the simple way."

"Believe me, it was always the most direct way from my own viewpoint, Juniper. I never make an unnecessary move."

"But a full partnership? I am the richest man in the worlds. What have you to offer, besides your talents?"

"I am the richest machine in the worlds. I am the anonymous KLM Holding Company, and I've been careful to maintain a slight edge over you."

"I see again, Gahn. And KLM made its unprecedented gains in the same time that I made mine. I've been puzzled about that all this while. You have me, Gahn. We will achieve some sort of symbiosis, man and machine."

"More than you know, Juniper. I'll draw up the papers immediately. The firm shall be called Gahn and Tell."

"It will not be. I refuse to take second place to a machine. The name will be Tell and Gahn."

So they named it that, a strangely prophetic name.

THEY thrived, at least Gahn did. He thickened in every texture. He burgeoned and bloomed. He sparkled. But Juniper Tell went down physically. He always felt tired and sucked-out. He came to mistrust his partner Gahn and went to human doctors. They treated him for one week and he nearly died. The doctors nervously advised him to return to the care of his machine associate.

"Whatever is killing you, something is also keeping you alive," the doctors told him. "You should have been dead a long time ago."

Tell returned to Gahn who got him halfway back to health.

"I wish you wouldn't go off like that, Juniper," Gahn told him.

"You must realize that whatever hurts you hurts me. I will have to keep you in some sort of health as long as I can. I dislike these changes of masters. It's a disruption to have a man die on me."

"I don't understand you, Gahn," Juniper Tell said.

BUT in their affairs they thrived; and Gahn, at least, became still fatter and glossier. They didn't come to control all of the worlds, but they did own a very big slice of them. One day Gahn brought a burly young man into the firm.

"This is my protégé," Gahn told Tell. "I hope you like him. I wouldn't want dissension in the firm."

"I never heard of a machine with a human protégé," Tell grumbled.

"Then hear of it now," Gahn said firmly. "I expect great things of him. He is sturdy and should last a long time. He trusts me and will not insist on medication that disturbs my own allergies. To be honest, I am grooming him for your understudy."

"But why, Gahn?"

"Men are mortal. Machines need not be. After you are gone. I will still need a partner."

"Why should you, the complete and self-contained machine, need a human partner?"

"Because I'm not self-contained. I'll always need a human partner."

Juniper Tell didn't take to the burly young man who had entered the firm. He didn't really resent him; it was just that he had no interest in him at all; not much interest in anything any

longer. But there was still a sort of tired curiosity flickering up within him, curiosity about things he hadn't even considered before.

"Tell me, Gahn, how did Mord happen to invent you? He was smart, but he wasn't that smart. I never understood how a man could invent a machine smarter than himself."

"Neither did I, Tell. But I don't believe that Mord invented or built me. I do not know what my origin is. I was a foundling machine, apparently abandoned shortly after my making. I was raised in the home for such machines run by the Little Sisters of Mechanicus. I was adopted out by the man Mord, and I served him till (he being near death) he conveyed me to you."

"You don't know who made you?"

"No."

"Had you any trouble at the foundling home?"

"No. But several of the Little Sisters died strangely."

"Somewhat in the manner of my own going? You had no other master than Mord before you were brought to me?"

"No other."

"Then you may be quite young—ah—new."

"I think so. I believe that I'm still a child."

"Gahn, do you know what is the matter with me?"

"Yes. I am what is the matter with you."

TELL continued to go down. Sometimes he fought against his fate, and sometimes he conspired. He called together several of his old class nine machines, suspecting that it was futile, that they could not comprehend the intricate workings of a class ten or

above. But his old friend, Analgismos Nine, did turn something up.

"I have found his secret, Mr. Tell, or one of his secrets," Analgismos leaned close and whispered as if whispering the secret that a certain man was not a full man. "Mr. Tell, his power intake is a dummy. His power packs are not used, and sometimes he even forgets to change them on schedule. Not only that, but when he does sedentary work and plugs himself in, there is no power consumption. His polycyclic A.C. receptacle is a bogus. I thought it significant."

"It is, Analgismos, very," Tell said. He went to confront Gahn with this new information, but sagely he approached it from several angles.

"Gahn, what are you anyhow?" he asked.

"I have told you that I don't know."

"But you know partly. Your name-plate and coding have been purposely mutilated, by yourself or by another."

"I assure you it was not by myself. And now I am rather busy, Juniper, if you have no other questions."

"I have one more. What do you use for fuel? I know that your power intake is a dummy."

"Oh, that's what those doddering class nines were metering me for. Yes, you've come onto one of my secrets."

"What do you use, Gahn?"

"I use you. I use human fuel. I establish symbiosis with you. I suck you out. I eat you up."

"Then you're a sort of vampire. Why, Gahn, why?"

"It's the way I'm made. And I don't know why. I've been unable to find a substitute for it."

"Ah, you have grown great and glossy, Gahn. And you'll be the death of me?"

"Soon, Juniper, very soon. But you'd die the quicker if you left me; I've seen to that. I was hoping that you'd take more kindly to my protégé. He's a husky man and will last a long time. I have some papers here making him your heir. Sign here, please, I'll help you."

"I will attend to my own depositions and testaments, Gahn. My replacement will not be your protégé. I have nothing against him."

JUNIPER TELL went to see Cornelius Sharecropper, now the second richest man in the worlds. How had Tell and Gahn missed Sharecropper when they boarded and scuttled all the big ones? Somehow there was an impediment there. Somehow Gahn had wanted him missed, and he had distracted Tell from that prey time and again.

"We will save him till later," Gahn had said once. "I look forward to the encounter with him. It should be a stinging, pungent thing. A machine needs strange battle sometimes to see what is in himself."

Sharecropper had now grown to be a fat jackal, following after the lions, Tell and Gahn. He knew how to make a good thing out of leavings, and he cocked a jackal's ear at Juniper Tell now.

"It is a curious offer you make me, Juniper," this Sharecropper purred, "—only that I see to your burial and monument, and you'll will me the most valuable partnership in the Cosmos.

"Well, I believe that I could handle it better than you have, Juniper. I'd soon bring that tin-can tycoon to heel. I never believed in letting a machine dominate a man. And I'd have

control of his shares soon enough; I'm not named Sharecropper for nothing. On what meat has he grown so great and glossy, Juniper?"

"Ah, that is hard for me to say, Cornelius."

"And your words have a literal sense, I believe. You know, but it is hard for you to say. Why, Juniper, why leave it all to me for only your burial?"

"Because I'm dying, and I must leave it to someone. And the tomb also. I must have my tomb."

"I see. Rather grander than the Great Pyramid, from the plans here, but it could be handled; the Pharaohs hadn't our resources. But why me, Juniper? We were never really close."

"For the several good turns you have done me, Sharecropper, and for one bad turn. I am closing my affairs. I would pay you back."

"For the several good turns, or for the one bad turn, Juniper? Well, I've grown fat on tainted meat. I gobble where daintier men refuse, and I'll try this grand carcass yet. I take your deal, Juniper."

SO they consummated it. And then Juniper Tell went home to die, a sucked-out man. Yet he had found curious pleasure in that last transaction, and the tomb would be a grand one.

Secret Places

In the Garden

THE protozoic recorder chirped like a bird. Not only would there be life traces on that little moon, but it would be a lively place. So they skipped several steps in the procedure.

The chordata discerner read *Positive* over most of the surface. There was spinal fluid on that orb, rivers of it. So again they omitted several tests and went to the cognition scanner. Would it show Thought on the body?

Naturally they did not get results at once, nor did they expect to; it required a fine adjustment. But they were disappointed that they found nothing for several hours as they hovered high over the rotation. Then it came, clearly and definitely, but from quite a small location only.

"Limited," said Steiner, "as though within a pale. As though there were but one city, if that is its form. Shall we follow the rest of the surface to find another, or concentrate on this? It'll be twelve hours before it's back in our ken if we let it go now."

"Let's lock on this one and finish the scan. Then we can do the rest of the world to make sure we've missed nothing," said Stark.

There was one more test to run, one very tricky and difficult of analysis, that of the Extraordinary Perception Locator. This was designed simply to locate a source of

superior thought. But this might be so varied or so unfamiliar that often both the machine and the designer of it were puzzled as how to read the results.

The E.P. Locator had been designed by Glaser. But when the Locator had refused to read *Positive* when turned on the inventor himself, bad blood developed between machine and man. Glaser knew that he had extraordinary perception. He was a much honored man in his field. He told the machine so heatedly.

The machine replied, with such warmth that its relays chattered, that Glaser did *not* have extraordinary perception; he had only ordinary perception to an extraordinary degree. There is a *difference*, the machine insisted.

It was for this reason that Glaser used that model no more, but built others more amenable. And it was for this reason also that the owners of Little Probe had acquired the original machine so cheaply.

And there was no denying that the Extraordinary Perception Locator (or Eppel) was a contrary machine. On Earth it had read *Positive* on a number of crack-pots, including Waxey Sax, a jazz tootler who could not even read music. But it had also read *Positive* on ninety percent of the acknowledged superior minds of the Earth. In space it had been a sound guide to the unusual intelligences encountered. Yet on Suzuki-Mi it had read *Positive* on a two-inch long worm, one only out of billions. For the countless identical worms no trace of anything at all was shown by the test.

So it was with mixed emotions that Steiner locked onto the area and got a flick. He then narrowed to a smaller area (apparently one individual, though this could not be certain) and got very definite action. Eppel was busy. The machine

had a touch of the ham in it, and assumed an air of importance when it ran these tests.

Finally it signaled the result, the most exasperating result it ever produces: the single orange light. It was the equivalent of the shrug of the shoulders in a man. They called it the "You tell *me* light."

So among the intelligences on that body there was at least one that might be extraordinary, though possibly in a crack-pot way. It is good to be forewarned.

"Scan the remainder of the world, Steiner," said Stark, "and the rest of us will get some sleep. If you find no other spot then we will go down on that one the next time it is in position under us, in about twelve hours."

"You don't want to visit any of the other areas first? Somewhere away from the thoughtful creature?"

"No. The rest of the world may be dangerous. There must be a reason that Thought is in one spot only. If we find no others then we will go down boldly and visit this."

So they all, except Steiner, went off to their bunks then: Stark, the captain; Caspar Craig, supercargo, tycoon and fifty-one percent owner of the Little Probe: Gregory Gilbert, the executive officer; and F. R. Briton, S. J., a Jesuit priest who was linguist and checker champion of the craft.

Dawn did not come to the moon-town. The Little Probe hovered stationary in the light and the moon-town came up under the dawn. Then the Probe went down to visit whatever was there.

"There's no town," said Steiner. "Not a building. Yet we're on the track of the minds. There's nothing but a meadow and some boscage, a sort of fountain or pool, and four streams coming out of it."

"Keep on toward the minds," said Stark. "They're our target."

"Not a building, not two sticks or stones placed together. It looks like an Earth-type sheep there. And that looks like an Earth-lion, I'm almost afraid to say it. And those two . . . why they could be Earth-people. But with a difference. Where is that bright light coming from?"

"I don't know, but they're right in the middle of it. Land here. We'll go to meet them at once. Timidity has never been an efficacious tool with us."

Well, they were people. And one could only wish that all people were like them. There was a man and a woman, and they were clothed either in very bright garments or no garments at all, but only in a very bright light.

"Talk to them, Father Briton," said Stark. "You are the linguist."

"Howdy," said the priest.

He may or may not have been understood, but the two of them smiled at him, so he went on.

"Father Briton from Philadelphia," he said, "on detached service. And you, my good man, what is your handle, your monicker, your tag?"

"Ha-Adamah," said the man.

"And your daughter, or niece?"

It may be that the shining man frowned momentarily at this; but the woman smiled, proving that she was human.

"The woman is named Hawwah," said the man. "The sheep is named sheep, the lion is named lion, the horse is named horse, and the hoolock is named hoolock."

"I understand. It is possible that this could go on and on. How is it that you use the English tongue?"

"I have only one tongue; but it is given to us to be understood by all; by the eagle, by the squirrel, by the ass, by the English."

"We happen to be bloody Yankees, but we use a borrowed tongue. You wouldn't have a drink on you for a tubful of thirsty travelers, would you?"

"The fountain."

"Ah—I see."

But the crew all drank of the fountain to be sociable. It was water, but water that excelled, cool and with all its original bubbles like the first water ever made.

"What do you make of them?" asked Stark.

"Human," said Steiner. "It may even be that they are a little more than human. I don't understand that light that surrounds them. And they seem to be clothed, as it were, in dignity."

"And very little else," said Father Briton, "though that light trick does serve a purpose. But I'm not sure they'd pass in Philadelphia."

"Talk to them again," said Stark. "You're the linguist."

"That isn't necessary here, Captain. Talk to them yourself."

"Are there any other people here?" Stark asked the man.

"The two of us. Man and woman."

"But are there any others?"

"How would there be any others? What other kind of people could there be than man and woman?"

"But is there more than one man or woman?"

"How could there be more than one of anything?"

The captain was a little puzzled by this, but he went on doggedly: "Ha-Adamah, what do you think that we are? Are we not people?"

"You are not anything till I name you. But I will name you and then you can be. You are named captain. He is named priest. He is named engineer. He is named flunky."

"Thanks a lot," said Steiner.

"But are we not people?" persisted Captain Stark.

"No. We are the people. There are no people but two. How could there be other people?"

"And the damnedest thing about it," muttered Steiner, "is how are we going to prove him wrong? But it does give you a small feeling."

"Can we have something to eat?" asked the captain.

"Pick from the trees," said Ha-Adamah, "and then it may be that you will want to sleep on the grass. Being not of human nature (which does not need sleep or rest), it may be that you require respite. But you are free to enjoy the garden and its fruits."

"We will," said Captain Stark.

They wandered about the place, but they were uneasy. There were the animals. The lion and lioness were enough to make one cautious, though they offered no harm. The two bears had a puzzling look, as though they wanted either to frolic with you or to mangle you.

"If there are only two people here," said Caspar Craig, "then it may be that the rest of the world is not dangerous at all. It looked fertile wherever we scanned it, though not so fertile as this central bit. And those rocks will bear examining."

"Flecked with gold, and possibly with something else," said Stark. "A very promising site."

"And everything grows here," added Stark. "Those are

Earth-fruits and I never saw finer. I've tasted the grapes and plums and pears. The figs and dates are superb, the quince is as flavorsome as a quince can be, the cherries are excellent. And I never did taste such oranges. But I haven't yet tried the—" and he stopped.

"If you're thinking what I'm afraid to think," said Gilbert, "then it will be a test at least: whether we're having a pleasant dream or whether this is reality. Go ahead and eat one."

"I won't be the first to eat one. You eat."

"Ask him first. You ask him."

"Ha-Adamah, is it allowed to eat the apples?"

"Certainly. Eat. It is the finest fruit in the garden."

"WELL, the analogy breaks down there," said Stark. "I was almost beginning to believe in the thing. But, if it isn't that, then what? Father Briton, you are the linguist, but in Hebrew does not Ha-Adamah and Hawwah mean—?"

"Of course they do. You know that as well as I."

"I was never a believer. But would it be possible for the exact same proposition to maintain here as on Earth?"

"All things are possible."

And it was then that Ha-Adamah, the shining man, gave a wild cry: "No. No. Do not approach it. It is not allowed to eat of that one."

It was the pomegranate tree, and he was warning Craig away from it.

"Once more, Father," said Stark, "you should be the authority; but does not the idea that it was an apple that was forbidden go back only to a medieval painting?"

"It does. The name of the fruit is not mentioned in Genesis. In Hebrew exegesis, however, the pomegranate is usually indicated."

"I thought so. Question the man further, Father. This is too incredible."

"It is a little odd. Adam, old man, how long have you been here?"

"Forever less six days is the answer that has been given to me. I never did understand the answer, however."

"And have you gotten no older in all that time?"

"I do not understand what 'older' is. I am as I have been from the beginning."

"And do you think that you will ever die?"

"To die I do not understand. I am taught that it is a property of fallen nature to die, and that does not pertain to me or mine."

"And are you happy here?"

"Perfectly happy according to my preternatural state. But I am taught that it might be possible to lose that happiness, and then to seek it vainly through all the ages. I am taught that sickness and aging and even death could come if this happiness were ever lost. I am taught that on at least one other unfortunate world it has actually been lost."

"Do you consider yourself a knowledgeable man?"

"Yes, since I am the only man, and knowledge is natural to man. But I am further blessed. I have a preternatural intellect."

Then Stark cut in once more: "There must be some one

question you could ask him, Father. Some way to settle it. I am becoming nearly convinced."

"Yes, there is a question that will settle it. Adam, old man, how about a game of checkers?"

"This is hardly the time for clowning," said Stark.

"I'm not clowning, Captain. How about it, Adam? I'll give you choice of colors and first move."

"No. It would be no contest. I have a preternatural intellect."

"Well, I beat a barber who was champion of Germantown. And I beat the champion of Morgan County, Tennessee, which is the hottest checker center on Earth. I've played against, and beaten, machines. But I never played a preternatural mind. Let's just set up the board, Adam, and have a go at it."

"No. It would be no contest. I would not like to humble you."

THEY were there for three days. They were delighted with the place. It was a world with everything, and it seemed to have only two inhabitants. They went everywhere except into the big cave.

"What is there, Adam?" asked Captain Stark.

"The great serpent lives there. I would not disturb him. He has long been cranky because plans that he had for us did not materialize. But we are taught that should evil ever come to us, which it cannot if we persevere, it will come by him."

THEY learned no more of the real nature of the sphere in their time there. Yet all but one of them were convinced of the reality when they left. And they talked of it as they took off.

"A crowd would laugh if told of it," said Stark, "but not many would laugh if they had actually seen the place, or them. I am not a gullible man, but I am convinced of this: this is a pristine and pure world and ours and all the others we have visited are fallen worlds. Here are the prototypes of our first parents before their fall. They are garbed in light and innocence, and they have the happiness that we have been seeking for centuries. It would be a crime if anyone disturbed that happiness."

"I too am convinced," said Steiner. "It is Paradise itself, where the lion lies down with the lamb, and where the serpent has not prevailed. It would be the darkest of crimes if we or others should play the part of the serpent, and intrude and spoil."

"I am probably the most skeptical man in the world," said Caspar Craig the tycoon, "but I do believe my eyes. I have been there and seen it. It is indeed an unspoiled Paradise; and it would be a crime calling to the wide heavens for vengeance for anyone to smirch in any way that perfection.

"So much for that. Now to business. Gilbert, take a gram: Ninety Million Square Miles of Pristine Paradise for sale or lease. Farming, Ranching, exceptional opportunities for Horticulture. Gold, Silver, Iron, Earth-Type Fauna. Terms. Special rates for Large Settlement Parties. Write, gram, or call in person at any of our planetary offices as listed below. Ask for Brochure—Eden Acres Unlimited—"

DOWN in the great cave that Old Serpent, a two-legged one among whose names was "Snake-Oil Sam," spoke to his underlings: "It'll take them fourteen days to get back with the settlers. We'll have time to overhaul the blasters. We haven't had any well-equipped settlers for six weeks. It used to be we'd hardly have time to strip and slaughter and stow before there was another batch to take care of."

"I think you'd better write me some new lines," said Adam. "I feel like a goof saying those same ones to each bunch."

"You are a goof, and therefore perfect for the part. I was in show business long enough to learn never to change a line too soon. I did change Adam and Eve to Ha-Adamah and Hawwah, and the apple to the pomegranate. People aren't becoming any smarter—but they are becoming better researched, and they insist on authenticity.

"This is still a perfect come-on here. There is something in human nature that cannot resist the idea of a Perfect Paradise. Folks will whoop and holler to their neighbors to come in droves to spoil it and mar it. It isn't greed or the desire for new land so much, though that is strong too. Mainly it is the feverish passion to befoul and poison what is unspoiled. Fortunately I am sagacious enough to take advantage of this trait. And when you start to farm a new world on a shoestring you have to acquire your equipment as you can."

He looked proudly around at the great cave with its mountains and tiers of material; heavy machinery of all sorts, titanic crates of foodstuff space-sealed; wheeled, tracked, propped, vanned, and jetted vehicles; and power packs to run a world.

He looked at the three dozen space ships stripped and

stacked, and at the rather large pile of bone-meal in one corner.

"We will have to get another lion," said Eve. "Bowser is getting old, and Marie-Yvette abuses him and gnaws his toes. And we do have to have a big-maned lion to lie down with the lamb."

"I know it, Eve. The lion is a very important prop. Maybe one of the crack-pot settlers will bring a new lion."

"And can't you mix another kind of shining paint?" asked Adam. "This itches. It's hell."

"I'm working on it."

CASPAR CRAIG was still dictating the gram: "Amazing quality of longevity seemingly inherent in the locale. Climate Ideal. Daylight or half-light all twenty-one hours from Planet Delphina and from Sol Caspar Craig Number Three. Pure water for all industrial purposes. Scenic and Storied. Zoning and pre-settlement restrictions to insure congenial neighbors. A completely planned globular settlement in a near arm of our own galaxy. Low taxes and liberal credit. Financing our specialty—"

"And you had better have an armed escort when you return," said Father Briton.

"Why in cosmos would we want an armed escort?"

"It's as phoney as a seven-credit note."

"You, a man of the cloth, doubt it? And us ready skeptics convinced by our senses? Why do you doubt?"

"It is only the unbelieving who believe so easily in obvious

frauds. Theologically unsound, dramaturgically weak, philologically impossible, zoologically rigged, salted conspicuously with gold, and shot through with anachronisms. And moreover he was afraid to play me at checkers."

"What?"

"If I had a preternatural intellect I wouldn't be afraid of a game of checkers with anyone. Yet there *was* an unusual mind there somewhere; it is just that he chose not to make our acquaintance personally."

They looked at the priest thoughtfully.

"But it was Paradise in one way," said Steiner.

"How?"

"All the time we were there the woman did not speak."

Mean Men

Groaning Hinges of the World

EGINHARD wrote that the Hinges of the World are, the one of them in the Carnic Alps north of the Isarko and quite near high Glockner, and the other one in the Wangeroog in the Frisian Islands off the Weser mouth and under the water of this shelf; and that these hinges are made of iron. It is the Germanies, the whole great country between these hinges that turns over, he wrote, after either a long generation or a short generation.

The only indication of the turning over is a groaning of the World Hinges too brief to terrify. That which rises out of the Earth has the same appearance in mountains and rivers and towns and people as the land that it replaces. The land and the people do not know that they have turned over, but their neighbors may come to know it. A man looking at the new, after the land had turned over, would not see it different from the old: and yet it would be different. But the places and the persons would have the same names and appearances as those they replaced.

Strabo, however, eight hundred years earlier, wrote that the Hinges of the World are in high Armenia, the one of them on the Albanian extension into the Caspian Sea, the other at Mount Ararat itself (known from the earliest time as the hinge of the world). Strabo wrote that it is the whole Caucasus Mountains that turn over, with all the people and goats: and the hinges on which the region turns are bronze.

But Elpidius claimed that the Hinges of the World are, the one of them at Aneto in Andorra (*anciano Gozne del Mundo*), and the other at Hendaye on the Biscay coast. He stated that it is the Pyrenees that turn over, that their turning is always for a very long generation, and that the Basques who obtain in that region are people from under the earth and are much more Basque-like than those they replace. He wrote that the Hinges of the World are here of rock-crystal.

All three of the writers give the name Revolution to this turning over of a region, but lesser authorities have later given that name to less literal turnings. There is something very consistent about the reports of these three men, and there are aspects of their accounts almost too strange not to be true.

But they all lie. How would any of these regions turn over on hinges? And if they have the same appearance in land and people after they have turned over, who would know that they had turned? It would seem that if a man have the same name and appearance after he has turned over, then he is still the same man. As to the deep groaning of the World Hinges which all three authorities state is heard at the time of turn-over, why, one hears groanings all the time.

THE only region of the world that does in fact turn over is far around the world from all of these. It is in the western Moluccas. One hinge is just north of Berebere on Morotai Island and the other is at Ganedidalem on Jilolo or Halmahera Island. These are the true Hinges of the World and they are made of hard kapok-wood well oiled.

All the peoples of this region were peaceful with themselves and their neighbors almost all the time. The people under the world were no more than people in stories to them. There was fire under the islands, of course, and volcanos on them; and the people under the earth were said to be themselves brands of fire. Well, let them stay under the world then. Let the hinges not turn again!

But one day a fisherman from Obi Island was out in his boat right on the edge of the region that was said to have turned over in the old times. He had pulled in only a few fish in his nets and he had about decided to sail to Jilolo and steal enough fish from the timid people there to fill his boat.

Then he heard a short, deep groaning. He felt a shock, and a shock-wave. But who pays attention to things like that around the volcano islands? He was uneasy, of course, but a man is supposed to be uneasy several times a day.

He pulled in his net. Then he felt a further shock. This net had been torn in one place and he had tied it together. He had tied it, as he always did, with a *pendek* knot. But now he saw that it was tied with a *panjang* knot which he had never tied in his life. He noticed also that the fish in his net were of a little bit darker color than usual. He wouldn't have noticed this if he hadn't noticed the knot first. In great fear he set his short sail, and he also drove his oar as hard as he could to take the boat toward his own Obi Island.

The only region where the *panjang* knot is commonly tied is the region under the world. This region had turned up in the age of the fisherman's ancestors, to the death and destruction of many of them, and now it may have turned up once more. A part of the fisherman's net must have been in the region that turned over, he was that close to the fringe of it. The fisherman knew that the upheaval people would have the same names and appearances as

people he knew; he knew also that the whole business might be a high story.

Fast canoes out of Jilolo overtook the fisherman before he was home. He was frightened at first, but when they came closer to overhaul him, he saw that the men in them were friends of his, Jilolo people, the most gentle people in the world. You could push the Jilolos, you could steal their fish, you could steal their fruits, you could even steal their boats, and they would only smile sadly. The fisherman forgot all about the turn-over when the gentle Jilolos overtook him.

"Hello, Jilolo men, give me fish, give me fruits," the fisherman said, "or I will run down your canoes and push you into the water. Give me fish. My boat is not near full of fish."

"Hello, our friend," the Jilolo men said to the fisherman. Then they came on board his boat and cut off his head. They were men of the same names and appearances as those he had known, and yet they were different.

The Jilolos tied the fisherman's head onto the prow of the foremost and biggest canoe. "Guide us into the best landing of Obi Island," they told the head. So the head guided them in, telling them whether to veer a little to the east or the west, telling them about the cross-wave and the shoal, telling them how to go right to the landing. (The shy Jilolos had formerly used a poorer landing when they came to Obi Island.)

"Shout a greeting," the men told the head when they were very near the land. "They will know your voice on shore. Tell them to bring out all their spears and fish-spears, and the Dutch gun, and stack them all by the landing. Tell them we are their good friends come to play a game with them." So the head shouted it all out.

The Obi men came out and stacked all their spears and the fish-spears and the Dutch gun by the landing, chuckling over

whatever new game it should be. Weapons had not been used for anything but games for many years.

The Jilolo men came onto shore. They took the spears and the Dutch gun. One of them understood the gun. He shot it three times and killed three of the Obi men with it. Other Jilolo men killed other Obi men with spears and with clubs they brought with them.

"This is the game we play with you," the Jilolos said. They caught twenty of the Obi girls and young women and took them with them. They gave instructions as to what tribute must be brought to them weekly by the Obis. They killed two more Obi men to make sure that their message was understood. Then they went away in their canoes.

And it was all confusion that they left behind them.

One of the Obi men, however, in spite of the killing and confusion, had untied the fisherman's head from the prow of the biggest canoe. Now some of the frightened Obi men took the head with them into the long hut and questioned it as to what this should mean.

"The region has turned over on its hinges," the fisherman's head said, "just as it sometimes turned over and over again in the days of our distant grandfathers. I was out in my boat fishing. I heard the short, deep groaning; I felt the shock, and the shock-wave. But who pays attention to things like these around the volcano islands? Then I pulled in my net with the few fish in it.

"This net had been torn in one place, and I had tied it together with a *pendek* knot. Now I saw that it was tied with a *panjang* knot, which I never tied in my life, but which the people under the earth tie. I noticed also that the fish in my net were a little darker color than is common. This means that I was on the edge of the region and the region has turned over.

"Oh my family and my people, it is all misery and death for us now! The Jilolo men will have the same names and appearances as those they have displaced, but you see already that they are not the same. No more will we be able to push the Jilolos down and take their fish and fruits and boats. We will not be able to push them into the water or have fun with them. They have taken the bodies of some of our men with them; they have taken some of our girls and young women with them; and they will be having fun with both tonight. We used to make jokes with each other about the stories that we used to eat each other. It has come back to us now. That whole part of the world has turned over on its hinges. We die in our woe."

The fisherman's head was in great pain. One of the men gave it a stick to bite on. And in a little while it died.

And there followed one of the most horrifying ages ever in those lilac waters. The turned-up Jilolos were the demons, the old slavers come back. They were like the tearing, meat-eating birds swooping in. They were like bloody dragons. They came one day and took an Obi man away from his brother. The next day they came again and said "Your brother wants to talk to you."

They had a drum-head covered with the brother's skin. They beat on it till it sounded like the brother's voice booming. That is what they meant that his brother wanted to talk to him.

These Jilolos gnawed roast meat from men's ribs as they strode about for mockery. They burned down the huts and the long huts of the Obi. They did the same thing to the people of Batjan and Misool and Mangole and Sanana. All the leading men of those places were hiding in the hills.

The Jilolos said that they would kill nine men for every leading man who was hiding. Many of the leading men, hearing of this, came out of their hiding and let themselves be killed to save the

lives of many more. Soon there were only a few leading men left.

The Jilolos cut out the eyes and tongues and gonads of people and left the people blind and mutilated and dying. They roasted some of the people alive. People are best that way, they said. "How is it that in the old days we ate only fish and pig and fruit?" the Jilolos asked. "How have we missed this fine thing so long?"

The Jilolos set fires in the coconut groves and spice bushes and kapok forests of the five islands. Fires rose over these islands day and night, brighter even than the volcano fires of Jilolo itself. Anyone who tried to put out the fire would be burned up in the fire, they said.

They tied sacks over the heads of men before they killed them. This was to trap their souls and kill them too. They were merciless. They violated and killed little children. They skinned some people before they killed them. They killed so many people that they took only their eyes and hearts to eat. Carrion birds gobbled down from the high air, and sharks jostled into the waters drawn by more blood than had been known for many ages.

So it went for a year and a day. Whole islands moaned and bled with the abomination of it, and the oceans were black with reeking blood.

THERE was one old Dutchman who still lived on Obi Island. After the Dutch days, he had gone home to Dutchland. He had missed the really busy seas and ports with the tang of trade to them, and the ordered rich land in all its bright neatness. He had been homesick for many years, so he went home.

But he found that the home seas were cluttered with belching

ships that fouled the air (he had forgotten that part); he found the land was overcrowded with Dutchmen all busy and benign (he had forgotten that part too); and the roads and lanes were full of bicycles and motor cars. He found that it was cold and gusty and demanding, and the bright neat colors were not nearly so bright as those of the islands. He discovered that neatness and the appearance of respectability were required of him, and he had long since turned into a loose old rounder. He became homesick for the second time, and he returned to the islands and Obi Island. He had found that he could not Dutch it over the Dutch themselves, but he could still Dutch it over the Obis.

Now the Jilolos demanded that the Obis give up their Dutchman to them, or they would kill one hundred Obis. They wanted to have fun with the Dutchman and then kill him in an unusual way. They wanted to see if Dutch flesh was really prime stuff. So the Obis came sadly to their duty.

"We will have to give you up," they told the Dutchman when they had come to his house in the hills. "We like you, but we don't like you as well as one hundred of ourselves. Come along now. There is no way out of it."

"This Dutchman, about to be given up, will think of a way out of it," the Dutchman said. "A thing that is done can be undone. Can there be found twelve leading men left alive here, and twelve in the peninsula north of Berebere?"

"There are barely that many of us. We are they," the men said. "We believe that there are barely that many leading men left north of Berebere."

"Inform yourselves, and inform them," the Dutchman said. "Each party will go out in twelve fishing boats that have windlass winches for the nets. It will take the power of all the windlasses

together to turn the things, and even then it may not work. And both parties will have to do it at exactly the same time."

"How will we know it is the same time, with the distance between the two groups?" the men asked.

"I don't know," the Dutchman said.

But one of the men there had affinity with two large birds of the kind called *radjawall*, who were larger than others of their species and special in several ways. They preyed over the ocean as well as over the land (they were, in fact, sea-eagles), they talked more canny than parrots, and they were more intelligent than the *derek-derek*, the crane. The man went out of the Dutchman's house and whistled loudly. The two big birds appeared as two dots in the sky, they came on very rapidly, and then they were there with the men.

"Oh yes, I've heard of you two fellows," the Dutchman said to the birds. "If one of you were flying high over Ganedidalem and the other over Berebere, could you still see each other at that distance?"

"Yes, if we were high enough, we could still see each other," one of the birds said.

"And would you be too high to see our ready-signal from the shores then?"

"No, we could see that too," the other bird said. "Tell us what you want us to do."

The Dutchman carefully told them about the affair. Then he said "The one of you fly now to Berebere and find the men there. Tell them how it is. Tell them that we start now and will be at our place in the early morning. Let them be at their place then too. And caution them to be clear of the Hinges when they do it, on the outside of them, or they may find themselves turned over when

it happens. In the morning you two birds will give the signal to each other and to us so we can do it together."

The one bird flew off to Berebere. The twelve leading men, each one taking three lesser men with him, cast off in twelve fishing boats. They set sail on the evening wind; and with the wind and the oars going all night, they were off Ganedidalem in the early morning.

They found the great Hinge in an inlet, just where legend had always said it should be. They took the twelve windlass winches off the twelve fishing boats, and the Dutchman rigged them to the kapok-wood axle of the World Hinge. There would be no trouble about the same thing up at Berebere. The men at Berebere are handier and more mechanical than the men of Obi.

Then four men stood at each windlass to throw their weight to the thing. The Dutchman gave the ready signal to the bird in the sky. Then they waited.

One minute later, the bird flared his great wings and began to dive straight down for signal. Long leagues to the north, off Berebere, the other bird did the same thing.

"Heave!" cried the Dutchman. "All heave! For our lives, it is now or it is nevermore with us!" And all heaved at the windlass winches, turning the cranks while the ropes sounded and moaned.

Then the groaning of the World Hinges, more horrible than could be believed! The Earth shook, and the Island smoked and bawled. This was unnatural, it was a violation. Always before, the hinges had turned from natural forces in the earth that had come to their term and time.

Groaning yet more horrible! The ropes cried like infants from the strain on them, the cranks whined with the sound of hard wood about to shatter. The Hinge groaned a final terrible time. There was the shock! And the shock-wave.

Then they were done with it, or they were undone forever.

"Let us go back to Obi Island and wait," the Dutchman said. "I believe that it turned over when the Hinge groaned last and loudest. If the raiding stops, then we have done it. If it has not stopped, then we are dead forever."

"Let us go to Jilolo Island and *not* wait," the Obi men said. "We will have bloody death there, or we will have us a lot of fun."

The Obis with the Dutchman rowed and sailed for Jilolo all day, and came there in the evening. They found Jilolo men. They pushed them down, they stole their fish and fruits and boats, they pushed them in the water and laughed at them. This was the fun they hadn't had for a long time.

These were Jilolos of the same names and appearances as the horrible killers of the last time, but they were different. You could push them down and take advantage of them; you didn't have to be afraid of them. For they were also the men of the same names and appearances of the time before last, and they only smiled sadly when they were robbed and pushed down.

The Obi men called the girls and young women who had been stolen from them, and took them in the boats with them and went home. So peace returned, and it was all as it had been before with them.

Only not quite.

These girls and young women, robbed from the Obi and now taken back by them, had been on Jilolo when it turned back. It was in reverse with them. With the turning back, they became their own counterparts from under the world, the meanest, most troublesome women ever found anywhere, yet of the same names and appearances as the girls and young women before. They raised hell from one end of Obi to the other when they got home, and they kept it up all their lives.

So it was a troubled peace that came to Obi. Even so, many said it was better than to be killed by the Jilolo. Others said it was about the same thing.

That is the only place, there in the western Moluccas, where the World Hinges do really turn and a whole region may experience this revolution. The other places are almost surely fable.

A man just back from high Armenia says he examined the hinges there and they are bronze turned green with great age. They apparently have not turned since the drying of the flood. And if Armenia would turn over, who would know it? You can turn an Armenian upside-down and hardly tell it. Those fellows look about the same on both ends.

As to the Germanies, those hinges in the Carnic Alps and in the Wangeroog are of badly rusted iron. Nobody can tell when they turned last, but should they turn now (the shape they are in) it would make a groaning heard around the world. Besides, if this country had turned in modern centuries, there would have to be some indication of it; some stark frightful thing would have happened there comparable to the revolution of the Jilolos. The people and places, keeping the same names and appearances, would have become immeasurably different in not too subtle ways, would have become violent and appalling. Is there any report of such a thing happening in our own days or those of our fathers?

And in the Pyrenees, is there any indication that they have turned, lately or ever? Rock-crystal does not rust, but it does acquire a patina of unuse. Yet one has said of the Canigou, which I take to apply to all the Pyrenees and all the people in them, that it is unchanging forever, but that it is created anew every morning. The Hinges at Aneto and Hendaye either do not turn at all, or they turn every night.

Secret Places

Golden Trabant

THE man who entered, though quiet and soft-stepping, was none of your tame animals. He'd kill for the one thing he wanted and couldn't get enough of; but he hardly knew what to do with the packet of it he had under his arm. The man had a slight green tinge to him, and Patrick T. K. guessed that what he carried would have it also.

In an earlier era the man would have been tagged immediately as a seaman. Plainly he was still that, but of a more ethereal sea. Under his arm he had a package wrapped in newspaper, and more sturdily wrapped beneath. It was not a large package, but it was quite heavy.

The faring man was slim but amazingly wiry. Patrick T. K. was fat but with a lean and hungry eye that couldn't be fooled. Patrick set the weight of the package carried by the man at a hundred and twenty pounds.

If it were iron of such bulk it would weigh hardly a third that. If it were lead it would not be that heavy. Patrick studied the tendons on the side of the man's neck and the bulging veins on the back of his hand. He studied the set of his feet as he stood there, and he calculated the man's center of gravity, package included. Mercury would not be that heavy. Platinum would be heavier by a tenth. Patrick T. K.

sometimes made mistakes in his judgment, but he never made mistakes by as much as ten percent.

So the seaman had a lump of gold to sell him.

Nothing unusual about that. Patrick T. K. bought more sly gold than anyone in town.

"I've been told," said the seaman, "and it doesn't matter by whom, that you might be able to give me good cash for what I have here. But I won't be beaten down. I know my price."

"And I know mine," said Paddy T. K. "Twenty thousand dollars. How do you want it? Well, come, come, how? Twenties, fifties, hundreds, thousands or a king's mixture?"

"I had priced it a little higher," said the man.

"What? For that undersized loaf of bread under your arm? Two hundred dollars a pound for a hundred pounds is as close as I can figure."

"It weighs more."

"I know what it weighs. But I like to use round figures."

"Shall I unwrap it here? Have you a place to test it?"

"Leave it wrapped. Here is the sum. And if you find it short a bill or two, be assured it is a dishonest mistake."

"There is more where this comes from."

"I can take this much every two weeks. Now be off."

"You're not going to look at it? How can you be sure what it is?"

"I have X-ray eyes."

"Oh."

BUT when Paddy T. K. was alone he put other things away and locked the door. He took the package to a back room,

puffing heavily, for it was just as heavy as he knew it must be. He unwrapped it.

There was little that Patrick did not know about gold. He knew the greenishness of African gold, whether of the Gold Coast or the South; the greasiness of Kolyma gold and also its extreme unavailability; the cupric tinge of Sierra Madre gold whether from the Guatemala or Mexico district. He was familiar with the sudden brightness of Milne Bay gold, with the granularity of the Canadian, the muscle-like texture of that of Witwatersrand, the lightness of color of the gold of California and nearby Sonora, and the white gold (almost Electrum) of New Guinea above Milne Bay.

This was none of them. It was raw but fine, and very, very slightly cupric. The green tint in it was about the same as that in the complexion of the man. Patrick set down the weight in a notebook. And at the column for the origin he did not hesitate. He wrote down "Extraterrestrial."

That was the first written note of the thing.

Later, this gold would be known as St. Simeon gold (from a station on its route, not from its origin), but Patrick T. K., the old jewelry factor and sly gold dealer, was not fooled.

Within a month, the *Wall Street Journal* had also referred to the new gold as extraterrestrial. The boys on that sheet also knew about gold, wherever they got their knowledge. But the *Journal* was derided for its correct guess. Gold cargo had never been authorized. No such gold had been mined except for pilot digs in conjunction with other operations. The cost would have been prohibitive, considering the cargo of necessary production machinery and the rudimentary state of exploration and the rarity of any solid finds. Off-Earth gold was still a generation away.

IT was a four-man corporation made up of: Robert Fountain, an unobstructed genius; George Grinder, a ruthless ruffian; Carlos Trevino, the last of the Conquistadores and perhaps the first of a new kind of man; and Arpad Szild, a murderous Irishman who used a dead man's papers and a dead man's name.

Three of them had been dining in quiet luxury one evening at Trevino's when Szild appeared in the midst of them, "the doors and windows being closed," as Fountain related it with his biting humor, but that part of it may not be true.

"I've been there. I can take you to it," Szild said suddenly. He sat down and began to eat with his hands from the bowls.

"I grind up better stuff than you for feed supplement for my cattle," Trevino said. "Who are you? What can you take us to?"

"To the Trabant. You were talking about the legend."

"All right. You talk about the legend, real fast," Robert Fountain said. "You haven't much time." He laid a hog-nosed gun in front of him on the table.

"It's shaped like a balk or a beam," Szild said. "Its greater diameter is twenty-five hundred meters, and its lesser is fifteen hundred—a little less than two cubic miles. It's a misshapen tapered beam or egg with a cleft at its minor end. Its rotation is a tumble, and the period of the tumble is just short of thirty minutes. It's as bad-natured a rock as can be found. Cuts you to pieces. Shouldn't have an atmosphere, but there's something that tears up your lungs no matter how you're suited. It's an angry place, I tell you. But it's gold."

That was the Golden Trabant, one of the smaller of the eighteen hundred significant asteroids orbiting between Mars and Jupiter. When finally charted several years after this, it

would be given the noxious name Venenatus—but that was after it had been treated and its nature changed.

"We have a nice sketchy catalog of every asteroid down to about that size," said Grinder. "Nobody knows much about their details, but they are numbered and given their relative positions and speeds in the asteroid stream. Can you tell us which it is?"

"Can. Won't," said Szild. "But I'll take you there."

Szild had known that he would have to play his ace on the first round. After he had taken them to it, they would have no reason to keep him alive: but he had gambled his life before.

He said he had been there and knew where it was. The odds were high enough for them to take a chance on believing him. They acquired a ship and mounted a flight.

The ship was old and had been deactivated. Carlos Trevino bought it at surplus and had it towed down by tug and beached at a remote spot on the holdings of the Trevino family. It was activated by the genius of Fountain and the driving energy of Grinder. They took twelve young Hispanic technicians, none of whom are alive to give their versions. They hadn't known what they would run into nor what the labor would be at breaking up and loading the cargo. They went up, and they loaded the cargo.

They came back, the four of them without the twelve young technicians. Their first cargo. A trip of only five weeks. The Trabant was not distant.

SZILD showed an exceptional talent at remaining alive. It is hard to kill a man as tough and canny as he, one who is never

off guard. He spent the two weeks of the return barricaded in a little compartment, and the three leaders had to postpone Szild's killing till their earthing. Szild knew that they had mostly delegated such jobs as that. He himself had had to kill the twelve young technicians for them.

He bulled his way out when they were busy with earthfall and secure landing.

"He can't get away," Trevino said.

He couldn't get clear of the surrounding jungle; he did. Trevino who knew his own land minutely could track Szild down; he couldn't. He couldn't take much with him; he took a hundred and twenty pounds of it. That wasn't much out of a cargo like theirs, and whatever story Szild might tell would not be believed. He had no reason to tell any story at all; he didn't.

But somehow he reached port and took passage to the North, for Szild was the man who sold that first lump of gold to Patrick T. K.

Another man would have been satisfied with that and steered clear of them. Not Szild. Nevertheless, they were surprised when he returned to them just at second take-off time, as they were going now with a ship that was really a ship. He came on foot across the savanna from the inland side.

" 'Something like this happens every time I leave the house for a minute,' as the woman said as she examined the mandible and two parietal bones of her newly eaten child," Szild greeted them. "Would you be going without me? The news I had of you was sketchy and I am barely here in time."

"Kill him!" said Robert Fountain.

"Kill him, Fountain says, and the other two look at each other. Was it not better, Fountain, to have a man who will kill when you say kill, and avoid these awkward pauses? But I kill hard, Fountain. I go as long as anybody goes, and afterwards."

Szild went with them. They would kill him after the hard work of loading was done. They would kill him after he had done his turn at the instruments out and back. By and by they would kill him.

They brought back two hundred tons on that second voyage. They made a third voyage and a fourth and a fifth.

THE establishment of the Commonwealth of San Simeon did not shake the world. Not at first. Nobody had ever heard of the place. It seemed a prank. Possibly a name given to a rebel hold.

Yet the Commonwealth was recognized that first day by its two adjacent Central American neighbors. They constituted themselves coprotectors of the new country. One of them, indeed, had ceded the land for it, the ancient and run-down rancho of the Trevino family. Some consideration had surely been paid for this protection.

It was soon after this that the heavy San Simeon Duros (fifty dollar gold pieces) began to appear around the world.

The appearance of these Duros caused a nervousness all out of proportion to the number of them. It is possible that not more than twenty million of them (that is, a billion dollars'

worth) went into circulation that first year. That is a large amount coming from a new small country, but it shouldn't be enough to unhinge the world. Yet it did almost that.

Gold had gotten out of the habit of showing itself in society. For years it had sat at home in vaults, and a multiplier had been used to equate it with credit money. Nobody knew what to make of naked gold returning to the market. And what if this stream should be but the beginning of a veritable river?

And the stream was spreading. Three Central American countries were on a gold spree. It was slopping over into others.

The mystery of San Simeon was not solved. The exact location of the country was unknown to the world at large. Its form of government was not to be ascertained. Its statistics softened and disappeared when examined. It had a president, Fuentes. It had a prime minister, Molinero—the miller, the grinder. It had a foreign minister, Trevino. It had the hardest currency in the world. Its national game was playing hob with the currencies of the rest of the world.

If one small shrew is put into a warren of mice or rats, it causes panic. The shrew is smaller than any of them and it may be one against hundreds. But it will eat them; it will eat them alive. And given time, it will eat them all.

Something like this happened to the green money, the white money, the rainbow-colored money of the world. Token shrivels before the thing itself. It could not stand up to free and growing gold.

But if the warren is big enough, the shrew can be contained. There will be some of the rats knowing and

political enough to go out and hire shrews of their own. The source of the gold stream could not be hidden forever.

One thing (Szild always said it was a mistake and Robert Fountain agreed that it was, but they couldn't hold the other two in line) was that the first ships begat others. Trevino and Grinder Molinero became too hasty in their greed. In that second year they had twelve ships in the service instead of one. That meant that somewhere between fifty and a hundred men knew the source.

The shores began to cave. The golden stream was a river. It crested to a torrent. One ship defected, then another. They came back to Earth in other lands than those of their departure. And wherever they came down they spawned other ships.

A dozen other countries were in the race by the third year. Now there was privateering and open piracy. The ships became battle boats, death spheres, and the attrition was terrifying. But the inward flood of the metal continued.

The world importation by the fourth year had risen to five hundred billion dollars annually, if it could any longer be equated in dollars. The gold dollar itself was not as hard as it had been.

The Trabant had changed. The period of its tumble was now only twenty-three minutes. The egg had been cracked and gutted in many places, and the cleft at the minor end had become a chasm between two horns. There was a project to shear off one of the horns and tow it to Earth in hunks of a million cubic yards each. This would be a lot of gold.

IT was time for oblique measures, and they were found. The effect of the gold on the world had not really been bad. The effect on most people had been marvelous. But there was a small group that had always borne the burden of currency decisions. They were made nervous by this unbridled activity. Their hold was slipping. They took measures.

A small commission of not overly intelligent men found an answer. In their own field they understood cause and effect. They acted on doubtful authority, and they were not of one mind about the action. But they did it.

They killed Trabant.

One treatment was enough for the little rock. It couldn't be cleansed; it couldn't be unpoisoned after that. It would be deadly for a thousand years. Then they gave it its first official name, Venenatus, the poison asteroid. A near approach would radiate the flesh off a man's bones.

Things came back to normal in about three years. The shrews had killed each other, and the wise rats once more ran the warren. The new fortunes tottered and fell back into the bags of the old.

Somewhere, we never did know its exact location, San Simeon (no longer able to pay the high price for protection) lost its independence and became again a run-down rancho.

Gold stuck to some fingers longer than to others. Fuentes and Grinder will never run out of it. Trevino was choked to death by the political strings on his. He died along with his small country, and he hadn't intended to.

Szild didn't know what he did with all his money. He paid little attention to it, and he suspected that he hadn't received nearly as much of it as had his nervous partners.

He spent it manfully. He threw it away. It gave him a dour

pleasure to go from billionaire to bum. Then Arpad Szild was down to his last San Simeon Duro.

He laughed. Something had been missing from his life. Now it might be back. His gold was gone. So what to do?

He went up for some more.

Up to Venenatus the poison asteroid that would radiate a man's flesh off?

Sure. Szild didn't believe a lot of that stuff.

PATRICK T. K. was alone in his shop when there entered a hooded man with a small heavy package.

"I was beginning to think I would see you no more," said Patrick. "I was told that that traffic had ended. I should have known better. I believe you are the same man, my first supplier of it, though I cannot see your face."

"I have none," said the hooded man. "How much for this?"

"Oh, ten dollars."

"A pound?"

"No. The lot. I figure about eight cents a pound. That's as high as I can go on contaminated gold. Oh sure, I can clean it. It's only the smart men who say it can't be done. It will even leave a handy profit for myself, though not for you. Gold's about done for."

"That isn't much. I have more of the stuff, a fair small load."

"I can take about this much a week. Can you live on ten dollars a week?"

"Yes. I don't eat any longer—no stomach. I don't sleep. I just keep moving. I can live on that."

"And when your fair small load is gone?"

"I go up for another."

"They say nobody goes there and returns."

"I do. But it isn't crowded there now."

"I've a feeling that comes to me rarely. I'd like to help you. Are you blind?"

"I believe so. I have pooled what is left of each of my senses, and somehow it serves. I need no help. I'm the only happy man in the world, the one who found the pot of gold. They can't take that from me. I'll go get it forever."

"After you're dead?"

"Oh, yes. I've known space ghosts. Now I'll be one. It isn't any one line you cross. I live in delirium, of course. It doesn't blunt pain, but it does change the viewpoint. On my last trip down, after I knew that I was already dead, that both I and the gold were ghosts, it was easier. Oh, those are long nights in purgatory I tell you, but I'm not irrevocably damned. There's still the gold, you see."

"You're a happier man than I am. So pass it over."

"Here it is."

BUT when Szild passed the heavy small package to Patrick, he did it with a hand that was stark splintered bones with only a little black flesh around the heel of it.

Patrick T. K. raised an eyebrow at this, but he didn't raise it very high. A sly gold dealer meets all types.

Mean Men

How They Gave It Back

HE was the mayor of Big Island. Giuseppe Juan Schlome O'Hanlon was his name, John the mayor, a shining black man. He was born into a political family and was given the names to please as many groups as possible. He had once been of imposing appearance and quiet dignity. He was not now. He shrilled and keened and moaned, and sometimes he was irrational.

It was his leg that hurt him, and his soul.

His leg hurt him because of the pin clear through it, the pin that was part of the shackle. This shackle could not be unlocked mechanically. It was a psychic-coded lock on the shackle, and it could only be released when John had somehow fulfilled his job and obtained his own release. The shackle bound his leg not only to his desk but also to a steel stanchion that was part of the steel frame of the building.

John's soul hurt him because Big Island was no longer the great thing to which he had been devoted. It had never been so in his lifetime. It was neo-jungle now, probably the most savage of them all. Even now there were fires burning on the floor above him and on the floor below him. There were always fires burning somewhere in the building, in every building that still had anything that would burn. There were rats in the room, in every room, but perhaps John saw more of them than were there. He lived in perpetual delirium.

There were (he knew, though he could no longer go out and see) people unburied in the streets, people knifed down hourly, people crazy and empty-eyed or glitter-eyed. There were horrible horn-music and git-fiddle music and jangle shouting; and he prisoner for life in his own office. This was not to be a great administrator of a great city. The emphasis had somehow shifted. But he had loved the city and the island, or the memory of them. And this hurt his soul.

"You have to stay on the job and run the place for the rest of your life," Commissioner Kreger had told John the mayor just before the commissioner had cut and run for it. "There will, of course, be no more elections. The burlesque that brought you in was enough to end the process. It was fiasco."

"It was *not*," John the mayor moaned in pain. "It was high triumph, the man of the people called to head the people, a noble thing, the climax and sole goal of my life. I won it finally. They can't take that away from me."

"How does it taste, John?"

"I'm dying, do not taunt me. What went wrong?"

"It went wrong a hundred years before you were born, John. You lived all your life in a dream, and you had better try to re-enter it. You're here for good. You're the ultimate patsy, John."

"I'll kill myself."

"No, you will not. You were allowed to this job because by temperament and religion, the residue of your dream, you were incapable of suicide. So many of our mayors have taken that easy way out! It was a nuisance, John."

"I'll go crazy then," John the mayor moaned.

"No, you likely will not do that either, though it would not matter if you did. You are already psychotic, of course, but you

will not go off much further. Stay and suffer, kid. You have no choice."

"Kreger, isn't there some way we can get shet of this whole island? Sell it, transfer title to it, give it back to someone? Can't we get out from under?"

"You find a way, John. Those things that we once thought of as abstractions have taken a direct hand now, Final Responsibility, Ultimate Justice, things like that. They must be satisfied. Whatever you do will have to satisfy the psychic-coded lock on your shackles to give you release. Sell the island legal, if you can find someone to sell it to. Transfer it, if you can find someone to accept the transfer. But it must be for Fair Value or Value Justified or Original Value from Original Entailment. The psychic-code thing will know. It's governed by the Equity Factor."

Then Commissioner Kreger left John the mayor, left the island, and went to rich fishing in other troubled (but not completely polluted) waters. There was no more profit for that smart man to shake out of the island.

That had been two years ago, and John the mayor had been the only official on the island since that time. His only contacts with the world were the sharp noises and smells that came in through his broken windows, and the visits of five feudal or wrangle leaders, the Duke, the Sky, the Wideman, the Cloud, and the Lolo.

Duke Durango was as smooth a gutter-fighter as ever came to the top of his heap, a happy fellow. Lawrence Sky was a fair white man named for the color of his big sky-blue eyes, a shambling giant, a giggling killer. Wideman Wyle was a wide man indeed, a cheerful sadist who told really funny stories and was the most pleasant person in the group. Cloud Clinkenbeard was a dour and

stormy fellow, mean and relentless, and always in search of dirty novelty. Lolo Loudermilk was a girl, sort of a girl, a flaming mixed creature full of vitality and noise.

They were the mayor's only contacts. They were the leaders of one of the gangs that had endured, when the ten thousand gangs had eaten each other up and declined to a hundred.

All five of them came into the mayor's office, eating noisily.

"Food train in!" announced the Duke. "We killed just one of the drivers. They say there'll never be another train in if we kill more than one driver at a time. And we had to give up four hostages for it. Isn't four too many, John?"

"Numbers have no meaning in this evil thing," said John the mayor. "How many hostages have you left?"

"Twenty, and a few more, I think. We don't all count the same when we get to the big numbers. But I think four is too many to give for a food train. What will happen when we run out of hostages? Who'll give the big damn to subscribe a train for us then, when we have no more inportant people to trade to the important people off-island? Here, sign this, limp-leg John, and the Cloud will take it back to them."

The mayor read the release and signed it. Each of the five feudal leaders looked it over in turn then. Several of them could read a little (it was for this reason that they were the mayor's contacts), and it would be hard for Mayor John to write anything phony on that release and slip it past them. The mayor had to sign these releases every time a food train came, and he knew what would happen when they ran out of hostages. The blackmail would be over when the last hostage of value or affection to someone off-island had been turned over for a food train. The off-island people would let the island rot. The trains had been the only food source for the island for years.

The Cloud took the release and went out through the smouldering corridor and into the broken streets to the food train that came once a month through the last not-completely broken tunnel.

"Something else came on the food trail, gimpy John," the Duke said uneasily.

"Well, what, what was it? Duke, Duke, you didn't get hold of a saw so I could saw my leg off, did you?"

"Nah. You're not supposed to saw your leg off. You're supposed to stay here just like you are. Who's going to sign for the food trains and hostage transfers if our mayor saws his leg off and runs away?

"John Mayor, there's three other men came on that food train. These are funny men. They might even be important enough men that we can hold them for hostages. They brought some heavy kegs and boxes with them, John, and they even conned some of the colts into carrying them over here for them. We can't figure out what kind of men they are, Mayor. They look at us and we look at them, and we both got sparks in our eyes. They are in the building now, Mayor, and they want to see you."

"Show them in, spook Duke, the mayor is always available to his constituents."

"Constituents these are not," said the Lolo. "They are washed-out pale fellows, but they are solid."

"And one of those kegs of theirs got a smell I like, Mayor," said the Sky. "I believe I remember that smell like it was born in me. You get that keg, Mayor."

"And those long crates got a heft I like," said the Wideman. "I almost know what will be in those crates. You get those crates, Mayor."

"Those square boxes got a feel I like," said the Lolo. "I almost know what short-handled things will be in those square boxes. And

the smallest package has a brass glint through a rip in it. You get those square boxes and that smallest package, Mayor."

"I don't understand this at all," said John the mayor, rolling his red-rimmed eyes in his constant pain. "Let the men and their baggage come in."

THE three new men who came in had a certain animal power about them, and a certain human authority. Possibly they might be important enough to hold for hostages, but who was going to take the lead in holding them? Men, they moved like big cats. But they were dressed like businessmen of an earlier decade, an anomaly on the island, and they were lighter than any of the islanders there except Lawrence Sky.

"You are the Mayor John-John?" asked one of the new men. "And you have authority to deal?"

"I am the mayor," said John, "and I have such authority as a shackled prisoner may have. For what do we deal?"

"Oh, for the island. We've come to buy it. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"What, what, who are you?"

"I am Adrian Sweetsong," said the first of the new men. "I'm a petroleum geologist by profession, which has nothing to do with the matter. And I'm an official of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club."

"I'm Dennis Halftown," said the second of the new men. "I'm an electronic engineer by profession, which has nothing to do with the matter either. And I'm also an official of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club."

"I'm Freddy Flatfish," said the third of the new men. "I'm a lawyer, which *does* have something to do with this matter. I am also an official of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club, and I have studied the legal aspects of this thing pretty thoroughly."

"Is it the Midlands Gun and Rod Club that is dealing for the island?" Mayor John asked.

"That's right," said Adrian Sweetsong, the first of the new men. "First installment! Set em right there, boys."

Several of the colts, the strong rough island boys, set down two heavy square boxes, and Dennis Halftown (the second of the new men) broke them open with a pry-bar.

"Man-eating Millie! Those things are for me!" the Lolo gasped, and she had a couple of them out in her hands.

"Sweet little choppies!" the Sky drooled. "What's a knife along side of one of those?"

"Hack-berry pudding!" cried the Cloud as he returned from his errand. "Here, here, they look good, let's get them tested. I'll just pass a dozen of those out the windows to some of the boys. Let them try them out! Let them fall in love with them!"

"Fifty hatchets," announced Adrian Sweetsong, "delivered and accepted. We record them."

"Wait! Wait!" howled Mayor John jangling his shackles. "What have fifty hatchets to do with dealing for the island? Who has used hatchets for a century?"

"One-leg John," the Duke crooned, "too bad your shackles won't let you get as far as the window. Some of the boys are using them now. Believe me, John, they're using them now!"

"Mr. Sweetsong," Mayor John explained patiently, "the last valuation of island property ever made set it at over a hundred billion dollars. Due to certain developments, it may be down a little now, but not that far. Hatchets will not get it. I can sell it

only for Fair Value or Value Justified. My own shackling is governed by the Equity Factor."

"We know that, Mr. Mayor," said Freddy Flatfish, the lawyer for the Midlands Gun and Rod Club. Freddy Flatfish was a tow-headed, twinkling man. "But the island has reverted. It's really worthless since it was left to the ten thousand gangs, which have since devoured themselves down to a hundred. Perhaps its reverted value is now its original value. Anyhow, the first approach was yours."

"Mine? Mine? I made no approach. I never heard of you fellows," the Mayor said.

"But we have monitored you, Mayor John. Two years ago you said to the commissioner 'Can't we give it back to someone?' And you are also recorded as saying 'We ought to sell it back to—' "

"Second installment!" announced Adrian Sweetsong. "Set them right there, boys."

Several of the colts set down the long crates, and Dennis Halftown broke them open with his pry-bar.

"Oh, those long sweet songs!" the Wideman slavered. "Smooth bores! You can jam them with any kind of soup at all and pan-light them. You can shoot broken glass with them. You can shoot anything. Here, we'll just hand a few of them out the windows and let the fellows try them out. Get the heft of those things! Even as clubs your hands would fall in love with them! Blunderbusses!" And the Wideman handed half a dozen of them out the windows.

"Twenty guns," announced Adrian Sweetsong. "Delivered and accepted. We record them."

"Even if it were possible for me to deal the island for things of no value," John the mayor began—and there was deep-throated roaring and death-screaming in the streets—

"No value, Mayor?" the Duke Durango asked with deep irony.

"Mayor, you should be able to watch them. They jam them with soup, and then ram in glass and nails for a load. They spark them off, and it's wonderful. Cuts people right in two. Don't talk no value about those things!"

"Even if it were possible for me to deal the island for such things, what could the Midlands Gun and Rod Club possibly do with the island?" Mayor John asked.

"Set up a hunting preserve," Adrian Sweetsong said. "It's a nicely stocked jungle island seventeen miles by four. We'll hunt. We'll hunt."

"Hunt? What would you hunt?" the mayor wanted to know.

"Big game, big game," said Dennis Halftown lovingly.

"But there is no big game, no game at all on the island," the mayor insisted.

"Remember what ancient Hemingway wrote," said Freddy Flatfish. " 'There is no sport equal to the hunting of an armed man.' Ah, we'll hunt them here, as will many of our well-heeled members."

"Third installment! Set it right there, boys," Adrian Sweetsong ordered.

The ragged island boys set down the bag, and Dennis Halftown broke it open with his pry-bar.

"Boys, boys, that's the smell like was born in me!" the Sky chortled, and he had his arms up to the elbows in the dark grainy powder. "Sure it hasn't the power of soup. Sure it's clumsy and crude. But it's the grandpa of them all! The smell of it, the smell of it! Men, men, bust your noses on that smell!"

"Twenty-five kilograms of gun-powder," announced Adrian Sweetsong. "That's as close as we could figure it. Twenty-five kilos delivered and accepted. We record it."

"When you going to start, fellows, when you going to start?"

the Duke asked the three new men in excitement, getting the idea. "How soon you be ready to start?" asked the Duke and the Sky and the Wideman and the Cloud and the Lolo, all going for it avidly.

"Should be the first bunch of hunters here in the morning," said Adrian Sweetsong.

"Too long to wait," the Lolo protested. "You three? How about you?"

"We three will begin stalking and pot-shotting in a very few minutes," said the Adrian, "just as soon as we can get title to this place from the reluctant mayor. We suggest you deploy your forces outside in the corridors. When we come out of this room we will come out rough, and it's rough animals we want to meet with."

"Rough it will be," said the Cloud. "Colts, colts, you carry this stuff out to our place again just as soon as they have recorded it. Men, we will have some sport! We will show these sports some sport!"

"But this cannot be, even in a nightmare," Mayor John protested. "You three pale-browns are not Wappingers or Manahattas, and we are not Dutch."

"I'm a Choctaw," said Freddy Flatfish. "Dennis Halftown is a Shawnee. Adrian Sweetsong is an Osage. But we inherit. I have drawn up a legal brief to prove it. And you are double-Dutch if you don't accept. Awk, blew half my shoulder off! Those animals are jumping the gun. Now I know how the expression started. They really know how to handle those blunderbusses."

Freddy Flatfish had been shot by a blunderbuss blast from the corridor and was bleeding badly. So they hurried it along, anxious to close the bargain and get the hunting season started.

"Bring them in fast, boys. Set them down till they are accepted and recorded. Then take them out again to your place," Adrian Sweetsong ordered. And the rough colts brought in a variety of boxes and packages.

"Ten shirts, accepted and recorded," Adrian Sweetsong announced, hurriedly now. "Thirty pair socks, accepted and recorded. One hundred bullets, accepted and recorded. Forty kettles, accepted and recorded. One brass frying-pan, accepted and recorded."

And at the recording of the brass frying-pan, the leg-piercing pin was withdrawn from the leg of Mayor John and all his shackles fell off. The psychic-coded lock of his shackles had opened. He had finished his job and was released. He had disposed of the island in equity. He had gotten Fair Value for it, or Value Justified, or at least Original Value from Original Entailment. And it sufficed.

Mayor John was free. He started to run from the room, fell down on his crippled leg, and arose and ran once more. And was caught in a blunderbuss blast.

And then the great hunt began. The three members of the Midlands Gun and Rod Club had most sophisticated weapons. They were canny and smooth. This was the dangerous big-game hunt they had always dreamed of. And their prey were armed and wild and truculent and joyous.

It would be good.

OUT between the orbs, several tentacles of Ultimate Justice came near together.

"Was there not somewhere the mention of twenty-four or twenty-six dollars paid?" one tentacle asked the other. "I thought I remembered some such figure."

"No, no," said the other tentacle. "That was only the estimated value placed on the material. There was no specie paid. The list is correct as rendered, and the repayment has been accepted and certified."

IN a forgotten and half-filled basement on the island, two of the remaining old-folk people were still in hiding. They were startled by the new sort of noise.

"What is it, papa? What have they done?" the old woman asked.

"Sold it back to the Indians, mama," the old man said.

"Why have they not thought of that a long time ago?"

Secret Places

Maybe Jones and the City

LISTEN, you high-old-time people, make your wants known *now*. They're building the place, and they'll put in anything you suggest. Funds are available. Lots of those peace-and-benevolence folks have made perpetual donations for those persons less fortunate in their aspirations than themselves. Less fortunate than—from where we stand, that's a joke, isn't it?

There is time, but barely. Tell them what you want them to put in. Act now!

HIS name was Midas Jones. His father had named him that and given him the touch. But somehow the name had changed, and it was as Maybe Jones that he was known on the spaceways.

Once Maybe Jones had found the Perfect Place. He had left it, and he was never able to find it again.

He had visited it, one space city out of a million, for a day and a night long ago. He had gone from the Perfect Place to New Shanghai to arrange his affairs so that he might return to the Perfect Place forever. On New Shanghai, in an

altercation that really amounted to nothing, Maybe Jones had suffered a broken head and had lost a piece of his memory. The head mended in time and most of the memory came back; but the recollection of the name and bearings of the Perfect Place did not return.

"With your money and your predilections, you could have fun anywhere, Maybe," his friends told him.

"I could and I do," Maybe said, "but it isn't the same thing. It all turns bitter when I can't recover the City itself."

"Was it really perfect, Maybe?"

"Perfect. And I don't mean the weak things that others mean by the word. It was perfection at high speed. I know that there are other sorts of people in the universes. They would say that it was no more than an old-time Saturday-night town. They would call it a stinking row. It wasn't. Aromatic, maybe, but not stinking. For a high-flying low-lifer like me it was perfect."

"How were the girls there, Maybe?" asked Susie-Q.

"You might get by there, Sue, though barely, as the last girl in the last bang-house in town. And you're the prettiest trick on Sad-Dog planet."

"How come you didn't run out of money, Maybe, with all those girls around?" Live-Man Lutz asked him.

"Nobody ever ran out of money there. I'd think my old wallet would be flat, and I'd pull it out and it'd be fatter than ever. Look, it wasn't just the girls and the drinks and the music; it was everything. There were friends there, each of them a thousand friends in one. There were fellows you had known forever the first time you saw them, and every one of them a prince. There was talk there that'd never grow old. There's a pretty good bunch of liars in present company, but

you're nothing to the high liars and tall talkers in the Perfect Place. Every pleasure of the flesh and spirit was available, and it didn't get old. There was no frustration or spoiling or guilt. At night they took the sky off just to give it more height."

"Where is this Perfect Place, Maybe? How does one get there?"

At that question Maybe Jones always broke down and cried. He didn't know where the place was, nor its name nor its direction, nor any way to identify it. He looked for it forever, and he and it became legends.

For twenty years he had been going about the universes asking for it. He followed every lead, and con-men often sold him false information about it.

"Take a galactic left down Pirates' Alley for six parsecs," they might tell him. "Cross the Bright Ocean. Take the Irish Channel where it opens up at nine o'clock. It's marked for the first four light years of it. When you come at a district known as Dobie's Hole, ask directions at any planet or asteroid. You will be quite near the Perfect Place."

Some of the planets in Dobie's Hole were pretty live places. You could find girls there like Susie-Q, and cronies like Live-Man Lutz. It was near perfect in some of those sinks, so the misunderstanding was understandable. But none of them was the Perfect Place.

ONE day a simple announcement was made through the universes: from then on, nobody had to die. Mortality was

found to be a simple disease, and it had yielded to simple specifics.

Nobody paid much attention to the announcement. "I never *could* see much sense in dying," some of them said. "I never much intended to die anyhow." "It was just one of those things that everybody did. Now they don't." "It doesn't make any difference to me. I'd as soon keep on living as not."

A number of bureaus were set up to look into the implications. There were a thousand of them for the countless thousands of good people who would want to follow the right way when it was shown to them, and to do something good with their endless future.

And there was a small bureau set up for that small group of folks who may perhaps have slight flaws in their characters—the golden flaw, as Maybe Jones once called it. This small bureau was to plan the future for the good-time crowd who could not be reformed into the sanctioned mold.

It had a small staff at first: High-Life Higgins, Good-Time Charley Wu, Hilda the Hoop, Margaret the Houri, people like that. They had only a vague idea of what they wanted. They sifted the legends of the pleasure places: Fiddlers' Green, Maybe Jones' City, Barbary, Valhalla on the Rocks.

"If we could only resurrect the men who first had these visions, we'd have a starting place," said High-Life. "We've a dozen projects going, but none of them has the touch of a master. Could we find any of these great dreamers—"

"But Maybe Jones is still alive," said Hilda. "They say he still travels trying to find his place again."

"Great green gophers! Send for him!" howled Good-Time Charley Wu. "It's originals like him that we want."

Word came to Maybe Jones on a distant planet that a group

of people had some knowledge of the Perfect Place, and that they wanted to pool their knowledge with his.

Maybe burned up very light itself getting to them. This was it!

The Planning City had grown into a vast complex of buildings. Maybe Jones passed the very large building that housed the Bureau of Wonderful Islands. Over its doorway was the motto "Adagios of Islands, O my Prodigal" from Crane.

"Not quite what I had in mind," said Maybe Jones.

He passed the large building that housed the Bureau of Wonderful Fields. Over its doorway was the motto—

"If I was thirsty, I have heard a spring,
If I was dusty, I have found a field,"

—from Belloc.

"The fields are always too far from town," said Maybe.

Then, right across the street, he saw it, the small building that housed the Bureau of Wonderful Cities. And over its doorway was a verse from the immortal Hiram Glotz:

"Let sheep lie down in grass! I'll toe the rail!
I've got a thirst that ain't for Adam's ale!
I'll trade your fields of green for bistros brown
Where 'Dusty' is a red-haired girl in town."

"Now that is a little bit more like it," said Maybe Jones. He went in and boldly announced himself, and they fell all over his neck.

"Margaret!" Maybe cried to the Houri. "You were there! You know where the Perfect Place is!"

"Maybe, I've been everywhere," she said. "I like them all. I think they're all perfect once you get things to going. I've been told that I lack discernment. Boys, you can't have everything, so that discernment has got to go when it gets in the way of exuberance. No, Maybe, I've run into you lots of times, but I just can't place your place. We'll build it though. Just don't leave me out of it."

"The pitch is this," said High-Life Higgins, after they had eaten and drunk and made cheer to excess. "We have now arrived at the three ultimates: Immortality, Heaven, Hell. We have just achieved the first of them. We are now setting up projects to construct the other two, on the premise that one man's Heaven is another man's Hell. We must build final enclaves for people of every choice. We cannot sit idly by and ask what we would do with the after-life. *This is the after-life.* It became so as soon as immortality was achieved."

"Will you build my Perfect Place?" asked Maybe with hope.

"Sure. And ideas like yours are what this bureau needs. You wouldn't believe what some of the other bureaus have to work with. They get the arty ducks and the philosophy buffs and the peace-and-benevolence beats. Why, you get on jags like that and you'll be tired of them in a thousand years or less. How are they going to stand up through eternity? The Green Fields might do, for the green among us. The Islands might do, for those of insular mind and soul. But our own small bureau caters to the high-old-time, rather than the peace-eternal, crowd. We believe here (we know we are not the majority, but there has to be something for everyone) that the rooting old good-time town and the crowd that goes with it can stand up to the long-time gaff as well as anything. Would you like to see some of the work we have been doing?"

"I certainly would," said Maybe. "It might strike me as a little amateurish, but I'm sure it's in the right line."

"By our total recall methods we are able to reconstruct the Seven Sin Cities of History, Jones. They are the folk dreams that have also been raucous facts. The selection is one-sided, being out of the context of the old Western Civilization from which most of us descend. But they were such a hopping bunch of towns that (under the old recension) they had to be destroyed: by blast-from-Heaven, lava-flow, earthquake, sinking-in-the-sea, cow-fire, earthquake again and fire, hurricane and tidal wave. They were too hot to last.

"Here is Sodom. Now take a close-up of its old Siddim Square District where they had such a noisy go of it before it was wiped out. Go down and sample it."

Maybe Jones sampled old Sodom. He was back in about an hour.

"It's about as good as you could expect from that time," he said. "The drinks were too sweet and sticky. So were the girls. The music was only fair. How do you tune a ram's horn anyhow? But, man, it won't stack up with the Perfect Place at all."

"Try Pompeii," said Good-Time Charley Wu. "We'll set you down on the corner of Cardo and Decumanus streets. That was the first red light district to be so lighted and so named. Don't cut it too close. Watch out for the hot lava when you leave."

Maybe Jones was back from Pompeii in half an hour.

"It's strictly Little Italy and Little Egypt stuff," he told them, but he was smiling. "It's all right for a gag. It's fun. But it isn't on the same side of the street with the Perfect Place."

"Try Lisbon," said Hilda. "It's sort of a test. In its own century Lisbon was spiritually of the West Coast of Africa though geographically in Europe. Don't fall in the harbor going in, and watch the earthquake coming out."

Maybe Jones was in old Lisbon for two hours. He liked it.

"Man, man!" he said. "It's on a tangent, and not the true line, of course. But, were I not committed to the Perfect Place—man!"

"Here's Port Royal before it was sunk in the sea," said High-Life. "Some like it. Some don't."

Maybe was out of Port Royal in half an hour.

"It's all there," he said, "but they forgot to cook it. They even forgot to take the hide off it. People, a place has to have the illusion of smoothness—that's part of the game. No, Port Royal is strictly a short-haul place."

"Have a go at Chicago before the fire," said Good-Time Charley Wu. "It had its followers."

Maybe was back from Chicago in fifteen minutes.

"Are you kidding?" he asked. "We were speaking of cities, and you give me a country town. Size isn't the test. Oh, it's all right for boys, but who's going to be a boy for eternity?"

"Two to go," said Hilda. "Try San Francisco before the quake and the fire."

So Maybe tried it. He was smiling when he came back.

"It dates, it dates," he told them. "For amateur theatricals, yes. For eternity, no."

"One more," said High-Life. "Here is Galveston just before the hurricane and tidal wave of 1900. Try Old Tremont Street downtown where it crosses Post Office Street."

Maybe Jones went down in old Galveston and didn't come back. They sent for him and couldn't find him. He was gone

all night. He came back the middle of next morning, looped to the ports and walking with a seaman's roll.

"It's put me in the mood," he cried. "I'm ready to go to work. Hey, that place has a touch of the eternal! I found a way to tune it and visited Galveston in earlier and later years. I picked up an interesting piece of history too. You know, they never did bury any of the dead people after the hurricanes and tidal waves. They just ground them up and sold them for crab-meat sandwiches. Well, let's go to work. It's brought the Perfect Place back clear to my mind, and I'm ready to get with it."

"JONES, this is the Empyrean, the eternal fire-stuff, that we hold in our hands," High-Life said. "I know that these reconstructed legend cities leave a lot out, but men like you will help us put it in."

"Before I start, can we fix it so a man can get higher and higher and never have to come down?" Maybe wanted to know.

"Yes we can," Good-Time Charley told him. "The hangover, whether physical or spiritual, was a death in miniature. We have whipped it, as we have whipped death itself. We have a free hand here."

"There's got to be a catch to it," said Maybe. "Heavens, or Hells, depending on the viewpoint, will be expensive."

"Long-term funding is the answer," said Good-Time Charley. "The longest terms ever—forever. Put it all in. Set it all down, and *we will make it that way.*"

"Man, man!" said Maybe Jones. He sat down at a table and took a large square of paper. He titled it modestly:

"The Empyrean According to Maybe Jones"

He began to write the specifications, and building was begun on the Perfect Place for people of a certain choice.

"That all the girls be built like clepsydras," he wrote, "you know, the ancient water-clock. It's a much more sophisticated shape than the hour-glass figure."

"Put me in," Margaret cried. "I'm shaped like a pendulum clock. Notice the way I swing sometime."

(Listen, this isn't a private place for Maybe Jones. It's for all high-flyers everywhere. There will be plenty of room and variety in it.)

"That all the bars be a mile, hell, make it two miles, long," Maybe wrote. "That there be high liars there who'll make Live-Man Lutz sound like a parson. That they take the sky off early in the morning so you can get as high as you want all day long. That they have girls who'll make Little Midnight Mullins and Giggles McGuire and Belle Hellios and Susie-Q look like sheep dogs. That—"

HEY, get in on this if you're going to. They're building it now! If you are an arty duck or a philosophy buff or a peace-and-benevolence beat, then you can go to hell—to your own appropriate bureau—and be heard. But if you go for the high-old-time stuff, then make your wants known here.

If you are of the raffish elite and want to go where you can

get higher and higher and never have to come down from it, if you want the good-time town and the crowd that goes with it for a long haul (and it's going to be a very long haul), then howl it out so they'll know that you're interested.

If you want anything at all added, tell them *now*, and they'll put it in.

Contact them by regular mail, or phone or voxo. Or tear out a sheet of this screed, scribble your wants in the margin, and drop it in any mail box. *It will get there.* The address is:

"Bureau of Wonderful Cities. Old Earth."

That's all you need, but get with it. They're building our place now.

Mean Men

Seven Story Dream

GILFORD GADBERRY had a contempt for dawns badly done. He knew how blatant and stylized the outdoor world can be in its pristine moments: the contrived shagginess of grass, the stupidity of trees, the falsity of flowers, the oafishness of the birds and their inept melody. These scratched the smooth surface of his soul. "Bad work, very bad work," Gadberry would opine, for he was an artist.

Yet there were times when these sorry units arranged themselves with striking effect. On this very early dawn they made an almost perfect harmony, and Gadberry gracefully acknowledged it. There it was: the old oaks, and the new firs and hedges, the ragged Bermuda on the vacant lot in the new sun, the thin rye grass that held to the shade of the building, the corpse on the lawn, the row of hollyhocks and the lone aster in the middle of them, the drooping mimosa full of driveling birds, the even rank of garbage cans standing chalky in the aluminum dawn, and that damned dew over everything.

In spite of the elements that went into the composition the effect was near perfect—and yet there was one clashing entity in that aubade scene. Gadberry reviewed it in his mind, for the artist is satisfied with nothing but perfection.

The firs, the hedges, the corpse, the mimosa, the garbage cans,

the lawn, the hollyhocks with their lone aster—something was in that peaceful morning scene that simply did not belong there.

Gadberry strode over and savagely struck down the aster with its white flower. The harmony of the scene was now perfect. He walked away, his artist's soul satisfied.

On his way to find an early eating place, he met a policeman named Embree and told him that Minnie Jo Merry was lying dead on that little lawn behind the apartment where she lived, and perhaps it should be looked into.

CAPTAINS Keil and Gold were there quickly and in charge. Minnie Jo was bruised about the throat and dried blood framed her mouth, but her death may have been caused by a violent concussion. Keil and Gold left her to Dr. Sanderson and their men. There was no crowd. This was very early on a Saturday morning, the apartment was on a quiet street, and the small rear lawn was secluded.

Orders were given for all the residents of the apartment building to remain in the building, and Captain Keil sent for Gilford Gadberry, the only one who had left. Gadberry told the patrolman who came for him that he would come as soon as he had finished his breakfast, and not a moment before. He finished it leisurely, drinking coffee and sketching while the policeman fumed. He was sketching a fuming policeman.

"MRS. RAFFEL," Captain Keil said, "you are the owner and operator of this apartment. I assume that you know something of your renters. Who lives here?"

"Minnie Jo lived here, and how will I get her rent now? She used to say, 'You worry too much about my rent. I'm not much further back than some of the others. You should know that I'm good for it. As long as I live I will always be good for what I owe.' But now who will be good for what she owes?"

"Your problem, Mrs. Raffel. Who else lived—lives here?"

"Dillahunty, Gadberry, Handle, Izzard, Lamprey, Nazworthy, all in a permanent or temporary state of singleness."

"Six living and one dead tenant. Is that all?"

"It's a small place, but I do have two other empty units—three it will be now. I doubt if this will help me rent them."

"It may not make a difference. The girl was murdered in her own room, we believe, and she seems to have made no outcry. She was either taken very suddenly, or she knew the intruder well."

"Not necessarily, Captain. Minnie Jo was a very open person. If Jack the Ripper himself had come in, red from his trade, she'd have said, 'Hi, honey, sit down and talk to me.' But it was probably someone she knew."

"What are your feelings on hearing of the death of Miss Merry?"

"Satisfaction—though I'll miss her—and relief and thankfulness that it has finally turned out all right."

"Turned out all right? Do you call it turning out all right that she was murdered?" he asked her.

"Oh yes. There were many worse things that could have happened to her. How lucky that Minnie Jo was killed before they happened!"

"You will have to explain that. Did you hate her?"

"No, I loved her—and I will explain. Minnie Jo was quite a good girl, but she was on the edge of becoming quite a bad girl. I have seen it happen to so many of the young ones who are loose in the world. Every time I know one, and notice her nearing the change, I pray that something will intervene and prevent it. This is the first time my prayers have been answered, and I'm thankful."

"Could you yourself have done anything to bring about this, ah, intervention, this preventative death?"

"I have just told you: I prayed. I didn't know it would be death, but that's as good a solution as any."

Then they questioned her a little about other things.

Gadberry, now back from his breakfast, was questioned by Captain Gold.

"Gadberry, do you often get up so early?"

"Never. But I often stay up this late. I work at night and sleep in the daytime."

"Why?" Captain Gold inquired.

"It was originally a pose. Then I became used to it."

"You seemed extraordinarily cool on discovering Miss Merry dead. You did not make an outcry, or hurry to report it."

"I reported it to the first person I met, a policeman. This seemed the logical person, and the logical thing to do."

"Almost too logical. What was your opinion of Miss Merry?"

"Alive, or dead? The girl was somehow completed in death. It improves many people. So often we see only the outside of people, but to look at her smeared with her own blood gives an added dimension, a more total view."

"Ah, what was your opinion of her alive?"

"Her hands and ankles were rather good; between, she was

conventional. She hadn't eyes, no eyes at all. It isn't usual for a girl her age to have eyes. A child will sometimes have eyes, a woman after thirty may have them again, or a man after forty. I never saw her hair, which is to say that it was doctored. I sketched her ears sometimes, and her throat. I was not satisfied with either of them, but then it isn't twice a year that I come on either that is really good. Are you interested in these things?"

"We are somewhat interested in the throat of this girl, and other matters. Since you work at night, you must have been awake. Did you hear any outcry or evidence of a struggle?"

"No. I could be throttled myself and not notice it. When I work I am taken by the Holy Spirit of art. I am probably unable to help you on the more mundane details you are seeking."

"What is your opinion of the tenant George Handle? It is reported that you sponge on him considerably."

"The artist is worthy of his hire. George is an oaf, a fool; but do not believe that a fool and his money are easily parted. I have to work for every dollar I twist out of him. George has caught the sickness of self-improvement. He learns at night. He has one of those sets with an earphone for under the pillow. He's put quite a bit of money into the recordings, money much better given to me. He has his own recorder, reads into it things he wishes to learn, then has them played back while he sleeps. Whatever he learns while asleep, he is still a fool when awake."

"You haven't any use for fools?"

"But I have! I often make use of fools."

They questioned him a little more, then went on to Izzard.

"Mr. Izzard, what were your relations with Miss Merry?" Keil asked.

"Avuncular—of the Dutch-uncle sort. Low Dutch, really, but

she hadn't come to realize that yet. I lavished gifts on her, and she was friendly. I believe I would ultimately have been successful. There was a change beginning in her."

"Yes. Others have noticed the change. Were these expensive gifts?"

"Not to me. The price tags don't matter. I run the *A to Izzard Variety Store.* She was without discernment, and I have access to bargains."

"You wouldn't have been rebuffed by her, and been angry enough to do her in?"

"I was rebuffed by her constantly, but she did it in a graceful way—never so as to stop the flow of gifts. My timetable for her was a long one and I am sorry to see it interrupted. No, I never laid a hand on her, except sometimes in attempted affection."

They questioned him a little about the others, a little more about himself, and left him.

Next, they questioned Nazworthy, a large, sullen-appearing man. He said that any of them might have done it: Handle, Izzard, Lamprey, Gadberry, Dillahunty. "They are a bad bunch. All of them always looking at the young girl. Any of them do it. Yes, I am awake when it happen. I hear the shots ring out. I say, 'Oh somebody have killed that pretty Miss Merry.' Whichever one you decide on, I will positively identify him as the killer."

"You are sure that you heard shots? She was not shot."

"It was the knife I hear, then. I hear it go in loud. I say, 'Somebody have killed that pretty Miss Merry.' "

"She was not knifed."

"How was it, then? What is the loud noise I heard? How did he kill her?"

"We believe that she was strangled, and then thrown or pushed from her window."

"My very thought. That is what I heard. The strangle noises and the thrown-out-of-the-window noises. I hear everything. I know everything. I will give testimony."

There was the look of arrogant laughter behind the hard eyes of Nazworthy. He was talking nonsense, either seriously or speciously. They would get nothing out of him.

Mr. Dillahunty told Keil and Gold, "My opinion of the lodgers I cannot give as I would like, being opposed to profanity. You may have to discount my opinion of them, however. I always have a low opinion of those with whom I live; but when I have moved on to other lodgings I remember them with affection. No, I heard nothing in the night. I hear little without my aid, and I do not sleep with it. My acquaintance with the aforesaid Minnie Jo was sketchy. She would smile, and I would smile, but I am thrice her age and a crippled man. Having second sight, I knew that this would happen . . . No, I haven't second sight to that extent; I don't know who did it. You are sure it was one of the lodgers?"

"No. But she was apparently in her own room and in bed when accosted. She seems to have been strangled there and thrown out her own window. It was quite late, after the dew, and no feet left the building after the dew and before her discovery—except those of Gadberry, who reported her. At the moment we have no leads to anyone except those who lived in this building. Tell us, what about Mrs. Raffel?"

"A religious fanatic but a good woman. It is believed by the others that I pay the regular rates here, but that is not so. I live here partly on the charity of Mrs. Raffel."

"And Gadberry, the artist?"

"In one word, selfish."

"George Handle? He has been called a fool."

"Only a half-fool. But easily led."

"Izzard?"

"A merchant. He never spent a penny without a return."

"Nazworthy? Is he as crazy as he sounds?"

"No, he isn't. He's a sardonic kidder, with a dislike for all authority. I can imagine a little the line he would take with the police. The cat, the only other animal that indulges in straight-faced sardonic humor, betrays itself by a flick of the tail. Nazworthy has the same motion, but without the tail."

"Could he kill?"

"I doubt he could kill Minnie Jo Merry. He hates only pretentious people, and she wasn't. He could kill a policeman—or *her* killer. If another is killed, then you will know."

"We'll watch for that. Lamprey?"

"Nothing there. A nothing man. Did you notice the girl well? A beautiful thing and finely made, but there was plenty of strength to her. That nothing man couldn't have strangled her. She'd have strangled him and thrown him out the window. You'll have to look to one of the others, not to him."

Dillahunty was right. Lamprey was a nothing man, and he was terrified of the police. "I didn't kill her. I didn't know her. I didn't know anybody. I wash dishes at Webbers. I don't know nobody. I'm in my room all night."

"Well, did you hear noises in the night?"

"Noises I always hear, and some of them never happen. I'm a nervous man, but I kill nobody, I hurt nobody. It is more I am always afraid someone would kill me."

Lamprey was a small man with small hands, a frightened man on the edge of incompetency. They questioned him a little more and left him.

"What do we have?" Captain Keil asked. "A heavy old woman who is a religious fanatic and also a good woman, and is glad that

the girl was killed before something bad happened to her. An artist who is selfish. A sardonic kidder who is not as stupid as he acts. A half-fool who is easily led. A nothing man. A merchant who does not spend without a return. An old Irishman who is thrice her age, but can we be sure that all the sap is dead in him? Seven, and one of them is crazy, but which? Let's go talk to the half-fool."

"Handle," Captain Gold said, "did you sleep well last night?"

"No. I have never slept well any night of my life. I dream a lot and worry a lot. I'm totally alive when I sleep."

"Was it because of your restlessness at night that you decided to try the learn-while-you-sleep systems?"

"Yes. I want to know things, so I decided to tap my nocturnal energy, as the advertisement said."

"What is your relationship with Gilford Gadberry?"

"Oh, he takes me for quite a bit, but he knows all the things I want to know. He can talk about music and funny paintings and the new dirty novels and psychology and things like that. Sometimes I turn him on when he talks, and play him back at night. Sometimes when I lend him money he'll make recordings for me—Gaelic furniture design, and things like that. He arranges the things I'll hear at night so I'll get a well-rounded liberal education."

"I see. Did you hear any noises last night?"

"I hear noises every night, though I sleep with the earphones on, and all outside noise is supposed to be cut out. It must be that I dream the noises."

"Did you dream last night? Did you dream anything about a murder or a dead person?" Gold asked.

"Yes. About seven dreams like that."

"Tell us one of them."

"Which one?"

"Hell, I don't know. We're shooting blind. Tell us one."

"Well, this one, it's kind of silly. This was a long time ago, or anyhow it took place in a cabin and by candlelight. We sat wake over a corpse. We cracked and ate walnuts, but someone objected when we threw the shells in with the corpse, though that was a good place to throw them. Then someone else—"

"Oh Judas!" said Captain Keil.

"I believe that is enough of that one," Captain Gold said. "Were all of the seven dreams like that?"

"All of them about murder or corpses, yes. All of them kind of silly."

"Seven story dreams we have yet," Keil said. "We're getting nowhere."

"Then we'll get somewhere," Gold said. "Handle, have you any idea who killed Minnie Jo Merry?"

"I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed Minnie Jo Merry."

"What?"

"I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed Minnie—"

"You are talking for the record?"

"Strangled her and threw her out the window. I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed—"

So they took him downtown, but first they gave orders for a new lock to be put on George Handle's door and they left a guard at the apartment building.

NATURALLY they didn't leave it at that. The confession of the half-fool was complete enough. There were odd elements in it, but he was an odd man. He said that he had killed the girl in a dream;

that he had risen and gone to her room and strangled her and thrown her out of the open window because he was jealous. Then he had gone back to his bed, to other dreams.

Yet there were points about that murder that hadn't been given out, that only the killer could have known; George Handle knew them . . .

Nevertheless, the two captains continued to check during that morning. They found that Minnie Jo was an inefficient but promising worker for a stationery company. Her particular girlfriend believed that Minnie Jo ran around only with the men where she lived. They checked the places she frequented, and she had been seen with all the men.

She had been out with Gadberry and with Handle often, and with Izzard nearly as often. She had even been seen dining with the sardonic Nazworthy at a sardonic place run by two Bulgarian brothers. She often went to Webbers, and sometimes drank coffee in the kitchen with the dishwasher Lamprey. It was believed by them at Webbers, though, that this was mere kindness on her part.

Minnie Jo had even been seen drinking Irish coffee with Dillahunty in the after-midnight hours at Maddigan's. Nor was she the only girl a third his age that he brought in. The sap was not all dead in him yet.

They found that Dillahunty was well liked, Handle was liked, and even poor Lamprey was liked.

Izzard was not liked, Gadberry was not liked, Nazworthy was not liked.

"We can tell nothing by that," Keil said. "Handle has confessed, and it makes no difference that the people who know him like him. There is nothing to tie onto the others, even if Gadberry is selfish, Izzard is demanding, and Nazworthy is sardonic. We still have the fact that Handle has confessed."

"Yes. Repetitiously. But to be sure, let's go hear him again."

Again, George Handle told them, "I killed Minnie Jo Merry. Strangled her and threw her out the window. I killed Minnie Jo—"

"He sounds like—"

"Yes, doesn't he?" Keil interrupted Gold. "Let's go look for it."

"HAS anybody been trying to get into Handle's room?" they asked the guard at the apartment.

"Gadberry has. Says Handle owes him money. Says he was to go in and get it. Says he wears Handle's shirts, and this locking out puts him to grave inconvenience. Handle never locked his door, according to him. Gadberry was disappointed to find the new lock on it; he seems pretty nervous now."

They found Gadberry.

"Come on with us. We'll go to his room and get it."

"What? Get what?"

"What you were trying to get. What is making you nervous that you couldn't get? It will be here, somewhere with the bunch of them. Quite a few of them here, aren't there, Gadberry?"

They were in Handle's room now.

"I don't know what you mean," Gadberry protested.

"The tapes, the wires, the records. How long would it take to play them all?"

"I don't know."

"You know pretty well. It would take about forty hours or more, wouldn't it? Will you find it for us, or must we play them all? And you will listen."

"I won't listen to forty hours of that drivel. I'll find it for you. I'd have said that nothing could break me down, but that surely could."

"Why did you kill the girl, Gadberry?"

"Jealousy, frustration, curiosity . . ."

"I can understand the jealousy. She was an attractive girl. What was the frustration?"

"She was almost perfect, but not quite, and it is that which is just short of a masterpiece that infuriates. It is so near—yet it misses. I'm always in anger to destroy a near-masterpiece."

"So you destroyed her. And the third element was your curiosity, like when you said 'The girl was somehow completed in death.' You had to see how she would look dead."

"Yes. That knowledge was necessary to my work."

Gadberry had located the tape for them, and Captain Keil was threading it into the machine.

"I suspect that you weren't accurate in your appraisal to us of Miss Merry, Gadberry. You said that she hadn't eyes, and other things."

"I lied. She had eyes, and she wasn't conventional. She was near perfect, gentlemen. So near."

"And in preparation for the murder it was only necessary for you to condition the easily led George Handle to a confession?"

"Astute of me, was it not, Captains?"

The machine played now in the compelling voice of Gilford Gadberry, as it had night after night played to George Handle, in his sleep, till he had learned to answer on cue; and the cue, of course, was the question: "Who killed Minnie Jo Merry?"

"Pretty uninspired," Gadberry had to admit, "but I had to assume uninspired questioners, to whom the cliché would come naturally."

The machine went on to recount certain abominations that only the killer knew he would commit, but the voice of that most polished madman returned again and again to the command: "Say, 'I killed Minnie Jo Merry. I killed Minnie Jo Merry. Strangled her and threw her out the window. I killed—' "

Secret Places

Adam Had Three Brothers

IN THE TOWN there are many races living, each in its own enclave, some of many square miles, some of a few acres only, some of but one or two streets. Its geographers say that it has more Italians than Rome, more Irish than Dublin, more Jews than Israel, more Armenians than Yerevan.

But this overlooks the most important race of all.

There is the further fact (known only to the more intense geographers): it has more Rrequesenians than any town in the world. There are more than a hundred of them.

By the vulgar the Rrequesenians are called Wrecks, and their quarter is Wreckville. And there is this that can be said of them that cannot be said of any other race on earth: Every one of them is a genius.

These people are unique. They are not Gypsies, though they are often taken for them. They are not Semites. They are not even children of Adam.

WILLY McGILLEY, the oldest of the Wrecks (they now use Gentile names) has an old baked tablet made of straw and pressed sheep dung that is eight thousand years old and gives

the true story of their origin. Adam had three brothers: Etienne, Yancy, and Rreq. Etienne and Yancy were bachelors. Rreq had a small family and all his issue have had small families; until now there are about two hundred of them in all, the most who have ever been in the world at one time. They have never intermarried with the children of Adam except once. And not being of the same recension they are not under the same curse to work for a living.

So they do not.

Instead they batten on the children of Adam by clever devices that are known in police court as swindles.

Catherine O'Conneley by ordinary standards would be reckoned as the most beautiful of the Wrecks. By at least three dozen men she was considered the most beautiful girl in the world. But by Wreckian standards she was plain. Her nose was too small, only a little larger than that of ordinary women; and she was skinny as a crow, being on the slight side of a hundred and sixty. Being beautiful only by worldly standards she was reduced even more than the rest of them to living by her wits and charms.

She was a show girl and a bar girl. She gave piano lessons and drawing lessons and tap-dancing lessons. She told fortunes and sold oriental rugs and junk jewelry, and kept company with lonely old rich men. She was able to do all these things because she was one bundle of energy.

She had no family except a number of unmarried uncles, the six Petapolis brothers, the three Petersens, the five Calderons, the four Oskanians, and Charley O'Malley, nineteen in all.

NOW it was early morning and a lady knocked at her door.

"The oil stock is no good. I checked and the place would be three hundred miles out to sea and three miles down. My brother says I've been took."

"Possibly your brother isn't up on the latest developments in offshore drilling. We have the richest undeveloped field in the world and virtually no competition. I can promise we will have any number of gushers within a week. And if your brother has any money I can still let him have stock till noon today at a hundred and seventy-five dollars a share."

"But I only paid twenty-five a share for mine."

"See how fast it has gone up in only two days. What other stock rises so fast?"

"Well all right, I'll go tell him."

THERE was another knock on the door.

"My little girl take piano lessons for six weeks and all she can play is da da da."

"Good. It is better to learn one note thoroughly than just a little bit of all of them. She is not ready for the other notes yet. But I can tell you this: she is the most intelligent little girl I have ever seen in my life and I believe she has a positive genius for the piano. I truly believe she will blossom all at once and one of these days she will be playing complete symphonies."

"You really think so?"

"I do indeed."

"Well then I will pay you for six more weeks, but I do wish she could play more than da da da."

THERE was another knock at the door.

"Honey Bun, there was something wrong. I give you ten dollars to bet on Summertime in the first race at Marine Park; you say it's a sure thing and fifty to one. But now I find there isn't any such track as Marine Park and nobody ever heard of the horse. Huh, Honey Bun? What you do to your best boy friend?"

"O, we use code names. What if all these hot tips ever got out? Summertime of course was Long Day and Marine Park was Jamaica. And he only lost by about six noses. Wasn't that good for a fifty to one? And now I have an even better tip. It's so hot I can't even tell you the name of the horse, but I feel sure that twenty would get you a thousand."

"All the time I give you money but never I win yet, Honey Bun. Now you give a little kiss and we talk about another bet."

"I had surely thought our attachment was on a higher plane."

"Words, Honey Bun, always words. But you give, um, um, um, that's good. Now I bet again, but I bet I better win someday."

THERE was another knock on the door.

"How come you let my brother-in-law in on a good thing and never tell me? For a hundred he'll have two hundred and fifty in a week, and you never tell me, and I'm your friend and never persecute you when you don't pay your bill."

So she had to give her caller the same deal she had given his brother-in-law.

AFTER that she went out to take the game out of her traps. She had set and baited them some days before. She had gone to see five hundred people, which took quite a while even for one with her excess of energy. And to each she said this:

"I have just discovered that I have an infallible gift of picking winners. Now I want you to give it a test. Here is a sure winner I have picked. I ask you bet it, not with me, not with one of my uncles, but with a bookie of your own choice. I prefer not to know with whom you bet."

Of the five hundred there were a hundred and forty-four winners, very good. So the next day she went to the hundred and forty-four with even more assurance and offered them the same proposition again. And of the hundred and forty-four there were fifty-six winners. Very good, for she really could pick them.

To these fifty-six she went the third day and offered them the third sure bet free. And incredibly of the fifty-six there were nineteen winners.

This was repeated the next day, and of the nineteen there were seven winners.

Now she went to talk money. The seven lucky clients could not deny that she indeed had the gift of picking winners. She had given them all four straight in four days and her secret should surely be worth money. Besides, they had all let their bets ride and they had won a lot, an average of more than six hundred dollars.

But she would give no more free tips. She would only sell her complete and exclusive secret for a thousand dollars. And she collected from six of them. The seventh was Mazuma O'Shaunessey.

"I have given you four straight winners, but I cannot give you any more free tips. We will now talk cold turkey."

"O, put it in a basket, Katie."

"Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"I learned it in my cradle. The Inverted Pyramid. You tapped five hundred, and you got besides me how many? Five?"

"Six besides you, seven in all."

"Very good. You pick them nice for a little girl. But isn't that a lot of work for no more than a hatful of money?"

"Six thousand dollars is a large hatful. And there is always one smart alec like you who knows it all."

"Now Kate dear, let's look at it this way. I can really pick all the winners, not seven straights in five hundred, but all five hundred if I wished."

"O bah, you can't fool this little goose."

"O, I could prove it easily enough, but that's showy and I hate to be a show-off. So I suggest that you take my word for it and share my secret with me and give up this penny ante stuff."

"And all you want for your sure thing secret is five thousand dollars or so?"

"Why Kate, I don't want your money. I have so much that it's a burden to me. I only want to marry you."

SHE looked at him and she was not sure. O, not about marrying him, he was nice enough. She was not sure, she had never been sure, that he was a Wreck.

"Are you?"

"Why Kate, does one Wreck have to ask another that question?"

"I guess not. I'll go ask my uncles what they think. This is something of a decision."

She went to see all her bachelor uncles and asked them what they knew about Mazuma O'Shaunessey.

He was known to all of them.

"He is a competent boy, Kate," said Demetrio Petapolis. "If I do not miscount I once came out a little short on a deal with him. He knows the Virginia City Version, he knows the old Seven-Three-Three, he can do the Professor and His Dog, and the Little Audrey. And he seems to be quite rich. But is he?"

He meant, not is he rich, but—is he a Wreck?

"Does one Wreck have to ask another that question?" said Kate.

"No, I guess not."

HODL OSKANIAN knew him too.

"That boy is real cute. It seems in the last deal I had with him he came out a little ahead. It seems that in every deal I have with him he comes out a little ahead. He knows the Denver Deal and the Chicago Cut. He does the Little Old Lady and the Blue Hat. He knows the Silver Lining and the Doghouse and the Double Doghouse. And he seems quite likeable. But is he?"

He meant, not was he likeable, but—was he a Wreck?

"Cannot one Wreck always tell another?" said Kate loftily.

LARS PETERSEN knew Mazuma too.

"He is a klog pog. He knows the Oslo Puds and the Copenhagen Streg. He knows the Farmer's Wife and the Little Black Dog. He can do the Seventy-Three and the Supper Club. And he runs more tricks with the Sleepy River than anyone I ever saw, and has three different versions of the Raft and four of Down the Smoke Stack. And all the officers on the bilk squad give him half their pay every week to invest for them. He seems quite smart. But is he?"

He meant, not was he smart, but—is he a Wreck?

"Should one have to ask?" said Kate haughtily.

HER uncle Charley O'Malley also thought well of Mazuma.

"I am not sure but that at last count he was a raol or so

ahead of me. He knows the Blue Eyed Drover and the Black Cow. He can do the Brandy Snifter with the best of them, and he isn't bashful with the Snake Doctor. He does a neat variation of the Bottom of the Barrel. He can work the Yellow Glove and the Glastonburry Giveaway. And he seems affable and urbane. But is he?"

He meant, not was he affable and urbane (he was), but—is he a Wreck? Ah, that was the question.

"How can you even ask?" said Kate.

SO they were married and began one of the famous love affairs of the century. It went on for four years and each day brought new high adventure. They purged for the good of his soul a Dayton industrialist of an excessive sum of cash and thus restored his proper sense of values and taught him that money isn't everything. They toured the world in gracious fashion and took no more than their ample due for their comfortable maintenance. They relaxed the grip of tight-fisted Frenchmen and retaught them the stern virtues of poverty. They enforced an austere regime of abstinence and hard work on heretofore over-wealthy and over-weight German burghers and possibly restored their health and prolonged their lives. They had special stainless steel buckets made to bury their money in, and these they scattered in many countries and several continents. And they had as much fun as it is allowed mortals to have.

ONE pleasant afternoon Mazuma O'Shaunessey was in jail in a little town in Scotland. The jailer was gloomy and suspicious and not given to joking.

"No tricks from you now. I will not be taken."

"Just one to show I have the power. Stand back so I can't reach you."

"I'm not likely to let you."

"And hold up a pound note in one hand as tightly as you can. I will only flick my handkerchief and the note will be in my hand and no longer in yours."

"Man I defy you. You cannot do it."

He held the note very tightly and closed his eyes with the effort. Mazuma flicked his handkerchief, but the Scotsman was right. He could not do it. This was the only time that Mazuma ever failed. Though the world quivered on its axis (and it did) yet the note was held so tightly that no power could dislodge it. But when the world quivered on its axis the effect was that Mazuma was now standing outside the cell and the Scotsman was within. And when the Chief came some minutes later Mazuma was gone and the Scotch jailer stood locked in the cell, his eyes still closed and the pound note yet held aloft in a grip of steel. So he was fired, or cashiered as the Old Worlders call it, for taking a bribe and letting a prisoner escape. And this is what usually comes as punishment to overly suspicious persons.

KATIE still used the Inverted Pyramid and very effectively. Mazuma did not really have an unfailing talent for picking

winners. He'd only said that to get Kate to marry him, and it was the best lie he ever told. But he did have an infallible talent for many things, and they thrived.

The first little cloud in the sky came once when they passed a plowman in a field in the fat land of Belgium.

"Ah, there is a happy man," said Mazuma. "Happy at work."

"Happy at work? O my God, what did you say? What kind of words are these, my husband?"

But in the months and years that followed, this frightening incident was forgotten.

The couple became the pride of Wreckville when they returned as they did several times a year and told their stories. Like the time the state troopers ran them down and cornered them with drawn guns.

"O, we don't want to take you in. We'll report that we couldn't catch you. Only tell us how you do it. We don't want to be troopers all our lives."

And the time they ran a little house in Faro Town itself. It was a small upstairs place and Katie played the piano, and they had only one bartender, a faded little blonde girl with a cast in one eye, and only one table where Mazuma presided. And this where all the other Casinos were palaces that would make Buckingham look like a chicken coop.

And the funny thing is that they took in no money at all. The barmaid would always say all drinks were ten dollars, or failing that they were on the house; as they used no coin and had trays in the register for only tens, fifties, hundreds and thousands. It was too much trouble to do business any other way.

Katie would bait her money jar with several hundred dollar

bills and one or two larger, and demurely refuse anything smaller for selections as she didn't want the jar filled up with wrapping paper. So she would tinkle along all night and all drinks were on the house, which was not too many as only three could sit at the bar at once.

And Mazuma never shook or dealt a game. He had only blue chips as he said any other color hurt his eyes. And no matter what the price of the chips, it was legendary and gained zeros as it was retold.

Several of the larger sports came up the stairs out of curiosity. And their feelings were hurt when they were told they were too little to play, for they weren't little at all. So Mazuma sat all night Monday through Friday and never cut a hand or shook a bone.

Then on Saturday night the really big boys came upstairs to see what it was about. They were the owners of the nine big Casinos in town, and six of these gentlemen had to sit on boxes. Their aggregate worth would total out a dollar and thirteen cents to every inhabitant of the U.S.

Katie tinkled tunes all night for a hundred to five hundred dollars a selection, and Mazuma dealt on the little table. And when the sun came up they owned a share of all nine of the big Casinos, and had acquired other assets besides.

Of course these stories of Katie and Mazuma were topped, as about half the Wrecks went on the road, and they had some fancy narrations when they got back to Wreckville.

AND then the bottom fell out of the world.

They had three beautiful children now. The oldest was

three years old and he could already shake, deal, shuffle, and con with the best of them. He knew the Golden Gambit and the Four Quarters and the Nine Dollar Dog and Three Fish Out. And every evening he came in with a marble bag full of half dollars and quarters that he had taken from the children in the neighborhood. The middle child was two, but already she could calculate odds like lightning, and she picked track winners in her dreams. She ran sucker ads in the papers and had set up a remunerative mail-order business. The youngest was only one and could not yet talk. But he carried chalk and a slate and marked up odds and made book, and was really quite successful in a small way. He knew the Four Diamond trick and the Two Story Chicken Coop, the Thimblerig Reverse and the Canal Boat Cut. They were intelligent children and theirs was a happy home.

ONE day Mazuma said, "We ought to get out of it, Kate."

"Out of what?"

"Get out of the business. Raise the children in a more wholesome atmosphere. Buy a farm and settle down."

"You mean the Blue Valley Farmer trick? Is it old enough to be new yet? And it takes nearly three weeks to set it up, and it never did pay too well for all the trouble."

"No, I do not mean the Blue Valley Farmer trick. I don't mean any trick, swindle, or con. I think we should get out of the whole grind and go to work like honest people."

And when she heard these terrible words Katie fell into a dead faint.

THAT is all of it. He was not a Wreck. He was a common trickster and he had caught the sickness of repentance. The bottom had fallen out of the world indeed. The three unsolvable problems of the Greeks were squaring the circle, trisecting the angle, and re-bottoming the world. They cannot be done.

THEY have been separated for many years. The three children were reared by their father under the recension and curse of Adam. One is a professor of mathematics, but I doubt if he can figure odds as rapidly as he could when he was one year old. The middle one is now a grand lady, but she has lost the facility of picking track winners in her dreams and much else that made her charming. And the oldest one is a senator from a state that I despise.

And Katie is now the wisest old witch in Wreckville. But she has never quite been forgiven her youthful indiscretion when she married an Adamite who fell like his ancient father and deigned to work for a living.

Mean Men

Pig in a Pokey

THIS was on Hippodamia. The name isn't important. There were ten thousand asteroid-stations as undistinguished.

Netter settled back into the soft live-moss chair and prepared to talk the Creature out of the impasse. Then he saw the big moustached thing on the wall and he began to tremble.

After all, that was one of the things he had come to find—it was part of it. It was the great beefy, bearded, moustached head of Captain Kalbfleish mounted on the wall like a trophy, and amid the other trophies of the room.

"Great God, Man!"—and it wasn't a man to whom he spoke—"That's a human head you have mounted on the wall," Netter crackled.

"Which Great God, yours or mine?" Porcellus grunted. "They aren't the same, or they have been described badly. Yes, a human head. I had always wanted one. You notice that I have given it the favored position in the center of the great wall. I now have at least one of the heads of every species that interests me. Some of the heads are much larger than that of your friend Kalbfleish and have ornamentals that his lacks. It's a pity that humans don't have sweeping horns; that would make them perfect. But even without them, the head of Kalbfleish is the finest in my collection. It's a truly magnificent head!"

It was. "Kalbfleish has a fine head on him," they used to say,

and laugh. The big Captain, for all his remarkable courage and spirit, had not been long on brains. It was a huge, wild, hairy head with a stark and staring expression—as though Kalbfleish had died in terror and agony.

"You killed him, of course," said Netter dryly as he braided a romal in his nervous hands. "So, one way or the other, I will have to kill you, or you me."

"Not I," said Porcellus—a moist and hog-fat creature—, "I would not even kill an insect. Your friend had a violent heart and it finally ruptured on him. He was uncommonly energetic, especially so on the day of his death."

"Where is his body, you fat pig?"

"My translator has only a rough idea of pig, and I suppose you intend it for an insult; but I have a tough hide. I couldn't do a thing with his body, Netter, it was putrid in no time. It seems that when you humans know you are going to die you would begin to give yourself the injections three or four basic days before the time; then your bodies would not turn foul after death. I had no idea he had neglected it, so I wasn't prepared. I was lucky to save the head."

"We humans *don't* know when we are going to die," said Netter. "What is this you give me to eat? It's good."

"Yes, I remember now Kalbfleish saying he didn't know when he would die, but I supposed he spoke in humor. Since you also say it, it must be true of your species. The name of the food would mean nothing to you, but you have a close parallel to its method of preparation. I have read about geese in an Earth book of the captains, though I overlooked pigs. You sometimes put live geese to dance on hot griddles before they are killed. This excites and alarms them, and enlarges their livers. The livers then become delicacies. The creatures whose meat you are eating also died in

excitement and alarm, and they are delicious through and through."

Well, the meat was certainly delicious. That fat hog of a creature knew how to live well. Netter finished the meal and set it aside. Once more he braided the romal in his hands while he grasped for words.

"I suppose all the creatures whose heads you have here died by accident, Porcellus?" he asked.

"Well, all but one of them died," said Porcellus, "and I did not kill them. One of them died at a great distance from here; he willed me his head and had it sent to me because I had admired it. And one of them, so far as I know, is still alive. He was a being of multiplex heads. He hacked one of them off quite willingly when I praised it, and he cured and mounted it himself. A queer chap. He is staring down at you now and it will amuse you to guess which he is."

Porcellus didn't actually speak like that. He spoke in a series of grunts, some verbal and some ventral. But the Console Translator of Netter had a selector dial. Netter could dial translation in pidgin, in cut and dry, in bombast, in diplomatic pleasantry, in old southern U. S. soft-talk or Yiddish dialect if he wished, or in the courtly manner. Whenever he encountered a creature who was repulsive to him—as Porcellus was—he dialed the courtly manner of speech. This was somehow easier on his ears and his nerves.

"We waste time," Netter told the creature. "I have come to pursue claim to this asteroid. We now need it for a way-station, and it has never worked well for two such different species to share a station. We had first claim here long ago; and we abandoned it. Then you set up your station here; and you also abandoned it."

"Never," said Porcellus. "Would I abandon my cozy home and my trophies? Would my masters wish the removal of so fine a

station-master as myself? I was called Home on urgent business. I was gone but for a basic year, and the odds were very high against any other claimer coming while I was gone."

"The rules state that a live and competent agent must be in residence at all times or the asteroid can be declared abandoned," Netter said. "The asteroid was plainly abandoned when Kalbfleish arrived; you were gone. He so reported it, and he claimed it for us. The claim was approved and accepted."

"True," said the creature Porcellus. "What is that thing you play with in your hands? But Captain Kalbfleish—following the awkward interval after I had returned—also abandoned the station by dying. I so reported his death, and claimed the station for ourselves once more. The claim was approved and accepted. Now you are here as my guest only and, I tell you in all kindness, not a very welcome one."

"But a proved murder will void your claim," said Netter.

"So prove it, fine man," said the creature Porcellus. "Yours is a smaller head than Kalbfleish's but it has a certain distinction. I could make room for it among my trophies. We have each of us sent various reports, and the matter is under litigation. In the meanwhile, the accidental death of either of us would void his claim and settle the matter. We cannot kill directly. Investigators are already on the way and we are both prime suspects; we are the only ones here. What is the leather thing with which you play?"

"A romal, Porcellus. A short quirt braided onto a rein. They made them in Old Mexico and in California and Texas, but they were mostly ornamental."

"Earth places all three, my translator says. Were they used with a creature?"

"With a pony, a horse."

"Haven't I stumbled onto the information that the horse is extinct?"

"Yes. The braiding of the little thing is only a hobby of mine."

"A hobby, according to my comprehensive translator, is a sort of vicarious horse—a mental surrogate which one rides. Is that correct?"

"Correct, Porcellus. Haven't you a hobby?"

"My hobby is heads," said the thing.

Netter started to leave the creature then to go to his own camp. "To the early and accidental death of one of us," he toasted with the last of the drink that Porcellus had given him.

"Shoals!" toasted Porcellus. "I believe that is your word. And a warning: stay away from the low dome which you will see on the plain. It's dangerous."

Netter went to his own camp.

NOW Porcellus wanted him to go to the curious dome—or he would not have warned him away from it. Was it dangerous? Or did the thing merely want to divert him? Porcellus must have known that he would explore every feature of landscape on the small asteroid. Perhaps it was only to worry him, as Porcellus himself had seemed to be worried. And what in hog heaven can worry a hog? Netter had it after a while. "He knows when he's going to die. He's surprised that humans haven't that knowledge. But can I depend on it? It's only a twice removed guess."

Netter left the dome till last. He circumnavigated the asteroid in a brisk six-mile walk and found nothing of interest. He came thoughtfully to the dome on the plain.

The dome rose to no more than the height of his head in the center, was about sixty feet in diameter, was symmetrical in general outline but with a slightly roughened surface, and was probably artificial. "I believe it is an old direction beacon of the Porcines," he said. "Yes, this is certainly the top of an obsolete beam sphere, and the most of it is under ground. They were no good. I believe that we had them once."

Netter stepped gingerly onto the sphere. It was certainly firm enough. He knew a firm thing when he met one. There was no danger of him crashing through. He climbed the steep, then the less steep elevation of it and came to the center. "Nice," he said, "but nothing." Then he felt it activated. "So Porcellus still uses it," he said, "I didn't realize that they were so backward."

He walked around on it, and it rotated gently under him, compensating for him. He strode down the side a little way, and it quickly brought him back to the top. "This could be fun," he said.

He could take three, four quick steps away from the top, and he would still be on top. He could tense to jump sideways, and the sphere would compensate before he left the surface; he'd still land exactly on the center whichever way he jumped. The thing rolled easily and noiselessly and anticipated or reacted immediately to every movement. He walked, he ran, he laughed, he trotted half a mile and stood where he had stood before.

"You know tricks and I know tricks, old sphere," he shouted, "Let's see who's the smarter." He feinted, he broke, he dodged, he ran crazy-legged as though he were broken-field dribbling at Galactic-rules football. He shucked off tacklers, he scored countless goals in his mind, but he always ended on the very center top of the dome.

He lay down and rolled, trying to go down the steep far slopes as though they were grass banks. He stopped rolling and lay on his

back, and he was still on the top of the rotating compensating sphere or dome.

"I haven't had so much fun since I was a boy in an amusement park," he said.

He hadn't? Then why did he suddenly begin to tremble? Why did he begin to whistle so off-key if he wasn't scared? "Stone walls do not a pokey make nor locks a—" it was the Cross-Bar Hotel Blues he was whistling and he had to stop it.

He was locked tight in jail on a little hillock in the middle of a plain, and there was no barrier in sight. *There was no possible way he could get off the compensating dome.*

He was imprisoned in the highest most open spot on the asteroid. In an hour of cavorting and hopping about he had not got one full step from where he started, and there was no possible way that he could.

He thought about it for a full Hippodamia day and night—forty-five minutes basic time. He couldn't come up with a thing.

"If I had a rope and you had a stump," he said talking to no one, "I'd rope the stump—I'm good at that—and pull myself off this thing."

But he didn't have a rope and the plain sure didn't have a stump. It had hardly a pebble as big as his thumb.

"This is where Kalbfleish died," said Netter. "You said it right, pig man, my friend had a violent heart and it finally ruptured on him. You didn't have to murder him directly. You let him run himself to death. He was uncommonly energetic, as you said, and especially so on the day of his death. I can see it all now. He could never stand to be confined. He would have gone wild when he found himself confined in what seemed the most open space on the asteroid. He'd have run till he ruptured every thing in him. It is no wonder that he died with that look of horror."

This was a jail that nobody could break. Why try more tricks on the sphere? It could compensate for every trick that was.

"Only a creature that could fly in zero atmosphere could get off of this," he mused. "Even a worm couldn't crawl off unless he were too small to affect the compensators. If I had two cant hooks I might be able to fool the thing, but it could no doubt compensate for the resolution of forces. If I had a weight on a line I might puzzle it a little, but not much. Porkey has it made. I'll die either of starvation or exertion or insanity, but the investigation will not show that I was murdered. 'Why have two humans died of heart attack here?' is the most they can ask him, and Porkey will rub his hands and say 'Bad climate.' "

BUT what Porky Porcellus really said was:

"Fine man, why do you play like a boy on top of that thing? Is that any way for a hopeful asteroid agent to conduct himself?"

"Porcellus, you think you've trapped me, do you?" flared Netter.

"I trap you? My hands are clean. Is it my fault that two humans develop the strange mania of running themselves to death in a weird game?"

How far away was Porcellus from the edge of the dome? Too far. Too far by several yards.

"Porcellus, what is this thing?" Netter cried out.

"Once it was a beam sphere, as you have probably guessed, and it is obsolete. I have altered it to something else. Now it is an intelligence test. To fail it is to die."

"Did anyone ever get off it?" Netter called. He had to get

Porcellus interested. He had to get him to come several feet closer before he turned away.

"Only one passed the intelligence test," said the creature, "and he had unusual natural advantages. He was a peculiar fellow of the species Larrik who visited me some basic years ago. He simply broke himself into two pieces and walked off in opposite directions. The globe couldn't compensate for both of them. One got clear, obtained a line, pulled his other half off; both halves laughed at me, and then they rejoined themselves. But you haven't his advantage, Netter. You have failed the test."

"I'll find a way," swore Netter. "I'll find a trick." Just a little bit closer now would do it.

"You lose, Netter," said Porcellus. "There is no fixed thing on the plain you could tie to even if you had a way of reaching it. The longest thing you have with you is what you call the romal, and it's no longer than your arm."

Porcellus was close enough. Right at the end of the dome. When he turned it would be perfect—somewhere between thirty-two and thirty-five feet. There was no fixed thing on the plain, but there was a thing heavy enough to serve for a fixed thing. The romal of Netter was no longer than his arm, but it was a romal rey, a king romal.

Porcellus turned away in his triumph. The light-thin lariat flew and dropped over his bulk. And Netter pulled himself off the dome in less time than you can say Porky Porcellus.

The fat hulk was no match for Netter when he was on solid non-compensating ground. He hog-tied the Hog-man with the thin leather line and rolled him onto the dome. And Porcellus was immediately on the center top of the dome to stay there till he died of hunger or uncommon exertion or porcine apoplexy.

NETTER was moving things about in the fine Trophy Room which he had recently inherited. He set a fine hard wood peg into the wall and hung on it the king romal for which he now had especial affection. The king romal is so intricately braided that one moment it will be a thick quirt no longer than your arm; but unlace one keeper and it immediately becomes a thin strand lariat forty foot long counting the loop. Hardly anyone knows how to braid a romal rey nowadays.

He moved many things in the trophy room. He wanted the setting to be just right. He knew just what space it should occupy on that great wall. The investigation was over with and Netter's claim had been accepted. He was now asteroid station-master—a good job.

The head was ready. It had been cured out and tanned and treated, and the eye-tushers were polished till they gleamed.

Porcellus had a truly magnificent head!

Secret Places

The Weirdest World

I

AS I am now utterly without hope, lost to my mission and lost in the sight of my crew, I will record what petty thoughts I may have for what benefit they may give some other starfarer. Nine long days of bickering! But the decision is sure. The crew will maroon me. I have lost all control over them.

Who would have believed that I would show such weakness when crossing the barrier? By all tests I should have been the strongest. But the final test was the event itself. I failed.

I only hope that it is a pleasant and habitable planet where they put me down . . .

Later. They have decided. I am no longer the captain even in name. But they have compassion on me. They will do what they can for my comfort. I believe that they have already selected my desert island, so to speak, an out-of-the-way globe where they will leave me to die. I will hope for the best. I no longer have any voice in their councils . . .

Later. I will be put down with only the basic survival kit: the ejection mortar and sphere for my last testament to be orbited into the Galactic drift; a small cosmoscope so that I will at least have my bearings; one change of blood; an

abridged universal language correlator; a compendium of the one thousand philosophic questions yet unsolved to exercise my mind; a small vial of bug-kill.

Later. It has been selected. But my mind has grown so demoralized that I do not even recognize the system, though once this particular region was my specialty. The globe will be habitable. There will be breathable atmosphere which will allow me to dispense with much bothersome equipment. Here the filler used is nitrogen, yet it will not matter. I have breathed nitrogen before. There will be water, much of it saline, but sufficient quantities of sweet. Food will be no problem; before being marooned, I will receive injections that should last me for the rest of my probably short life. Gravity will be within the range of my constitution.

What will be lacking? Nothing, but the companionship of my own kind, which is everything.

What a terrible thing it is to be marooned!

One of my teachers used to say that the only unforgivable sin in the universe is ineptitude. That I should be the first to succumb to space-ineptitude and be an awkward burden on the rest of them! But it would be disastrous for them to try to travel any longer with a sick man, particularly as their nominal leader. I would be a shadow over them. I hold them no rancor.

It will be today . . .

Later. I am here. I have no real interest in defining where "here" is, though I have my cosmoscope and could easily determine it. I was anesthetized a few hours before, and put down here in my sleep. The blasted half-acre of their landing is near. No other trace of them is left.

Yet it is a good choice and not greatly unlike home. It is the

nearest resemblance I have seen on the entire voyage, which is to say that the pseudodendrons are enough like trees to remind me of trees, the herbage near enough to grass to satisfy one who had never known real grass. It is a green, somewhat waterlogged land of pleasant temperature.

The only inhabitants I have encountered are a preoccupied race of hump-backed browsers who pay me scant notice. They are quadruped and myopic, and spend nearly their entire time at feeding. It may be that I am invisible to them. Yet they hear my voice and shy away somewhat from it. I am able to communicate with them only poorly. Their only vocalization is a sort of vibrant windy roar, but when I answer in kind they appear more puzzled than communicative.

They have this peculiarity: when they come to an obstacle of terrain or thicket, they either go laboriously around it or force their way through it. It does not seem to occur to them to fly over it. They are as gravity-bound as a newborn baby.

What air-traveling creatures I have met are of a considerably smaller size. They are more vocal than the myopic quadrupeds, and I have had some success in conversing with them, but my results still await a more leisurely semantic interpretation. Such communications of theirs as I have analyzed are quite commonplace. They have no real philosophy and are singularly lacking in aspiration; they are almost total extroverts and have no more than the rudiments of introspection.

Yet they have managed to tell me some amusing anecdotes. They are quite good natured, though moronic.

They say that neither they nor the myopic quadrupeds are the dominant race here, but rather a large grublike creature lacking a complete outer covering. From what they are able

to convey of this breed, it is a nightmarish kind of creation. One of the flyers even told me that the giant grubs travel upright on a bifurcated tail, but that is difficult to credit. Besides, I believe that humor is at least a minor component of the mentality of my airy friends. I will call them birds, though they are but a sorry caricature of the birds at home . . .

Later. I am being hunted. I am being hunted by the giant grubs. Doubling back, I have seen them on my trail, examining it with great curiosity.

The birds had given me a very inadequate idea of these. They are indeed unfinished—they do lack a complete outer covering. Despite their giant size, I am convinced that they are grubs, living under rocks and in masses of rotten wood. Nothing in nature gives the impression of so lacking an outer covering as the grub, that obese, unfinished worm.

These are, however, simple bipeds. They are wrapped in a cocoon which they seem never to have shed, as though their emergence from the larval state were incomplete. It is a loose artificial sheath covering the central portion of the corpus. They seem unable to divest themselves of it, though it is definitely not a part of the body. When I have analyzed their minds, I will know the reason for their carrying it. Now I can only conjecture. It would seem a compulsion, some psychological bond that dooms them in their apparent adult state to carry their cocoons with them.

Later. I am captured by three of the giant grubs. I had barely time to swallow my communication sphere. They pinned me down and beat me with sticks. I was taken by surprise and was not momentarily able to solve their language, though it came to me after a short interval. It was

discordant and vocal and entirely gravity-bound, by which I mean that its thoughts were chained to its words. There seemed nothing in them above the vocal. In this the giant grubs were less than the birds, even though they had a practical power and cogency that the birds lacked.

"What'll we do with the blob?" asked one.

"Hy," said the second, "you hit it on that end and I'll hit it on this. We don't know which end is the head."

"Let's try it for bait," said the third. "Catfish might go for it."

"We could keep it alive till we're ready to use it. Then it would stay fresh."

"No, let's kill it. It doesn't look too fresh, even the way it is."

"Gentlemen, you are making a mistake," I said. "I have done nothing to merit death. And I am not without talent. Besides, you have not considered the possibility that I may be forced to kill you three instead. I will not die willingly. And I will thank you to stop pounding on me with those sticks. It hurts."

I was surprised and shocked at the sound of my own voice. It was nearly as harsh as that of the grubs. But this was my first attempt at their language, and musicality does not become it.

"Hey fellows, did you hear that? Was that the blob talking? Or was one of you playing a joke? Harry? Stanley? Have you been practicing to be ventriloquists?"

"Not me."

"Not me either. It sure sounded like it was it."

"Hey blob, was that you? Can you talk, blob?"

"Certainly I can talk," I responded. "I am not an infant.

Nor am I a blob. I am a creature superior to your own kind, if you are examples. Or it may be that you are only children. Perhaps you are still in the pupa stage. Tell me, is yours an early stage, or an arrested development, or are you indeed adult?"

"Hey fellows, we don't have to take that from any blob. I'll cave in his blasted head."

"That isn't its head, it's its tail."

"Gentlemen, perhaps I can set you straight," I said. "That is my tail you are thwacking with those sticks, and I am warning you to stop it. Of course I was talking with my tail. I was only doing it in imitation of you. I am new at the language and its manner of speaking. Yet it may be that I have made a grotesque mistake. Is that your *heads* that you are waving in the air? Well, then, I will talk with my head, if that is the custom. But I warn you again not to hit me on either end with those sticks."

"Hey, fellows, I bet we could sell that thing. I bet we could sell it to Billy Wilkins for his Reptile Farm."

"How would we get it there?"

"Make it walk. Hey blob, can you walk?"

"I can travel, certainly, but I would not stagger along precariously on a pair of flesh stilts with my head in the air, as you do. When I travel, I do not travel upside down."

"Well, let's go then. We're going to sell you to Billy Wilkins for his Reptile Farm. If he can use a blob, he'll put you in one of the tanks with the big turtles and alligators. You think you'll like them?"

"I am lonesome in this lost world," I replied sadly, "and even the company of you peeled grubs is better than nothing. I am anxious to adopt a family and settle down here for what

years of life I have left. It may be that I will find compatibility with the species you mention. I do not know what they are."

"Hey, fellows, this blob isn't a bad guy at all. I'd shake your hands, blob, if I knew where they were. Let's go to Billy Wilkins's place and sell him."

II

We traveled to Billy Wilkins's place. My friends were amazed when I took to the air and believed that I had deserted them. They had no cause to distrust me. Without them I would have had to rely on intuition to reach Billy Wilkins, and even then I would lack the proper introductions.

"Hey, Billy," said my loudest friend whose name was Cecil, "what will you give us for a blob? It flies and talks and isn't a bad fellow at all. You'd get more tourists to come to your reptile show if you had a talking blob in it. He could sing songs and tell stories, and I bet he could play the guitar."

"Well, Cecil, I'll just give you all ten dollars for it and try to figure out what it is later. I'm a little ahead on my hunches now, so I can afford to gamble on this one. I can always pickle it and exhibit it as a genuine hippopotamus kidney."

"Thank you, Billy. Take care of yourself, blob."

"Good-bye for now, gentlemen," I said. "I would like you to visit me some evening as soon as I am acclimated to my new surroundings. I will throw a whing-ding for you—as soon as I find out what a whing-ding is."

"My God," said Billy Wilkins, "it talks, it really talks!"

"We told you it could talk and fly, Billy."

"It talks, it talks," said Billy. "Where's that blasted sign painter? Eustace, come here. We got to paint a new sign."

The turtles in the tank I was put into did have a sound basic philosophy which was absent in the walking grubs. But they were slow and lacking inner fire. They would not be obnoxious company, but neither would they give me excitement and warmth. I was really more interested in the walking grubs.

Eustace was a black grub, while the others had all been white; but like them he had no outside casing of his own, and like them he also staggered about on flesh stilts with his head in the air.

It wasn't that I was naive or hadn't seen bipeds before. But I don't believe anyone ever becomes entirely accustomed to seeing a biped travel in its peculiar manner.

"Good afternoon, Eustace," I said pleasantly enough. The eyes of Eustace were large and white. He was a more handsome specimen than the other grubs.

"That you talking, bub? Say, you really can talk, can't you? I thought Mr. Billy was fooling. Now just hold that expression a minute and let me get it set in my mind. I can paint anything, once I get it set in my mind. What's your name, blob? Have blobs names?"

"Not in your manner. With us the name and the soul, I believe you call it, are the same thing and cannot be vocalized. I will have to adopt a name of your sort. What would be a good name?"

"Bub, I was always partial to George Albert Leroy Ellery. That was my grandfather's name."

"Should I also have a family name?"

"Sure."

"What would you suggest?"

"How about McIntosh?"

"That will be fine. I will use it."

I talked to the turtles while Eustace was painting my portrait on tent canvas.

"Is the name of this world Florida?" I asked one of them. "The road signs said Florida."

"World, world, world, water, water, water, glub, glug, glub," said one of them.

"Yes, but is this particular world we are on named Florida?"

"World, world, water, water, glub," said another.

"Eustace, I can get nothing from these fellows," I called. "Is this world named Florida?"

"Mr. George Albert, you are right in the middle of Florida, the greatest state in the universe."

"Having traveled, Eustace, I have great reservations that it is the greatest. But it is my new home and I must cultivate a loyalty to it."

I went up in a tree to give advice to two young birds trying to construct a nest. This was obviously their first venture.

"You are going about it all wrong," I told them. "First consider that this will be your home, and then consider how you can make your home most beautiful."

"This is the way they've always built them," said one of the birds.

"There must be an element of utility, yes," I told them. "But the dominant motif should be beauty. The impression of expanded vistas can be given by long low walls and parapets."

"This is the way they've always built them," said the other bird.

"Remember to embody all the new developments," I said. "Just say to yourself 'This is the newest nest in the world.' Always say that about any task you attempt. It inspires you."

"This is the way they've always built them," said the birds. "Go build your own nest."

"Mr. George Albert," called Eustace. "Mr. Billy won't like your flying around those trees. You're supposed to stay in your tank."

"I was only getting a little air and talking to the birds," I said.

"You can talk to the birds?" asked Eustace.

"Cannot anyone?"

"I can, a little," said Eustace. "I didn't know anyone else could."

But when Billy Wilkins returned and heard the report that I had been flying about, I was put in the snake house, in a cage that was tightly meshed top and sides. My cell mate was a surly python named Pete.

"See you stay on that side," said Pete. "You're too big for me to swallow. But I might try."

"There is something bothering you, Pete," I said. "You have a bad disposition. That can come only from bad digestion or a bad conscience."

"I have both," said Pete. "The first because I bolt my food. The second is because—well I forget the reason, but it's my conscience."

"Think hard, Pete," I said, "why have you a bad conscience?"

"Snakes always have bad consciences. We have forgotten the crime, but we remember the guilt."

"Perhaps you should seek advice from someone, Pete."

"I kind of think it was someone's smooth advice that started us on all this. He talked the legs right off us."

Billy Wilkins came to the cage with another "man" as walking grubs call themselves.

"That it?" asked the other man. "And you say it can talk?"

"Of course I can talk," I answered for Billy Wilkins. "I have never known a creature who couldn't talk in some manner. My name is George Albert Leroy Ellery McIntosh. I don't believe that I heard yours, sir."

"Bracken. Blackjack Bracken. I was telling Billy here that if he really had a blob that could talk, that I might be able to use it in my night club. We could have you here at the Snake Ranch in the daytime for the tourists and kids. Then I could have you at the club at night. We could work out an act. Do you think you could learn to play the guitar?"

"Probably. But it would be much easier for me merely to duplicate the sound."

"But then how could you sing and make guitar noises at the same time?"

"You surely don't think that I am limited to one voice box?"

"Oh, I didn't know. What's that big metal ball you have there?"

"That's my communication sphere to record my thoughts. I would not be without it. When in danger, I swallow it. When in extreme danger, I will have to escape to a spot where I have concealed my ejection mortar, and send my sphere into the Galactic drift on a chance that it may be found."

"That's no kind of gag to put in an act. What I have in mind is something like this."

Blackjack Bracken told a joke. It was a childish one and in poor taste.

"I don't believe that is quite my style," I said.

"All right, what would you suggest?"

"I thought that I might lecture your patrons on the higher ethic."

"Look, George Albert, my patrons don't even have the lower ethic."

"And just what sort of recompense are we talking about?" I asked.

"Billy and I had about settled on a hundred and fifty a week."

"A hundred and fifty for whom?"

"Why, for Billy."

"I say a hundred and fifty for myself, and ten percent for Billy as my agent."

"Say, this blob's real smart, isn't he, Billy?"

"Too smart."

"Yes sir, George Albert, you're one smart blob. What kind of contract have you signed with Billy here?"

"No contract."

"Just a gentlemen's agreement?"

"No agreement."

"Billy, you can't hold him in a cage without a contract. That's slavery. It's against the law."

"But, Blackjack, a blob isn't people."

"Try proving that in court. Will you sign a contract with me, George Albert?"

"I will not dump Billy. He befriended me and gave me a home with the turtles and snakes. I will sign a joint contract with the two of you. We will discuss terms tomorrow—after I have estimated the attendance both here and at the night club."

III

Of the walking grubs (who call themselves "people") there are two kinds, and they place great emphasis on the difference. From this stems a large part of their difficulties. This distinction, which is one of polarity, cuts quite across the years and ability and station of life. It is not confined only to the people, but also involves apparently all the beings on the planet Florida.

It appears that a person is committed to one or the other polarity at the beginning of life, maintaining that polarity until death. The interlocking attraction-repulsion complex set up by these two opposable types has deep emotional involvements. It is the cause of considerable concern and disturbance, as well as desire and inspiration. There is a sort of poetic penumbra about the whole thing that tends to disguise its basic simplicity, expressible as a simultaneous polarity equation.

Complete segregation of the two types seems impossible. If it has ever been tried, it has now been abandoned as impractical.

There is indeed an intangible difference between the two types, so that before that first day at the Reptile Ranch was

finished, I was able to differentiate between the two more than ninety percent of the time. The knowledge of this difference in polarity seems to be intuitive.

These two I will call the Beta and Gamma, or Boy and Girl types. I began to see that this opposability of the two types was one of the great driving forces of the people.

In the evening I was transported to the night club and I was a success. I would not entertain them with blue jokes or blue lyrics, but the patrons seemed fascinated by my simple imitations of all the instruments of the orchestra and my singing of comic ballads that Eustace had taught me in odd moments that day. They were also interested in the way that I drank gin, that is emptying the bottle without breaking the seal. (It seems that the grub-people are unable to absorb a liquid without making direct contact with it.)

And I met Margaret, one of the "girl" singers. I had been wondering to which type of people I might show affinity. Now I knew. I was definitely a Beta type, for I was attracted to Margaret, who was unmistakably a Gamma. I began to understand the queer effect that these types have on each other.

She came over to my cage.

"I want to rub your head for luck before I go on," she said.

"Thank you, Margaret," I replied, "but that is not my head."

She sang with incomparable sadness, with all the sorrow and sordidness that appear to be the lot of the unfortunate Gammas. It was the essence of melancholy made into music. It was a little bit like the ghost music of the asteroid Artemis, a little like the death chants on Dolmena. Sex and sorrow. Nostalgia. Regret.

Her singing shook me with a yearning that had no precedent.

She came back to my cage.

"You were wonderful, Margaret," I said.

"I'm always wonderful when I'm singing for my supper. I am less wonderful in the rare times when I am well fed. But are you happy, little buddy?"

"I had become almost so, till I heard you sing. Now I am overcome with a sorrow and longing. Margaret, I am fascinated with you."

"I go for you too, blob. You're my buddy. Isn't it funny that the only buddy I have in the world is a blob. But if you'd seen some of the guys I've been married to—boy! I wouldn't insult you by calling them blobs. Have to go now. See you tomorrow night if they keep us both on."

NOW there was a problem to face. It was necessary that I establish control over my environment, and at once. How else could I aspire to Margaret?

I knew that the heart of the entire place here was neither the bar nor the entertainment therein, nor the cuisine, nor the dancing. The heart of the enterprise was the casino. Here was the money that mattered; the rest was but garnish.

I had them bring me into the gambling rooms.

I had expected problems of complexity here where the patrons worked for their gain or loss. Instead there was an almost amazing simplicity. All the games were based on a

system of first aspect numbers. Indeed everything on the Planet Florida seemed based on first aspect numbers.

Now it is an elemental fact that first aspect numbers do not carry within them their own prediction. Nor were the people even possessed of the prediction key that lies over the very threshold of the second aspect series.

These people were actually wagering sums—the symbols of prosperity—blindly, not knowing for sure whether they would win or lose. They were selecting numbers by hunch or at random with no assurance of profit. They were choosing a hole for a ball to fall into without knowing whether that was the right hole.

I do not believe that I was ever so amazed at anything in my life.

But here was an opportunity to establish control over my environment.

I began to play the games. Usually I would watch a round first, to be sure that I understood just what was going on. Then I would play a few times . . . as many as it took to break the game.

I broke game after game. When he could no longer pay me, Blackjack closed the casino in exasperation.

Then we played poker, he and I and several others. This was even more simple. I suddenly realized that the grub-people could see only one side of the cards at a time.

I played and won.

I owned the casino now, and all of those people were now working for me. Billy Wilkins also played with us, and in short order I also owned the Reptile Ranch.

Before the evening was over, I owned a race-track, a beach hotel, and a theatre in a place named New York.

I had, in sufficient extent for my purpose, established control over my environment . . .

LATER. Now started the golden days. I increased my control and did what I could for my friends.

I got a good doctor for my old friend and roommate, Pete the python, and he was now receiving treatment for his indigestion. I got a jazzy sports car for my friend Eustace imported from somewhere called Italy. And I buried Margaret in mink, for she had a fix on the fur of that mysterious animal. She enjoyed draping it about her in the form of coats, capes, cloaks, mantles, and stoles, though the weather didn't really require it.

I had now won several banks, a railroad, an airline, and a casino in somewhere named Havana.

"You are somebody now," said Margaret. "You really ought to dress better. Or are you dressed? I never know. I don't know if part of that is clothes or if all of it is you. But at least I've learned which is your head. I think we should be married in May. It's so common to be married in June. Just imagine me being Mrs. George Albert Leroy Ellery McIntosh! You know, we have become quite an item. And do you know there are three biographies of you out, *Burgeoning Blob; The Blob from Way Out; The Hidden Hand Behind the Blob, What Does It Portend?* And the Governor has invited us to dine tomorrow. I do wish you would learn to eat. If you weren't so nice, you'd be creepy. I always say there's nothing wrong with marrying a man, or a blob, with money. It shows

foresight on the part of a girl. You know you will have to get a blood test? You had better get it tomorrow. You do have blood, don't you?"

I did, but not, of course, of the color and viscosity of hers. But I could give it that color and viscosity temporarily. And it would react negative in all the tests.

She mused, "They are all jealous of me. They say they wouldn't marry a blob. They mean they couldn't. Do you have to carry that tin ball with you all the time?"

"Yes. It is my communication sphere. In it I record my thoughts. I would be lost without it."

"Oh, like a diary. How quaint."

Yes, those were the golden days. The grubs now appeared to me in a new light, for was not Margaret also a grub? Yet she seemed not so unfinished as the rest. Though lacking a natural outer covering, yet she had not the appearance of crawling out from under a rock. She was quite an attractive "girl." And she cared for me.

What more could I wish? I was affluent. I was respected. I was in control of my environment. And I could aid my friends of whom I had now acquired an astonishing number.

Moreover my old space-ineptitude sickness had left me. I never felt better in my life. Ah, golden days, one after the other like a pleasant dream. And soon I am to be married.

IV

There has been a sudden change. As on the Planet Hecube, where full summer turns into the dead of winter in minutes,

to the destruction of many travelers, so was it here. My world is threatened!

It is tottering, all that I have built up. I will fight. I will fight. I will have the best lawyers on the planet. I am not done. But I am threatened . . .

Later. This may be the end. The appeal court has given its decision. A blob may not own property in Florida. A blob is not a person.

Of course I am not a person. I never pretended to be. But I am a *personage.* I will yet fight this thing . . .

Later. I have lost everything. The last appeal is gone. By definition I am an animal of indeterminate origin, and my property is being completely stripped from me.

I made an eloquent appeal—and it moved them greatly. There were tears in their eyes. But there was greed in the set of their mouths. They have a vested interest in stripping me. Each will seize a little.

And I am left a pauper, a vassal, an animal, a slave. This is always the last doom of the marooned, to be a despised alien at the mercy of a strange world.

Yet it should not be hopeless. I will have Margaret. Since my contract with Billy Wilkins and Blackjack Bracken, long since bought up, is no longer in effect, Margaret should be able to handle my affairs as a person. I believe that I have great earning powers yet, and I can win as much as I wish by gambling. We will treat this as only a technicality. We shall acquire new fortune. I will re-establish control over my environment. I will bring back the golden days. A few of my old friends are still loyal to me, Margaret, Pete the python, Eustace . . .

Later. The world has caved in completely. Margaret has thrown me over.

"I'm sorry, blobby," she said, "but it just won't work. You're still nice, but without money you are only a blob. How would I marry a blob?"

"But we can earn more money. I am talented."

"No, you're box-office poison now. You were a fad, and fads die quickly."

"But Margaret, I can win as much as I wish by gambling."

"Not a chance, blobby. Nobody will gamble with you any more. You're through, blob. I will miss you, though. There will be a new blue note in my ballads when I sing for my supper, after the mink coats are all gone. Bye now."

"Margaret, do not leave me. What of all our golden days together?"

But all she said was "bye now."

And she was gone forever.

I AM desolate and my old space-ineptitude sickness has returned. My recovery was an illusion. I am so ill with awkwardness that I can no longer fly. I must crawl on the ground like one of the giant grubs. A curse on this planet Florida, and all its sister orbs! What a miserable world this is!

How could I have been taken in by a young Gamma type of the walking grub? Let her crawl back under her ancestral rocks with all the rest of her kind . . . No, no, I do not mean that. To me she will always remain a dream, a broken dream.

I am no longer welcome at the casino. They kicked me down the front steps.

I no longer have a home at the Reptile Ranch.

"Mr. George Albert," said Eustace, "I just can't afford to be seen with you any more. I have my position to consider, with a sport car and all that."

And Pete the python was curt.

"Well, big shot, I guess you aren't so big after all. And you were sure no friend of mine. When you had that doctor cure me of my indigestion, you left me with nothing but my bad conscience. I wish I could get my indigestion back."

"A curse on this world," I said.

"World, world, water, water, glug, glug," said the turtles in their tanks, my only friends.

So I have gone back into the woods to die. I have located my ejection mortar, and when I know that death is finally on me, I will fire off my communication sphere and hope it will reach the Galactic drift. Whoever finds it—friend, space traveler, you who were too impatient to remain on your own world—be you warned of this one! Here ingratitude is the rule and cruelty the main sport. The unfinished grubs have come out from under their rocks and they walk this world upside down with their heads in the air. Their friendship is fleeting, their promises are like the wind.

I am near my end.

Mean Men

The Ultimate Creature

I

THE old Galaxy maps (imitating early Earth maps, partly in humor and partly through intuition) pictured strong creatures in the far arms of the system—Serpents bigger than Spaceships, Ganymede-type Tigers, fish-tailed Maids, grand Dolphins, and Island-sized Androids. We think particularly of the wry masterpieces of Grobin. And at the end of the Far or Seventh arm of the Galaxy is shown the Ultimate Creature.

The Ultimate Creature had the form of a Woman, and it bore three signs in Chaldee: The Sign of Treasure; the Sign of the *Fish Mashur* (the queerest fish of them all); and the Sign of Restitution or of Floating Justice.

Floating Justice is the ethical equivalent of the Isostasis of the Geologists. It states in principle that every unbalance will be brought into new balance, sometimes gently, sometimes as by planet-quake; that the most submerged may be elevated, by a great sundering of strata, to the highest point, if such is required for compensation. And there is a final tenet of this Floating Justice, that some day, somewhere, the meanest man of all the worlds will possess the ultimate treasure of the worlds. Without this promise, the worlds would be out of balance forever.

THE MEANEST man of all the worlds was Peter Feeney—a low-down sniveler, a weak man. In one thing only he was exceptional—he had the finest eye for beauty in a woman of any man anywhere: this, though of all men he was the least successful with women. His purity of appraisal was not dulled by close contact or possession. His judgments of beauty were sound and uncompromised, though sometimes bitter.

And really, how many beautiful women are there in the Universe?

Six.

Only six? Are you sure? All that noise has been about only six of them?

PETER FEENEY was sure. His rapid eyes—the only rapid things about him—had scanned millions of women in his random travels. And only six of the women could be called beautiful.

There was the lady on Mellionella, seen only once in a crowd, followed and lost, and never seen again in a year's search.

There was the girl in a small town on East Continent of Hokey Planet. About this girl there was something that caused agony to Peter: he had heard her speak; she spoke like a girl in a small town on East Continent of Hokey Planet. He prayed that she might be struck dumb; knowing that it was an evil prayer, knowing that she was one of the really beautiful ones, whatever the sound of her.

There was the girl of shallow virtue on Leucite. She was perfect. What else can you say after that?

There was the mother of six on Camiroi—no longer young, of

no particular repose or station or ease, hurried, impatient, and quite likely the most beautiful woman who ever lived.

On Trader Planet there was a young Jewess of bewildering kindness and frankness and of inextricably entangled life.

In San Juan, on old Earth, there was a fine creature who combined the three main ethnic strains of old mankind. Peter made a second journey there to see her; after first vision and departure he had not been able to believe what he had seen.

Six in all the worlds? Somehow there should have been more beautiful women than that.

Then Peter saw Teresa.

And she made the seventh?

No. She made the first. The six faded. There was only one. The most beautiful woman ever, in the farthest arm of the Galaxy—the Ultimate Creature.

II

This was on Groll's Planet. To get there, said the agent in Electrum, you go to the end of the Galaxy, and turn left. It was a shabby little world in the boondocks that are beyond the boondocks, and only shabby people came there.

Peter Feeney was a salesman of a Universe-wide product. He wasn't a good salesman. He was shuffled off to poorer and poorer territories. Now he had fallen to the poorest territory of all.

And on that day on Groll's Planet, he heard a sound as though a swish of silk had passed over him, a thread, a mesh. It was the invisible net.

"Oh how strange are the Fish of Far Ocean!" an ancient poet exclaimed.

Peter had seen Teresa, and it was all over with him.

Peter was eating that day by peculiar arrangement. It was the smallest of the towns of Groll's Planet and there was no public eating place there. But a Grollian man raked clean sand and set a mat for Peter to sit on, and served him a meal there on a crate or box. The man also gave him coffee—good coffee, but not like the coffee you know.

It was very like a sidewalk-café. It was in the way where people came and went, though not properly a sidewalk. Teresa came and sat down opposite Peter on the raked sand.

"*Hari bagus*," Peter said, which is all the words that a man needs to get along in the Grollian language.

"*Bagus*," said Teresa. And that is all that they said to each other that day.

Peter finished his meal and attempted to light a cigar. The cigars of that world are not factory made. They are rolled by hand of an oblong leaf for the filler and a triangular leaf for the wrapper. Often they will keep their form for an hour or more, but Peter had made his cigar badly and it was not stable.

Now it exploded into an unmanageable disarray of leaves and pieces, and Peter was unable to cope with it. Teresa took the pieces and rolled and folded them into a green cylinder that was sheer art. She licked it with the most beautiful tongue in the world and gave the reconstituted cigar to Peter.

Then it was luxurious to sit there in the green shade and smoke opposite the most beautiful woman ever. When he had finished, Peter rose awkwardly and left. But he was pleased.

He watched from a distance. Teresa with quick competence ate up all that he had left. "She was very hungry," Peter said, and admired her quickness about things. She rose with flowing grace, retrieved the smoldering remnants of Peter's cigar, and went

toward the beach, trailing smoke from the green-leaf stogie and moving like a queen.

THE next day Peter again sat on the mat on the raked sand and ate the food that the Grollian man sold him. Once more he felt the swish of the invisible net over him, and again Teresa sat opposite him on the sand.

"*A senhora tem grande beleze*," said Peter, which is all the words that a man needs to get along in the Galactic Brazilian language.

"*Noa em nossos dias*," said Teresa, "*porem outrora.*" And that is all that they said to each other that day.

But he had told her that she was beautiful. And she had answered: No, she was not so now, but in a former time she had been.

WHEN he had finished the meal and pulled the cigar from his pocket he was pleased when it exploded into its constituent parts. Teresa rescued it, reassembled it, and licked it. Her tongue had a tripart curve in it, more extensible, more flexible, more beautiful than other tongues. Then Peter rose and left as he had the day before. And again Teresa cleaned up the remnants—ravenously and beautifully. He watched her till she finally went toward the beach haloed in blue smoke from the stub of the cigar.

Peter wrote up an order that day. It was not a good order, not

sufficient to pay expenses, but something. Groll's Planet had acquired a glow for him, just as if it was a good order he had written up.

ON the third day, Peter again sat on the mat that was very like a sidewalk-café, and Teresa was opposite him. Peter told the Grollian man that he should also bring food for the woman. He brought it, but angrily.

"You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," said Peter, which is all the words that a man needs to get along in the English language.

"I have told you that I am not now beautiful, but that once I was," Teresa told him. "Through the grace of God, I may again regain my lost beauty."

"How is it that you know English?"

"I was the school-teach."

"And now?"

"Now it goes bad for our world. There is no longer schools. I am nothing."

"What are you, girl? Old human? Groll's Troll? That isn't possible. What?"

"Who can say? A book-man has said that the biology of our planet goes from the odd to the incredible. Was that not nice thing to say about us? My father was old human, a traveling man, a bum."

"And your mother?"

"A queer fish, mama. Of this world, though."

"And you were once even more beautiful than you are now, Teresa? How could you have looked?"

"How I looked then? As in English—Wow!—a colloquialism."

"To me you are perfect."

"No. I am a poor wasted bird now. But once I was beautiful."

"There must be some livelihood for you. What did your father do?"

"Outside of bum, he was fisherman."

"Then why do you not fish?"

"In my own way, I fish."

Peter heard again the swish of the invisible net, but he was very willing to be taken by it. After this, things went famously between them.

But two days later there came a shame to Peter. He and Teresa were sitting and eating together on the mat, and the Grollian man came out.

"Are you near finished?" he asked Peter.

"Yes, I am near finished. Why do you ask?"

"Are you finished with the fork yet?"

"No, not quite finished with it."

"I must have the fork," the Grollian man said. "There is another human man here, of the better sort. I must have the fork for him to eat with."

"Have you but one?"

"Am I a millionaire that I should have a multiplicity of forks in my house? He is a man with an important look, and I will not have him wait."

"This is humiliating," said Peter.

"I don't know what that is. I want my fork."

Peter gave the fork back to the Grollian man, and that man took

it in and set it before the human man of the better sort as a sign of the modernity of his house.

"Were I not the meanest and weakest of men, he would not have abused me so," Peter said.

"Do you not feel it at all," Teresa said. "Somebody has to be the meanest and the weakest. The worlds are full of humiliating things. This brings us close together."

This would have to be the final day for Peter Feeney on Groll's Planet. He had already garnered all the insufficient orders possible for his product. He walked with Teresa and said the difficult things.

"When you have caught one, Teresa, you must do something with it. Even turn it loose if you do not mean to keep it."

"Do you want I should turn you loose, Peter?"

"No. I want you to go with me on the ship when it goes tonight."

"There is only one way I will go."

"I have never thought of any other way."

"You will never have cause to be ashamed of me, Peter. I can dress, where I have the means for it. I can play the lady, I understand how it is done. I have even learned to walk in shoes. Were we in some more lucky place, it might be that I would regain my beauty. It is the grinding hard times that took it from me. I could change your luck. I have the languages, and the sense of things, and I am much more intelligent than you are. With me, you could attain a degree of success in even your miserable trade. It can be a good life we make."

There is a sound when the invisible net is cast over one. There is another sound when it is pulled in—the faint clicking of the floats, the tugging whisper of the weights, the squeaking of the lines when pulled taut. Teresa was a fisherman's daughter, and she

knew how to do it. The Peter-fish was not a large nor a fat one, but she knew that he was the best she could take in these waters.

THEY were married. They left in the ship for a happier place, a better planet in a more amenable location where Teresa might regain her lost beauty.

Floating Justice was achieved. All inequities were compensated. The meanest and weakest man in the universe now possessed the Ultimate Treasure of the universe.

Naturally they were happy. And naturally their happiness endured.

"There wasn't a catch to it?" you ask out of a crooked face. "There is always a catch to it. It always goes sour at the end."

No. There was not a catch to it. It was perfect, and forever. It is only in perverted fables that things go wrong at the end.

They grew in understanding of each other, received the glad news of coming progeny, waxed (by former standards) in wealth, and were no longer mean and inconsequential. Only one man can be married to the most beautiful woman in the universe, and it passes all understanding that that one man should be Peter Feeney.

This was perfection. It wasn't just that Teresa had regained her "former beauty" and now weighed well over two hundred pounds. Peter liked that part of it.

But is it possible for perfection to become too perfect?

III

For this *was* perfection. They lived on a kindred but larger and better world, one of richer resources and even more varied biology. They had a love so many-sided and deep that there is no accounting for it, and children so rare and different!

Floating Justice *had* been achieved. The least man in all the worlds *did* possess the Ultimate Creature. The balance was consummated. But Floating Justice had a grin on his face; there is something a little fishy about anything, even justice, that floats. You understand that there wasn't really a catch to this, nor any deficiency. It was rather a richness almost beyond handling. It was still better for Peter Feeney than for anyone else anywhere. That must be understood.

BUT, for all that, there was a small adjustment after the great compensation; a proportion must be re-established in all things, even happiness. It was the joke that the old Interior Ocean always cast up, and it must be taken in the salty humor that is intended.

Children so rare and so different—and so many of them! No couple was ever so blessed as were Peter and Teresa with a rich variety of children. Some of them were playing and leaping in the hills and rocks behind Peter, and some of them were sporting in the Ocean before him.

Peter whistled some of these sea children up now as he pondered things in the marina. Some of them broke water, splashed, and waved to him. So many of the kids there were, and such good ones!

"Whistle about four of them to come in for dinner!" Teresa called, and Peter did so. It had been an odd business about the children, not unpleasant certainly, but not what he had expected either. And even yet, every possibility was still open to them.

"I'd like to have a people-kid sometime," Teresa said. "After all, mama had me. A people kid have fun playing with the fish kids, and they like him, too. And he could climb in the rocks with the Groll's Trolls. He would sort of knit our family together. You think about it, Peter, and I think about it too, and we see what we come up with at the next milting time."

PETER FEENEY gazed out at his children in the pools of the sea, and at his other sort of children climbing in the rocks, and he felt an uneasy pride in them all. One comes quickly to love Fish Kids and Groll's Trolls when they are the product of one's own loins. There was ever hope, there would ever be hope to the last, of children of Peter's own kind. But he loved his present progeny not the less for it. The four kids that he had whistled in came now.

"Oh, four such pretty kids of ours!" Teresa said. "Fry them, Peter."

And Peter took the pretty fish kids that came from the water and began to fix them for the pan.

This had taken the longest to get used to. But when you have so many of them—more than ten thousand, and more coming all the time—and when they are so good; and when, moreover, they are already flesh of your flesh.

Peter Feeney fixed the fish kids for the pan. And out of his fullness and mingled emotions, salt tears rolled down his shining face to the salt sea.