A FOUR SQUARE BOOK

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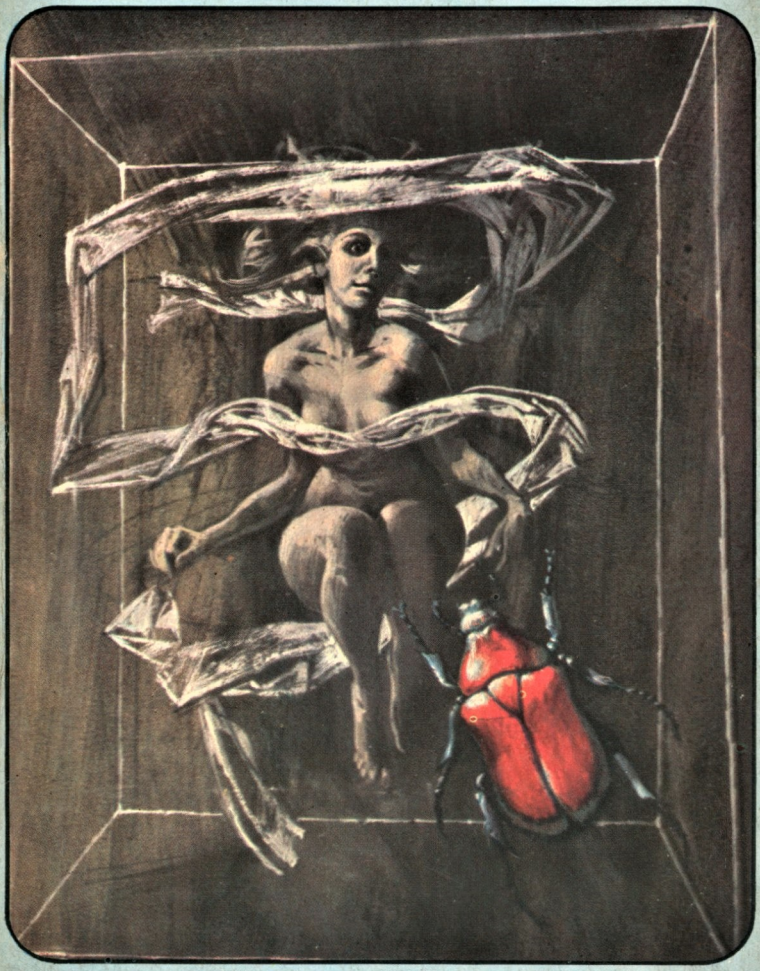
OUT OF TIME

GEORGE LANGELAAN



PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE.
DOES IT HAVE TO BE THAT ORDER?

OUT OF TIME

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GEORGE LANGELAAN

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First published in Great Britain by The New English Library Ltd. in 1964

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Four Square Books are published by The New English Library Limited from Barnard's Inn, Holborn, London EC1. They are made and printed in Great Britain by Love and Malcomson Ltd., Redhill, Surrey

PREFACE

HORROR IS A FORM OF FEAR, therefore of ignorance. Cutting up a live person with a fret-saw, a blow-torch, or a pair of nail scissors is not sheer horror for a surgeon, though it would be for most other people... at first. In time, known and explained horror wanes to disgust, more or less nauseating.

Real horror, paralysing horror is that untold. Edgar Allan Poe's *Berenice* is a good example. The idea of horror is planted in the mind of the reader, who suddenly finds himself alone with it. The horror is here of such quality that even a surgeon might well *enjoy* it, though a pathologist might merely qualify it as "mucky".

Time is for me one of the best elements of horror, not only because we know so little about it but because it is nothing and everything. We have, so far, only measured it in a miserable sort of way, cutting up minute fractions of it into days and hours, that seem endless to youth and so short for elderly people. But we are beginning to discover that time is something more than real, something tangible and even solid. In it, scientists can already begin to "feel" the past and the future; in time and space they are discovering time cells, or time in time. For the insect that lives a few minutes, we are eternal, but for a range of mountains, we flit about so rapidly that we do not really exist.

Everything that has ever happened and everything that will happen is in that one single blob of TIME. That is real horror.

GEORGE LANGELAAN

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GEORGE LANGELAAN was born of English parents in Paris and for twenty years moved thirty-one times, travelling between London and Paris. He finished his education in the United States and worked on a small paper in the Middle West. He covered the Spanish civil war for the *New York Times* and joined up in Paris as a gunner when the second world war broke out, parachuting into France at night. After the war he went back to newspaper work and has written stories published in France and the United States. His outstanding short story THE FLY was described by Ray Russell as "One of the most suspenseful pieces of horror science fiction I have ever read", and so impressed were executives at Twentieth Century Fox that they produced a highly successful film from it.

He now lives permanently in Paris with his French wife, their son and grandson.

THE FLY

To Jean Rostand, who knows such strange things.

Telephones and telephone bells have always made me uneasy. Years ago, when they were mostly wall fixtures, I disliked them, but nowadays, when they are planted in every nook and corner, they are a downright intrusion. We have a saying in France that a coalman is master in his own house; with the telephone that is no longer true, and I suspect that even the Englishman is no longer king in his own castle.

At the office, the sudden ringing of the telephone annoys me. It means that, no matter what I am doing, in spite of the switchboard operator, in spite of my secretary, in spite of doors and walls, some unknown person is coming into the room and onto my desk to talk right into my very ear, confidentially—and that whether I like it or not. At home, the feeling is still more disagreeable, but the worst is when the telephone rings in the dead of night. If anyone could see me turn on the light and get up blinking to answer it, I suppose I would look like any other sleepy man annoyed at being disturbed. The truth in such a case, however, is that I am struggling against panic, fighting down a feeling that a stranger has broken into the house and is in my bedroom. By the time I manage to grab the receiver and say: *"Ici Monsieur Delambre. Je vous ecoute,"* I am outwardly calm, but I only get back to a more normal state when I recognize the voice at the other end and when I know what is wanted of me.

This effort at dominating a purely animal reaction and fear had become so effective that when my sister-in-law called me at two in the morning, asking me to come over, but first to warn the police that she had just killed my

brother, I quietly asked her how and why she had killed André.

"But, François! . . . I can't explain all that over the telephone. Please call the police and come quickly."

"Maybe I had better see you first, Hélène?"

"No, you'd better call the police first; otherwise they will start asking you all sorts of awkward questions. They'll have enough trouble as it is to believe that I did it alone. . . . And, by the way, I suppose you ought to tell them that André . . . André's body, is down at the factory. They may want to go there first."

"Did you say that André is at the factory?"

"Yes . . . under the steam-hammer."

"Under the what!"

"The steam-hammer! But don't ask so many questions. Please come quickly, François! Please understand that I'm afraid . . . that my nerves won't stand it much longer!"

Have you ever tried to explain to a sleepy police officer that your sister-in-law has just phoned to say that she has killed your brother with a steam-hammer? I repeated my explanation, but he would not let me.

"*Oui, Monsieur, oui,* I hear . . . but who are you? What is your name? Where do you live? I said, where do you live!"

It was then that Commissaire Charas took over the line and the whole business. He at least seemed to understand everything. Would I wait for him? Yes, he would pick me up and take me over to my brother's house. When? In five or ten minutes.

I had just managed to pull on my trousers, wriggle into a sweater and grab a hat and coat, when a black Citroën, headlights blazing, pulled up at the door.

"I assume you have a night watchman at your factory, Monsieur Delambre. Has he called you?" asked Commissaire Charas, letting in the clutch as I sat down beside him and slammed the door of the car.

"No, he hasn't. Though of course my brother could have entered the factory through his laboratory where he often works late at night . . . all night sometimes."

"Is Professor Delambre's work connected with your business?"

"No, my brother is, or was, doing research work for the Ministère de l'Air. As he wanted to be away from Paris and yet within reach of where skilled workmen could fix up or make gadgets big and small for his experiments, I offered him one of the old workshops of the factory and he came to live in the first house built by our grandfather on the top of the hill at the back of the factory."

"Yes, I see. Did he talk about his work? What sort of research work?"

"He rarely talked about it, you know; I suppose the Air Ministry could tell you. I only know that he was about to carry out a number of experiments he had been preparing for some months, something to do with the disintegration of matter, he told me."

Barely slowing down, the Commissaire swung the car off the road, slid it through the open factory gate and pulled up sharp by a policeman apparently expecting him.

I did not need to hear the policeman's confirmation. I knew now that my brother was dead, it seemed that I had been told years ago. Shaking like a leaf, I scrambled out after the Commissaire.

Another policeman stepped out of a doorway and led us toward one of the shops where all the lights had been turned on. More policemen were standing by the hammer, watching two men setting up a camera. It was tilted downward, and I made an effort to look.

It was far less horrid than I had expected. Though I had never seen my brother drunk, he looked just as if he were sleeping off a terrific binge, flat on his stomach across the narrow line on which the white-hot slabs of metal were rolled up to the hammer. I saw at a glance that his head and arm could only be a flattened mess, but that seemed quite impossible; it looked as if he had somehow pushed his head and arm right into the metallic mass of the hammer.

Having talked to his colleagues, the Commissaire turned toward me:

"How can we raise the hammer, Monsieur Delambre?"

"I'll raise it for you."

"Would you like us to get one of your men over?"

"No, I'll be all right. Look, here is the switchboard. It

was originally a steam-hammer, but everything is worked electrically here now. Look, Commissaire, the hammer has been set at fifty tons and its impact at zero."

"At zero . . . ?"

"Yes, level with the ground if you prefer. It is also set for single strokes, which means that it has to be raised after each blow. I don't know what Hélène, my sister-in-law, will have to say about all this, but one thing I am sure of: she certainly did not know how to set and operate the hammer."

"Perhaps it was set that way last night when work stopped?"

"Certainly not. The drop is never set at zero, Monsieur le Commissaire."

"I see. Can it be raised gently?"

"No. The speed of the upstroke cannot be regulated. But in any case it is not very fast when the hammer is set for single strokes."

"Right. Will you show me what to do? It won't be very nice to watch, you know."

"No, no, Monsieur le Commissaire. I'll be all right."

"All set?" asked the Commissaire of the others. "All right then, Monsieur Delambre. Whenever you like."

Watching my brother's back, I slowly but firmly pushed the upstroke button.

The unusual silence of the factory was broken by the sigh of compressed air rushing into the cylinders, a sigh that always makes me think of a giant taking a deep breath before solemnly socking another giant, and the steel mass of the hammer shuddered and then rose swiftly. I also heard the sucking sound as it left the metal base and thought I was going to panic when I saw André's body heave forward as a sickly gush of blood poured all over the ghastly mess bared by the hammer.

"No danger of it coming down again, Monsieur Delambre?"

"No, none whatever," I mumbled as I threw the safety switch and, turning around, I was violently sick in front of a young green-faced policeman.

For weeks after, Commissaire Charas worked on the

case, listening, questioning, running all over the place, making out reports, telegraphing and telephoning right and left. Later, we became quite friendly and he owned that he had for a long time considered me as suspect number one, but had finally given up that idea because, not only was there no clue of any sort, but not even a motive.

Hélène, my sister-in-law, was so calm throughout the whole business that the doctors finally confirmed what I had long considered the only possible solution: that she was mad. That being the case, there was of course no trial.

My brother's wife never tried to defend herself in any way and even got quite annoyed when she realized that people thought her mad, and this of course was considered proof that she was indeed mad. She owned up to the murder of her husband and proved easily that she knew how to handle the hammer; but she would never say why, exactly how, or under what circumstances she had killed my brother. The great mystery was how and why had my brother so obligingly stuck his head under the hammer, the only possible explanation for his part in the drama.

The night watchman had heard the hammer all right; he had even heard it twice, he claimed. This was very strange, and the stroke-counter which was always set back to naught after a job, seemed to prove him right, since it marked the figure two. Also, the foreman in charge of the hammer confirmed that after cleaning up the day before the murder, he had as usual turned the stroke-counter back to naught. In spite of this, Hélène maintained that she had only used the hammer once, and this seemed just another proof of her insanity.

Commissaire Charas who had been put in charge of the case at first wondered if the victim were really my brother. But of that there was no possible doubt, if only because of the great scar running from his knee to his thigh, the result of a shell that had landed within a few feet of him during the retreat in 1940; and there were also the fingerprints of his left hand which corresponded to those found all over his laboratory and his personal belongings up at the house.

A guard had been put on his laboratory and the next

day half a dozen officials came down from the Air Ministry. They went through all his papers and took away some of his instruments, but before leaving, they told the Commissaire that the most interesting documents and instruments had been destroyed.

The Lyons police laboratory, one of the most famous in the world, reported that André's head had been wrapped up in a piece of velvet when it was crushed by the hammer, and one day Commissaire Charas showed me a tattered drapery which I immediately recognized as the brown velvet cloth I had seen on a table in my brother's laboratory, the one on which his meals were served when he could not leave his work.

After only a very few days in prison, Hélène had been transferred to a near-by asylum, one of the three in France where insane criminals are taken care of. My nephew Henri, a boy of six, the very image of his father, was entrusted to me, and eventually all legal arrangements were made for me to become his guardian and tutor.

Hélène, one of the quietest patients of the asylum, was allowed visitors and I went to see her on Sundays. Once or twice the Commissaire had accompanied me and, later, I learned that he had also visited Hélène alone. But we were never able to obtain any information from my sister-in-law who seemed to have become utterly indifferent. She rarely answered my questions and hardly ever those of the Commissaire. She spent a lot of her time sewing, but her favourite pastime seemed to be catching flies which she invariably released unharmed after having examined them carefully.

Hélène only had one fit of raving—more like a nervous breakdown than a fit said the doctor who had administered morphia to quieten her—the day she saw a nurse swatting flies.

The day after Hélène's one and only fit, Commissaire Charas came to see me.

"I have a strange feeling that there lies the key to the whole business, Monsieur Delambre," he said.

I did not ask him how it was that he already knew all about Hélène's fit.

"I do not follow you, Commissaire. Poor Madame

Delambre could have shown an exceptional interest for anything else, really. Don't you think that flies just happen to be the border-subject of her tendency to raving?"

"Do you believe she is really mad?" he asked.

"My dear Commissaire, I don't see how there can be any doubt. Do you doubt it?"

"I don't know. In spite of all the doctors say, I have the impression that Madame Delambre has a very clear brain . . . even when catching flies."

"Supposing you were right, how would you explain her attitude with regard to her little boy? She never seems to consider him as her own child."

"You know, Monsieur Delambre, I have thought about that also. She may be trying to protect him. Perhaps she fears the boy or, for all we know, hates him?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand, my dear Commissaire."

"Have you noticed, for instance, that she never catches flies when the boy is there?"

"No. But come to think of it, you are quite right. Yes, that is strange . . . Still, I fail to understand."

"So do I, Monsieur Delambre. And I'm very much afraid that we shall never understand, unless perhaps your sister-in-law should *get better*."

"The doctors seem to think that there is no hope of any sort, you know."

"Yes. Do you know if your brother ever experimented with flies?"

"I really don't know, but I shouldn't think so. Have you asked the Air Ministry people? They knew all about the work."

"Yes, and they laughed at me."

"I can understand that."

"You are very fortunate to understand anything, Monsieur Delambre. I do not . . . but I hope to some day."

"Tell me, Uncle, do flies live a long time?"

We were just finishing our lunch and, following an established tradition between us, I was just pouring some wine into Henri's glass for him to dip a biscuit in.

Had Henri not been staring at his glass gradually being

filled to the brim, something in my look might have frightened him.

This was the first time that he had ever mentioned flies, and I shuddered at the thought that Commissaire Charas might quite easily have been present. I could imagine the glint in his eye as he would have answered my nephew's question with another question. I could almost hear him saying:

"I don't know, Henri. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have again seen the fly that *Maman* was looking for."

And it was only after drinking off Henri's own glass of wine that I realized that he had answered my spoken thought.

"I did not know that your mother was looking for a fly."

"Yes, she was. It has grown quite a lot, but I recognized it all right."

"Where did you see this fly, Henri, and . . . how did you recognize it?"

"This morning on your desk, Uncle Françoise. It's head is white instead of black, and it has a funny sort of leg."

Feeling more and more like Commissaire Charas, but trying to look unconcerned, I went on:

"And when did you see this fly for the first time?"

"The day that Papa went away. I had caught it, but *Maman* made me let it go. And then after, she wanted me to find it again. She changed her mind." And shrugging his shoulders just as my brother used to, he added, "You know what women are."

"I think that fly must have died long ago, and you must be mistaken, Henri," I said, getting up and walking to the door.

But as soon as I was out of the dining room, I ran up the stairs to my study. There was no fly anywhere to be seen.

I was bothered, far more than I cared to even think about. Henri had just proved that Charas was really closer to a clue than had seemed when he told me about his thoughts concerning Hélène's pastime.

For the first time I wondered if Charas did not really

know much more than he let on. For the first time also, I wondered about Hélène. Was she really insane? A strange, horrid feeling was growing on me, and the more I thought about it, the more I felt that, somehow, Charas was right: Hélène was *getting away with it!*

What could possibly have been the reason for such a monstrous crime? What had led up to it? Just what had happened?

I thought of all the hundreds of questions that Charas had put to Hélène, sometimes gently like a nurse trying to soothe, sometimes stern and cold, sometimes barking them furiously. Hélène had answered very few, always in a calm quiet voice and never seeming to pay any attention to the way in which the question had been put. Though dazed, she had seemed perfectly sane then.

Refined, well-bred and well-read, Charas was more than just an intelligent police official. He was a keen psychologist and had an amazing way of smelling out a fib or an erroneous statement even before it was uttered. I knew that he had accepted as true the few answers she had given him. But then there had been all those questions which she had never answered: the most direct and important ones. From the very beginning, Hélène had adopted a very simple system. "I cannot answer that question," she would say in her low quiet voice. And that was that! The repetition of the same question never seemed to annoy her. In all the hours of questioning that she underwent, Hélène did not once point out to the Commissaire that he had already asked her this or that. She would simply say, "I cannot answer that question," as though it were the very first time that that particular question had been asked and the very first time she had made that answer.

This cliché had become the formidable barrier beyond which Commissaire Charas could not even get a glimpse, an idea of what Hélène might be thinking. She had very willingly answered all questions about her life with my brother—which seemed a happy and uneventful one—up to the time of his end. About his death, however, all that she would say was that she had killed him with the steam-hammer, but she refused to say why, what had led up to

the drama and how she got my brother to put his head under it. She never actually refused outright; she would just go blank and, with no apparent emotion, would switch over to, "I cannot answer that question."

Hélène, as I have said, had shown the Commissaire that she knew how to set and operate the steam-hammer.

Charas could only find one single fact which did not coincide with Hélène's declarations, the fact that the hammer had been used twice. Charas was no longer willing to attribute this to insanity. That evident flaw in Hélène's stonewall defence seemed a crack which the Commissaire might possibly enlarge. But my sister-in-law finally cemented it by acknowledging:

"All right, I lied to you. I did use the hammer twice. But do not ask me why, because I cannot tell you."

"Is that your only . . . misstatement, Madame Delambre?" had asked the Commissaire, trying to follow up what looked at last like an advantage.

"It is . . . and you know it, Monsieur le Commissaire."

And, annoyed, Charas had seen that Hélène could read him like an open book.

I had thought of calling on the Commissaire, but the knowledge that he would inevitably start questioning Henri made me hesitate. Another reason also made me hesitate, a vague sort of fear that he would look for and find the fly Henri had talked of. And that annoyed me a good deal because I would find no satisfactory explanation for that particular fear.

André was definitely not the absent-minded sort of professor who walks about in pouring rain with a rolled umbrella under his arm. He was human, had a keen sense of humour, loved children and animals and could not bear to see anyone suffer. I had often seen him drop his work to watch a parade of the local fire brigade, or see the *Tour de France* cyclists go by, or even follow a circus parade all around the village. He liked games of logic and precision, such as billiards and tennis, bridge and chess.

How was it then possible to explain his death? What could have made him put his head under that hammer? It could hardly have been the result of some stupid bet or a test of his courage. He hated betting and had no

patience with those who indulged in it. Whenever he heard a bet proposed, he would invariably remind all present that, after all, a bet was but a contract between a fool and a swindler, even if it turned out to be a toss-up as to which was which.

It seemed there were only two possible explanations to André's death. Either he had gone mad, or else he had a reason for letting his wife kill him in such a strange and terrible way. And just what could have been his wife's role in all this? They surely could not have been both insane?

Having finally decided not to tell Charas about my nephew's innocent revelations, I thought I myself would question Hélène.

She seemed to have been expecting my visit for she came into the parlor almost as soon as I had made myself known to the matron and been allowed inside.

"I wanted to show you my garden," explained Hélène as I looked at the coat slung over her shoulders.

As one of the "reasonable" inmates, she was allowed to go into the garden during certain hours of the day. She had asked for and obtained the right to a little patch of ground where she could grow flowers, and I had sent her seeds and some rosebushes out of my garden.

She took me straight to a rustic wooden bench which had been made in the men's workshop and only just set up under a tree close to her little patch of ground.

Searching for the right way to broach the subject of André's death, I sat for a while tracing vague designs on the ground with the end of my umbrella.

"François, I want to ask you something," said Hélène after a while.

"Anything I can do for you, Hélène?"

"No, just something I want to know. Do flies live very long?"

Staring at her, I was about to say that her boy had asked the very same question a few hours earlier when I suddenly realized that here was the opening I had been searching for and perhaps even the possibility of striking a great blow, a blow perhaps powerful enough to shatter her stonewall defence, be it sane or insane.

Watching her carefully, I replied:

"I don't really know, Hélène; but the fly you were looking for was in my study this morning."

No doubt about it, I had struck a shattering blow. She swung her head round with such force that I heard the bones crack in her neck. She opened her mouth, but said not a word; only her eyes seemed to be screaming with fear.

Yes, it was evident that I had crashed through something, but what? Undoubtedly, the Commissaire would have known what to do with such an advantage; I did not. All I knew was that he would never have given her time to think, to recuperate, but all I could do, and even that was a strain, was to maintain my best poker-face, hoping against hope that Hélène's defences would go on crumbling.

She must have been quite a while without breathing, because she suddenly gasped and put both hands over her still open mouth.

"François... Did you kill it?" she whispered, her eyes no longer fixed, but searching every inch of my face.

"No."

"You have it then... You have it on you! Give it to me!" she almost shouted touching me with both her hands, and I knew that had she felt strong enough, she would have tried to search me.

"No, Hélène, I haven't got it."

"But you know now... You have guessed, haven't you?"

"No, Hélène. I only know one thing, and that is that you are not insane. But I mean to know all, Hélène, and, somehow, I am going to find out. You can choose: either you tell me everything and I'll see what is to be done, or..."

"Or what? Say it!"

"I was going to say it, Hélène... or I assure you that your friend the Commissaire will have that fly first thing tomorrow morning."

She remained quite still, looking down at the palms of her hands on her lap and, although it was getting chilly, her forehead and hands were moist.

Without even brushing aside a wisp of long brown hair

blown across her mouth by the breeze, she murmured:

"If I tell you . . . will you promise to destroy that fly before doing anything else?"

"No, Hélène. I can make no such promise before knowing."

"But François, you must understand. I promised André that fly would be destroyed. That promise must be kept and I can say nothing until it is."

I could sense the deadlock ahead. I was not yet losing ground, but I was losing the initiative. I tried a shot in the dark.

"Hélène, of course you understand that as soon as the police examine that fly, they will know that you are not insane, and then . . ."

"François, no! For Henri's sake! Don't you see? I was expecting that fly; I was hoping it would find me here but it couldn't know what had become of me. What else could it do but go to others it loves, to Henri, to you . . . you who might know and understand what was to be done!"

Was she really mad, or was she simulating again? But mad or not, she was cornered. Wondering how to follow up and how to land the knockout blow without running the risk of seeing her slip away out of reach, I said very quietly:

"Tell me all, Hélène. I can then protect your boy."

"Protect my boy from what? Don't you understand that if I am here, it is merely so that Henri won't be the son of a woman who was guillotined for having murdered his father? Don't you understand that I would by far prefer the guillotine to the living death of this lunatic asylum?"

"I understand, Hélène, and I'll do my best for the boy whether you tell me or not. If you refuse to tell me, I'll still do the best I can to protect Henri, but you must understand that the game will be out of my hands, because Commissaire Charas will have the fly."

"But why must you know?" said, rather than asked, my sister-in-law, struggling to control her temper.

"Because I must and will know how and why my brother died, Hélène."

"All right. Take me back to the . . . house. I'll give you what your Commissaire would call my 'Confession.'"

"Do you mean to say that you have written it!"

"Yes. It was not really meant for you, but more likely for *your friend*, the Commissaire. I had foreseen that, sooner or later, he would get too close to the truth."

"You then have no objection to his reading it?"

"You will act as you think fit, François. Wait for me a minute."

Leaving me at the door of the parlor, Hélène ran upstairs to her room. In less than a minute she was back with a large brown envelope.

"Listen, François; you are not nearly as bright as was your poor brother, but you are not unintelligent. All I ask is that you read this alone. After that, you may do as you wish."

"That I promise you, Hélène," I said taking the precious envelope. "I'll read it tonight and although tomorrow is not a visiting day, I'll come down to see you."

"Just as you like," said my sister-in-law without even saying good-bye as she went back upstairs.

It was only on reaching home, as I walked from the garage to the house, that I read the inscription on the envelope:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

(Probably Commissaire Charas)

Having told the servants that I would have only a light supper to be served immediately in my study and that I was not to be disturbed after, I ran upstairs, threw Hélène's envelope on my desk and made another careful search of the room before closing the shutters and drawing the curtains. All I could find was a long since dead mosquito stuck to the wall near the ceiling.

Having motioned to the servant to put her tray down on a table by the fireplace, I poured myself a glass of wine and locked the door behind her. I then disconnected the telephone—I always did this now at night—and turned out all the lights but the lamp on my desk.

Slitting open Hélène's fat envelope, I extracted a thick

wad of closely written pages. I read the following lines neatly centered in the middle of the top page:

This is not a confession because, although I killed my husband, I am not a murderess. I simply and very faithfully carried out his last wish by crushing his head and right arm under the steam-hammer of his brother's factory.

Without even touching the glass of wine by my elbow, I turned the page and started reading.

For very nearly a year before his death (*the manuscript began*), my husband had told me of some of his experiments. He knew full well that his colleagues of the Air Ministry would have forbidden some of them as too dangerous, but he was keen on obtaining positive results before reporting his discovery.

Whereas only sound and pictures had been, so far, transmitted through space by radio and television, André claimed to have discovered a way of transmitting matter. Matter, any solid object, placed in his "transmitter" was instantly disintegrated and reintegrated in a special receiving set.

André considered his discovery as perhaps the most important since that of the wheel sawn off the end of a tree trunk. He reckoned that the transmission of matter by instantaneous "disintegration—reintegration" would completely change life as we had known it so far. It would mean the end of all means of transport, not only of goods including food, but also of human beings. André, the practical scientist who never allowed theories or daydreams to get the better of him, already foresaw the time when there would no longer be any airplanes, ships, trains or cars and, therefore, no longer any roads or railway lines, ports, airports or stations. All that would be replaced by matter-transmitting and receiving stations throughout the world. Travellers and goods would be placed in special cabins and, at a given signal, would simply disappear and reappear almost immediately at the chosen receiving station.

André's receiving set was only a few feet away from his transmitter, in an adjoining room of his laboratory, and he at first ran into all sorts of snags. His first successful experiment was carried out with an ash tray taken from his desk, a souvenir we had brought back from a trip to London.

That was the first time he told me about his experiments and I had no idea of what he was talking about the day he came dashing into the house and threw the ash tray in my lap.

"Hélène, look! For a fraction of a second, a bare ten-millionth of a second, that ash tray has been completely disintegrated. For one little moment it no longer existed! Gone! Nothing left, absolutely nothing! Only atoms travelling through space at the speed of light! And the moment after, the atoms were once more gathered together in the shape of an ash tray!"

"André, please... please! What on earth are you raving about?"

He started sketching all over a letter I had been writing. He laughed at my wry face, swept all my letters off the table and said:

"You don't understand? Right. Let's start all over again. Hélène, do you remember I once read you an article about the mysterious flying stones that seem to come from nowhere in particular, and which are said to occasionally fall in certain houses in India? They come flying in as though thrown from outside and that, in spite of closed doors and windows."

"Yes, I remember. I also remember that Professor Augier, your friend of the College de France, who had come down for a few days, remarked that if there was no trickery about it, the only possible explanation was that the stones had been disintegrated after having been thrown from outside, come through the walls, and then been reintegrated before hitting the floor or the opposite walls."

"That's right. And I added that there was, of course, one other possibility, namely the momentary and partial disintegration of the walls as the stone or stones came through."

"Yes, André. I remember all that, and I suppose you

also remember that I failed to understand, and that you got quite annoyed. Well, I still do not understand why and how, even disintegrated, stones should be able to come through a wall or a closed door."

"But it is possible, Hélène, because the atoms that go to make up matter are not close together like the bricks of a wall. They are separated by relative immensities of space."

"Do you mean to say that you have disintegrated that ash tray, and then put it together again after pushing it through something?"

"Precisely, Hélène. I projected it through the wall that separates my transmitter from my receiving set."

"And would it be foolish to ask how humanity is to benefit from ash trays that can go through walls?"

André seemed quite offended, but he soon saw that I was only teasing and again waxing enthusiastic, he told me of some of the possibilities of his discovery.

"Isn't it wonderful, Hélène?" he finally gasped, out of breath.

"Yes, André. But I hope you won't ever transmit me; I'd be too much afraid of coming out at the other end like your ash tray."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember what was written under that ash tray?"

"Yes, of course: Made in Japan. That was the great joke of our typically British souvenir."

"The words are still there, André; but . . . look!"

He took the ash tray out of my hands, frowned, and walked over to the window. Then he went quite pale, and I knew that he had seen what had proved to me that he had indeed carried out a strange experiment.

The three words were still there, but reversed and reading:

Made in Japan

Without a word, having completely forgotten me, André rushed off to his laboratory. I only saw him the next morning, tired and unshaven after a whole night's work.

A few days later André had a new reverse which put him out of sorts and made him fussy and grumpy for several weeks. I stood it patiently enough for a while, but being myself bad tempered one evening, we had a silly row over some futile thing, and I reproached him for his moroseness.

"I'm sorry, *chérie*. I've been working my way through a maze of problems and have given you all a very rough time. You see, my very first experiment with a live animal proved a complete fiasco."

"André! You tried that experiment with Dandelo, didn't you?"

"Yes. How did you know?" he answered sheepishly. "He disintegrated perfectly, but he never reappeared in the receiving set."

"Oh, André! What became of him then?"

"Nothing... there is just no more Dandelo; only the dispersed atoms of a cat wandering, God knows where, in the universe."

Dandelo was a small white cat the cook had found one morning in the garden and which we had promptly adopted. Now I knew how it had disappeared and was quite angry about the whole thing, but my husband was so miserable over it all that I said nothing.

I saw little of my husband during the next few weeks. He had most of his meals sent down to the laboratory. I would often wake up in the morning and find his bed unslept in. Sometimes, if he had come in very late, I would find that storm-swept appearance which only a man can give a bedroom by getting up very early and fumbling around in the dark.

One evening he came home to dinner all smiles, and I knew that his troubles were over. His face dropped, however, when he saw I was dressed for going out.

"Oh. Were you going out, Hélène?"

"Yes, the Drillons invited me for a game of bridge, but I can easily phone them and put it off."

"No, it's all right."

"It isn't all right. Out with it, dear!"

"Well, I've at last got everything perfect and I wanted you to be the first to see the miracle."

"*Magnifique*, André! Of course I'll be delighted."

Having telephoned our neighbours to say how sorry I was and so forth, I ran down to the kitchen and told the cook that she had exactly ten minutes in which to prepare a "celebration dinner."

"An excellent idea, Hélène," said my husband when the maid appeared with the champagne after our candlelight dinner. "We'll celebrate with reintegrated champagne!" and taking the tray from the maid's hands, he led the way down to the laboratory.

"Do you think it will be as good as before its disintegration?" I asked, holding the tray while he opened the door and switched on the lights.

"Have no fear. You'll see! Just bring it here, will you," he said, opening the door of a telephone call-box he had bought and which had been transformed into what he called a transmitter. "Put it down on that now," he added, putting a stool inside the box.

Having carefully closed the door, he took me to the other end of the room and handed me a pair of very dark sun glasses. He put on another pair and walked back to a switchboard by the transmitter.

"Ready, Hélène?" said my husband, turning out all the lights. "Don't remove your glasses till I give the word."

"I won't budge, André. Go on," I told him, my eyes fixed on the tray which I could just see in a greenish shimmering light through the glass panelled door of the telephone booth.

"Right," said André throwing a switch.

The whole room was brilliantly illuminated by an orange flash. Inside the booth I had seen a crackling ball of fire and felt its heat on my face, neck and hands. The whole thing lasted but the fraction of a second, and I found myself blinking at green-edged black holes like those one sees after having stared at the sun.

"*Et voilà!* You can take off your glasses, Hélène."

A little theatrically perhaps, my husband opened the

door of the booth. Though André had told me what to expect, I was astonished to find that the champagne, glasses, tray and stool were no longer there.

André ceremoniously led me by the hand into the next room in a corner of which stood a second telephone booth. Opening the door wide, he triumphantly lifted the champagne tray off the stool.

Feeling somewhat like the good-natured kind-member-of-the-audience who has been dragged onto the music hall stage by the magician, I refrained from saying, "All done with mirrors," which I knew would have annoyed my husband.

"Sure it's not dangerous to drink?" I asked as the cork popped.

"Absolutely sure, Hélène," he said handing me a glass. "But that was nothing. Drink this off and I'll show you something much more astounding."

We went back into the other room.

"Oh, André! Remember poor Dandelo!"

"This is only a guinea pig, Hélène. But I'm positive it will go through all right."

He set the furry little beast down on the green enamelled floor of the booth and quickly closed the door. I again put on my dark glasses and saw and felt the vivid crackling flash.

Without waiting for André to open the door, I rushed into the next room where the lights were still on and looked into the receiving booth.

"Oh, André! *Chéri!* He's there all right!" I shouted excitedly, watching the little animal trotting round and round. "It's wonderful, André. It works! You've succeeded!"

"I hope so, but I must be patient. I'll know for sure in a few weeks' time."

"What do you mean? Look! He's as full of life as when you put him in the other booth."

"Yes, so he seems. But we'll have to see if all his organs are intact, and that will take some time. If that little beast is still full of life in a month's time, we then consider the experiment a success."

I begged André to let me take care of the guinea pig.

"All right, but don't kill it by overfeeding," he agreed with a grin for my enthusiasm.

Though not allowed to take Hop-la—the name I had given the guinea pig—out of its box in the laboratory, I tied a pink ribbon round its neck and was allowed to feed it twice a day.

Hop-la soon got used to its pink ribbon and became quite a tame little pet, but that month of waiting seemed a year.

And then one day, André put Miquette, our cocker spaniel, into his "transmitter." He had not told me beforehand, knowing full well that I would never have agreed to such an experiment with our dog. But when he did tell me, Miquette had been successfully transmitted half a dozen times and seemed to be enjoying the operation thoroughly; no sooner was she let out of the "reintegrator" than she dashed madly into the next room, scratching at the "transmitter" door to have "another go," as André called it.

I now expected that my husband would invite some of his colleagues and Air Ministry specialists to come down. He usually did this when he had finished a research job and, before handing them long detailed reports which he always typed himself, he would carry out an experiment or two before them. But this time, he just went on working. Once morning I finally asked him when he intended throwing his usual "surprise party," as we called it.

"No, Hélène; not for a long while yet. This discovery is much too important. I have an awful lot of work to do on it still. Do you realize that there are some parts of the transmission proper which I do not yet myself fully understand? It works all right, but you see, I can't just say to all these eminent professors that I do this and that and, poof, it works! I must be able to explain how and why it works. And what is even more important, I must be ready and able to refute every destructive argument they will not fail to trot out, as they usually do when faced with anything really good."

I was occasionally invited down to the laboratory to witness some new experiment, but I never went unless André invited me, and only talked about his work if he

broached the subject first. Of course it never occurred to me that he would, at that stage at least, have tried an experiment with a human being; though, had I thought about it—knowing André—it would have been obvious that he would never have allowed anyone into the "transmitter" before he had been through to test it first. It was only after the accident that I discovered he had duplicated all his switches inside the disintegration booth, so that he could try it out by himself.

The morning André tried this terrible experiment, he did not show up for lunch. I sent the maid down with a tray, but she brought it back with a note she had found pinned outside the laboratory door: *Do not disturb me, I am working*

He did occasionally pin such notes on his door and, though I noticed it, I paid no particular attention to the unusually large handwriting of his note.

It was just after that, as I was drinking my coffee, that Henri came bouncing into the room to say that he had caught a funny fly, and would I like to see it. Refusing even to look at his closed fist, I ordered him to release it immediately.

"But, *Maman*, it has such a funny white head!"

Marching the boy over to the open window, I told him to release the fly immediately, which he did. I knew that Henri had caught the fly merely because he thought it looked curious or different from other flies, but I also knew that his father would never stand for any form of cruelty to animals, and that there would be a fuss should he discover that our son had put a fly in a box or a bottle.

At dinner time that evening, André had still not shown up and, a little worried, I ran down to the laboratory and knocked at the door.

He did not answer my knock, but I heard him moving around and a moment later he slipped a note under the door. It was typewritten:

HELENE, I AM HAVING TROUBLE. PUT THE BOY TO BED AND COME BACK IN AN HOUR'S TIME. A.

Frightened, I knocked and called, but André did not

seem to pay any attention and, vaguely reassured by the familiar noise of his typewriter, I went back to the house.

Having put Henri to bed, I returned to the laboratory where I found another note slipped under the door. My hand shook as I picked it up because I knew by then that something must be radically wrong. I read:

HELENE, FIRST OF ALL I COUNT ON YOU NOT TO LOSE YOUR NERVE OR DO ANYTHING RASH BECAUSE YOU ALONE CAN HELP ME. I HAVE HAD A SERIOUS ACCIDENT. I AM NOT IN ANY PARTICULAR DANGER FOR THE TIME BEING THOUGH IT IS A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH. IT IS USELESS CALLING TO ME OR SAYING ANYTHING, I CANNOT ANSWER, I CANNOT SPEAK. I WANT YOU TO DO EXACTLY AND VERY CAREFULLY ALL THAT I ASK. AFTER HAVING KNOCKED THREE TIMES TO SHOW THAT YOU UNDERSTAND AND AGREE, FETCH ME A BOWL OF MILK LACED WITH RUM. I HAVE HAD NOTHING ALL DAY AND CAN DO WITH IT.

Shaking with fear, not knowing what to think and repressing a furious desire to call André and bang away until he opened, I knocked three times as requested and ran all the way home to fetch what he wanted.

In less than five minutes I was back. Another note had been slipped under the door:

HELENE, FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY. WHEN YOU KNOCK I'LL OPEN THE DOOR. YOU ARE TO WALK OVER TO MY DESK AND PUT DOWN THE BOWL OF MILK. YOU WILL THEN GO INTO THE OTHER ROOM WHERE THE RECEIVER IS. LOOK CAREFULLY AND TRY TO FIND A FLY WHICH OUGHT TO BE THERE BUT WHICH I AM UNABLE TO FIND. UNFORTUNATELY I CANNOT SEE SMALL THINGS VERY EASILY.

BEFORE YOU COME IN YOU MUST PROMISE TO OBEY ME IMPLICITLY. DO NOT LOOK AT ME AND REMEMBER THAT TALKING IS QUITE USELESS. I CANNOT ANSWER. KNOCK AGAIN THREE TIMES AND THAT WILL MEAN I HAVE YOUR PROMISE. MY LIFE DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON THE HELP YOU CAN GIVE ME.

I had to wait a while to pull myself together, and then I knocked slowly three times.

I heard André shuffling behind the door, then his hand fumbling with the lock, and the door opened.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that he was standing behind the door, but without looking round, I carried the bowl of milk to his desk. He was evidently watching me and I must at all costs appear calm and collected.

"*Chéri*, you can count on me," I said gently, and putting the bowl down under his desk lamp, the only one alight, I walked into the next room where all the lights were blazing.

My first impression was that some sort of hurricane must have blown out of the receiving booth. Papers were scattered in every direction, a whole row of test tubes lay smashed in a corner, chairs and stools were upset and one of the window curtains hung half torn from its bent rod. In a large enamel basin on the floor a heap of burned documents was still smouldering.

I knew that I would not find the fly André wanted me to look for. Women know things that men only suppose by reasoning and deduction; it is a form of knowledge very rarely accessible to them and which they disparagingly call intuition. I already knew that the fly André wanted was the one which Henri had caught and which I had made him release.

I heard André shuffling around in the next room, and then a strange gurgling and sucking as though he had trouble in drinking his milk.

"André, there is no fly here. Can you give me any sort of indication that might help? If you can't speak, rap or something . . . you know: once for yes, twice for no."

I had tried to control my voice and speak as though perfectly calm, but I had to choke down a sob of desperation when he rapped twice for "no."

"May I come to you, André? I don't know what can have happened, but whatever it is, I'll be courageous, dear."

After a moment of silent hesitation, he tapped once on his desk.

At the door I stopped aghast at the sight of André

standing with his head and shoulders covered by the brown velvet cloth he had taken from a table by his desk, the table on which he usually ate when he did not want to leave his work. Suppressing a laugh that might easily have turned to sobbing, I said:

"André, we'll search thoroughly tomorrow, by daylight. Why don't you go to bed? I'll lead you to the guest room if you like, and won't let anyone else see you."

His left hand tapped the desk twice.

"Do you need a doctor, André?"

"No," he rapped.

"Would you like me to call up Professor Augier? He might be of more help . . ."

Twice he rapped "no" sharply. I did not know what to do or say. And then I told him:

"Henri caught a fly this morning which he wanted to show me, but I made him release it. Could it have been the one you are looking for? I didn't see it, but the boy said its head was white."

André emitted a strange metallic sigh, and I just had time to bite my fingers fiercely in order not to scream. He had let his right arm drop, and instead of his long-fingered muscular hand, a grey stick with little buds on it like the branch of a tree, hung out of his sleeve almost down to his knee.

"André, *mon chéri*, tell me what happened. I might be of more help to you if I knew. André . . . oh, it's terrible!" I sobbed, unable to control myself.

Having rapped once for yes, he pointed to the door with his left hand.

I stepped out and sank down crying as he locked the door behind me. He was typing again and I waited. At last he shuffled to the door and slid a sheet of paper under it.

HELENE, COME BACK IN THE MORNING. I MUST THINK AND WILL HAVE TYPED OUT AN EXPLANATION FOR YOU. TAKE ONE OF MY SLEEPING TABLETS AND GO STRAIGHT TO BED. I NEED YOU FRESH AND STRONG TOMORROW, MA PAUVRE CHERIE. A.

"Do you want anything for the night, André?" I shouted through the door.

He knocked twice for no, and a little later I heard the typewriter again.

The sun full on my face woke me up with a start. I had set the alarm-clock for five but had not heard it, probably because of the sleeping tablets. I had indeed slept like a log, without a dream. Now I was back in my living nightmare and crying like a child I sprang out of bed. It was just on seven!

Rushing into the kitchen, without a word for the startled servants, I rapidly prepared a trayload of coffee, bread and butter with which I ran down to the laboratory.

André opened the door as soon as I knocked and closed it again as I carried the tray to his desk. His head was still covered, but I saw from his crumpled suit and his open camp-bed that he must have at least tried to rest.

On his desk lay a typewritten sheet for me which I picked up. André opened the other door, and taking this to mean that he wanted to be left alone, I walked into the next room. He pushed the door to and I heard him pouring out the coffee as I read:

DO YOU REMEMBER THE ASH TRAY EXPERIMENT? I HAVE HAD A SIMILAR ACCIDENT. I "TRANSMITTED" MYSELF SUCCESSFULLY THE NIGHT BEFORE LAST. DURING A SECOND EXPERIMENT YESTERDAY A FLY WHICH I DID NOT SEE MUST HAVE GOT INTO THE "DISINTEGRATOR." MY ONLY HOPE IS TO FIND THAT FLY AND GO THROUGH AGAIN WITH IT. PLEASE SEARCH FOR IT CAREFULLY SINCE, IF IT IS NOT FOUND, I SHALL HAVE TO FIND A WAY OF PUTTING AN END TO ALL THIS.

If only André had been more explicit! I shuddered at the thought that he must be terribly disfigured and then cried softly as I imagined his face inside-out, or perhaps his eyes in place of his ears, or his mouth at the back of his neck, or worse!

André must be saved! For that, the fly must be found!

Pulling myself together, I said:

"André, may I come in?"

He opened the door.

"André, don't despair, I am going to find that fly. It is no longer in the laboratory, but it cannot be very far. I suppose you're disfigured, perhaps terribly so, but there can be no question of putting an end to all this, as you say in your note; that I will never stand for. If necessary, if you do not wish to be seen, I'll make you a mask or a cowl so that you can go on with your work until you get well again. If you cannot work, I'll call Professor Augier, and he and all your other friends will save you, André."

Again I heard that curious metallic sigh as he rapped violently on his desk.

"André, don't be annoyed; please be calm. I won't do anything without first consulting you, but you must rely on me, have faith in me and let me help you as best I can. Are you terribly disfigured, dear? Can't you let me see your face? I won't be afraid . . . I am your wife you know."

But my husband again rapped a decisive "no" and pointed to the door.

"All right. I am going to search for the fly now, but promise me you won't do anything foolish; promise you won't do anything rash or dangerous without first letting me know all about it!"

He extended his left hand, and I knew I had his promise.

I will never forget that ceaseless day-long hunt for a fly. Back home, I turned the house inside-out and made all the servants join in the search. I told them that a fly had escaped from the Professor's laboratory and that it must be captured alive, but it was evident they already thought me crazy. They said so to the police later, and that day's hunt for a fly most probably saved me from the guillotine later.

I questioned Henri and as he failed to understand right away what I was talking about, I shook him and slapped him, and made him cry in front of the round-eyed maids. Realizing that I must not let myself go, I kissed and petted the poor boy and at last made him understand what I wanted of him. Yes, he remembered, he had found the

fly just by the kitchen window; yes, he had released it immediately as told to.

Even in summer time we had very few flies because our house is on the top of a hill and the slightest breeze coming across the valley blows round it. In spite of that, I managed to catch dozens of flies that day. On all the window sills and all over the garden I had put saucers of milk, sugar, jam, meat—all the things likely to attract flies. Of all those we caught, and many others which we failed to catch but which I saw, none resembled the one Henri had caught the day before. One by one, with a magnifying glass, I examined every unusual fly, but none had anything like a white head.

At lunch time, I ran down to André with some milk and mashed potatoes. I also took some of the flies we had caught, but he gave me to understand that they could be of no possible use to him.

"If that fly has not been found tonight, André, we'll have to see what is to be done. And this is what I propose: I'll sit in the next room. When you can't answer by the yes-no method of rapping, you'll type out whatever you want to say and then slip it under the door. Agreed?"

"Yes," rapped André.

By nightfall we had still not found the fly. At dinner time, as I prepared André's tray, I broke down and sobbed in the kitchen in front of the silent servants. My maid thought that I had had a row with my husband, probably about the mislaid fly, but I learned later that the cook was already quite sure that I was out of my mind.

Without a word, I picked up the tray and then put it down again as I stopped by the telephone. That this was really a matter of life and death for André, I had no doubt. Neither did I doubt that he fully intended committing suicide, unless I could make him change his mind, or at least put off such a drastic decision. Would I be strong enough? He would never forgive me for not keeping a promise, but under the circumstances, did that really matter? To the devil with promises and honour! At all costs André must be saved! And having thus made up my mind, I looked up and dialled Professor Augier's number.

"The Professor is away and will not be back before the

end of the week," said a polite neutral voice at the other end of the line.

That was that! I would have to fight alone and fight I would. I would save André come what may.

All my nervousness had disappeared as André let me in and, after putting the tray of food down on his desk, I went into the other room, as agreed.

"The first thing I want to know," I said as he closed the door behind me, "is what happened exactly. Can you please tell me, André?"

I waited patiently while he typed an answer which he pushed under the door a little later.

HELENE, I WOULD RATHER NOT TELL YOU. SINCE GO I MUST, I WOULD RATHER YOU REMEMBER ME AS I WAS BEFORE. I MUST DESTROY MYSELF IN SUCH A WAY THAT NONE CAN POSSIBLY KNOW WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME. I HAVE OF COURSE THOUGHT OF SIMPLY DISINTEGRATING MYSELF IN MY TRANSMITTER, BUT I HAD BETTER NOT BECAUSE, SOONER OR LATER, I MIGHT FIND MYSELF REINTEGRATED. SOME DAY, SOMEWHERE, SOME SCIENTIST IS SURE TO MAKE THE SAME DISCOVERY. I HAVE THEREFORE THOUGHT OF A WAY WHICH IS NEITHER SIMPLE NOR EASY, BUT YOU CAN AND WILL HELP ME.

For several minutes I wondered if André had not simply gone stark raving mad.

"André," I said at last, "whatever you may have chosen or thought of, I cannot and will never accept such a cowardly solution. No matter how awful the result of your experiment or accident, you are alive, you are a man, a brain . . . and you have a soul. You have no right to destroy yourself! You know that!"

The answer was soon typed and pushed under the door.

I AM ALIVE ALL RIGHT, BUT I AM ALREADY NO LONGER A MAN. AS TO MY BRAIN OR INTELLIGENCE, IT MAY DISAPPEAR AT ANY MOMENT. AS IT IS, IT IS NO LONGER INTACT, AND THERE CAN BE NO SOUL WITHOUT INTELLIGENCE . . . AND YOU KNOW THAT!

"Then you must tell the other scientists about your discovery. They will help you and save you, André!"

I staggered back frightened as he angrily thumped the door twice.

"André . . . why? Why do you refuse the aid you know they would give you with all their hearts?"

A dozen furious knocks shook the door and made me understand that my husband would never accept such a solution. I had to find other arguments.

For hours, it seemed, I talked to him about our boy, about me, about his family, about his duty to us and to the rest of humanity. He made no reply of any sort. At last I cried:

"André . . . do you hear me?"

"Yes," he knocked very gently.

"Well, listen then. I have another idea. You remember your first experiment with the ash tray? . . . Well, do you think that if you had put it through again a second time, it might possibly have come out with the letters turned back the right way?"

Before I had finished speaking, André was busily typing and a moment later I read his answer:

I HAVE ALREADY THOUGHT OF THAT. AND THAT WAS WHY I NEEDED THE FLY. IT HAS TO GO THROUGH WITH ME. THERE IS NO HOPE OTHERWISE.

"Try all the same, André. You never know!"

I HAVE TRIED SEVEN TIMES ALREADY, was the typewritten reply I got to that.

"André! Try again, please!"

The answer this time gave me a flutter of hope, because no woman has ever understood, or will ever understand, how a man about to die can possibly consider anything funny.

I DEEPLY ADMIRE YOUR DELICIOUS FEMININE LOGIC. WE COULD GO ON DOING THIS EXPERIMENT UNTIL DOOMSDAY. HOWEVER, JUST TO GIVE YOU THAT PLEASURE, PROBABLY THE VERY LAST I SHALL EVER BE ABLE TO GIVE YOU, I WILL TRY ONCE MORE. IF YOU CANNOT FIND THE DARK GLASSES,

TURN YOUR BACK TO THE MACHINE AND PRESS YOUR HANDS OVER YOUR EYES. LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU ARE READY.

"Ready, André!" I shouted, without even looking for the glasses and following his instructions.

I heard him move around and then open and close the door of his "disintegrator." After what seemed a very long wait, but probably was not more than a minute or so, I heard a violent crackling noise and perceived a bright flash through my eyelids and fingers.

I turned around as the booth door opened.

His head and shoulders still covered with the brown velvet cloth, André was gingerly stepping out of it.

"How do you feel, André? Any difference?" I asked, touching his arm.

He tried to step away from me and caught his foot in one of the stools which I had not troubled to pick up. He made a violent effort to regain his balance, and the velvet cloth slowly slid off his shoulders and head as he fell heavily backward.

The horror was too much for me, too unexpected. As a matter of fact, I am sure that, even had I known, the horror-impact could hardly have been less powerful. Trying to push both hands into my mouth to stifle my screams and although my fingers were bleeding, I screamed again and again. I could not take my eyes off him, I could not even close them, and yet I knew that if I looked at the horror much longer, I would go on screaming for the rest of my life.

Slowly, the monster, the thing that had been my husband, covered its head, got up and groped its way to the door and passed it. Though still screaming, I was able to close my eyes.

I who had ever been a true Catholic, who believed in God and another, better life hereafter, have today but one hope: that when I die, I really die, and that there may be no after-life of any sort because, if there is, then I shall never forget! Day and night, awake or asleep, I see it, and I know that I am condemned to see it forever, even perhaps into oblivion!

Until I am totally extinct, nothing can, nothing will

ever make me forget that dreadful white hairy head with its low flat skull and its two pointed ears. Pink and moist, the nose was also that of a cat, a huge cat. But the eyes! Or rather, where the eyes should have been were two brown bumps the size of saucers. Instead of a mouth, animal or human, was a long hairy vertical slit from which hung a black quivering trunk that widened at the end, trumpet-like, and from which saliva kept dripping.

I must have fainted, because I found myself flat on my stomach on the cold cement floor of the laboratory, staring at the closed door behind which I could hear the noise of André's typewriter.

Numb, numb and empty, I must have looked as people do immediately after a terrible accident, before they fully understand what has happened. I could only think of a man I had once seen on the platform of a railway station, quite conscious, and looking stupidly at his leg still on the line where the train had just passed.

My throat was aching terribly, and that made me wonder if my vocal cords had not perhaps been torn, and whether I would ever be able to speak again.

The noise of the typewriter suddenly stopped and I felt I was going to scream again as something touched the door and a sheet of paper slid from under it.

Shivering with fear and disgust, I crawled over to where I could read it without touching it:

NOW YOU UNDERSTAND. THAT LAST EXPERIMENT WAS A NEW DISASTER, MY POOR HELENE. I SUPPOSE YOU RECOGNIZED PART OF DANDELO'S HEAD. WHEN I WENT INTO THE DISINTEGRATOR JUST NOW, MY HEAD WAS ONLY THAT OF A FLY. I NOW ONLY HAVE EYES AND MOUTH LEFT. THE REST HAS BEEN REPLACED BY PARTS OF THE CAT'S HEAD. POOR DANDELO WHOSE ATOMS HAD NEVER COME TOGETHER. YOU SEE NOW THAT THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE POSSIBLE SOLUTION, DON'T YOU? I MUST DISAPPEAR. KNOCK ON THE DOOR WHEN YOU ARE READY AND I SHALL EXPLAIN WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Of course he was right, and it had been wrong and cruel of me to insist on a new experiment. And I knew

that there was now no possible hope, that any further experiments could only bring about worse results.

Getting up dazed, I went to the door and tried to speak, but no sound came out of my throat . . . so I knocked once!

You can of course guess the rest. He explained his plan in short typewritten notes, and I agreed, I agreed to everything!

My head on fire, but shivering with cold, like an automaton, I followed him into the silent factory. In my hand was a full page of explanations: what I had to know about the steam-hammer.

Without stopping or looking back, he pointed to the switchboard that controlled the steam-hammer as he passed it. I went no farther and watched him come to a halt before the terrible instrument.

He knelt down, carefully wrapped the cloth round his head, and then stretched out flat on the ground.

It was not difficult. I was not killing my husband. André, poor André, had gone long ago, years ago it seemed. I was merely carrying out his last wish . . . and mine.

Without hesitating, my eyes on the long still body, I firmly pushed the "stroke" button right in. The great metallic mass seemed to drop slowly. It was not so much the resounding clang of the hammer that made me jump as the sharp cracking which I had distinctly heard at the same time. My hus . . . the thing's body shook a second and then lay still.

It was then I noticed that he had forgotten to put his right arm, his fly-leg, under the hammer. The police would never understand but the scientists would, and they must not! That had been André's last wish, also!

I had to do it and quickly, too; the night watchman must have heard the hammer and would be round any moment. I pushed the other button and the hammer slowly rose. Seeing but trying not to look, I ran up, leaned down, lifted and moved forward the right arm which seemed terribly light. Back at the switchboard, again I pushed the red button, and down came the hammer a second time. Then I ran all the way home.

You know the rest and can now do whatever you think right.

So ended Hélène's manuscript.

The following day I telephoned Commissaire Charas to invite him to dinner.

"With pleasure, Monsieur Delambre. Allow me, however, to ask: is it the Commissaire you are inviting, or just Monsieur Charas?"

"Have you any preference?"

"No, not at the present moment."

"Well, then, make it whichever you like. Will eight o'clock suit you?"

Although it was raining, the Commissaire arrived on foot that evening.

"Since you did not come tearing up to the door in your black Citroën, I take it you have opted for Monsieur Charas, off duty?"

"I left the car up a side-street," mumbled the Commissaire with a grin as the maid staggered under the weight of his raincoat.

"*Merci,*" he said a minute later as I handed him a glass of Pernod into which he tipped a few drops of water, watching it turn the golden amber liquid to pale blue milk.

"You heard about my poor sister-in-law?"

"Yes, shortly after you telephoned me this morning. I am sorry, but perhaps it was all for the best. Being already in charge of your brother's case, the inquiry automatically comes to me."

"I suppose it was suicide."

"Without a doubt. Cyanide the doctors say quite rightly; I found a second tablet in the unstitched hem of her dress."

"*Monsieur est servi,*" announced the maid.

"I would like to show you a very curious document afterward, Charas."

"Ah, yes. I heard that Madame Delambre had been writing a lot, but we could find nothing beyond the short note informing us that she was committing suicide."

During our tête-à-tête dinner, we talked politics, books

and films, and the local football club of which the Commissaire was a keen supporter.

After dinner, I took him up to my study where a bright fire—a habit I had picked up in England during the war —was burning.

Without even asking him, I handed him his brandy and mixed myself what he called "crushed-bug juice in soda water"—his appreciation of whisky.

"I would like you to read this, Charas; first because it was partly intended for you and, secondly, because it will interest you. If you think Commissaire Charas has no objection, I would like to burn it after."

Without a word, he took the wad of sheets Hélène had given me the day before and settled down to read them.

"What do you think of it all?" I asked some twenty minutes later as he carefully folded Hélène's manuscript, slipped it into the brown envelope, and put it into the fire.

Charas watched the flames licking the envelope from which wisps of grey smoke were escaping, and it was only when it burst into flames that he said slowly raising his eyes to mine:

"I think it proves very definitely that Madame Delambre was quite insane."

For a long time we watched the fire eating up Hélène's "confession."

"A funny thing happened to me this morning, Charas. I went to the cemetery where my brother is buried. It was quite empty and I was alone."

"Not quite, Monsieur Delambre. I was there, but I did not want to disturb you."

"Then you saw me . . ."

"Yes. I saw you bury a matchbox."

"Do you know what was in it?"

"A fly, I suppose."

"Yes. I had found it early this morning, caught in a spider's web in the garden."

"Was it dead?"

"No, not quite. I . . . crushed it . . . between two stones. Its head was . . . white . . . all white."

THE DEVIL HIS DUE

To my friend, the Devil.

The fox did not raise its head from between its paws, but its two large, luminous eyes spoke to the Englishman who had just stopped in front of the cage. The fox knew he could understand; it had known the moment their eyes had met, when the man, strolling away from the crowded beach, suddenly found himself in front of the old caravan that had once been painted red, the silent old gipsy woman who had once been beautiful, and the cage in front of her that had once been a packing case. In the other part of the home-made cage—for a captive fox needs very little room—a monkey with black, unintelligent, human eyes scratched itself thoughtfully. Although this shook the whole box, the fox took no notice; all its attention was concentrated on the man, and in its eyes which were neither blue nor grey, the man could see the sky and the winds, the trees and the fields, the rivers and the lakes, all that the fox was telling him about.

"Show me your hand," said the gipsy, leaning over the cage.

"No, thank you," mumbled the man.

"Show me your hand. I shall not tell your fortune or ask you for money. You are an animal man and there is something I want to see."

She was right. He was an animal man in the sense that he not only loved animals, but he understood them and they understood him. He had never feared an animal and no animal had ever feared him. Even when he was a little boy—in the days when there were still plenty of horse-drawn vehicles about—he had always been able to make a fallen horse get up from a slippery road, then simply talk to it softly until he had driven the fear out of its eyes and its limbs no longer trembled. He never went near a circus because there, animals are made to suffer both physically and morally; when, on occasions, he read about

a lion tamer being mauled or killed, he could not repress a thrill of pleasure, but his heart bled at the thought of the agony and misery the animal must have endured before being driven to such an act of desperation.

"How do you know? Are you an animal woman?"

"Of course. How else could I recognize you and read your thoughts?"

"What thoughts?"

"Your thoughts about that fox. Now show me your hand."

"What do you want to know?"

"Something I feel about you but which I do not understand," said the old gipsy woman grasping the back of his hand and drawing it, palm up, almost to her chin.

She no more than glanced at it, it seemed, before dropping it and spitting out the stub of her cigarette.

"And now, you know?"

"Yes. You killed your dog."

"He was sick and suffering."

"You killed him for another reason."

"Perhaps. So what?"

"Nothing. It hurts because you are an animal man and it was a useless murder."

"It was not murder!"

"Call it what you like; it is murder in your hand, therefore it is murder in your heart."

Is it murder to have a sick, old dog put to sleep? Perhaps it is for an animal man. But then there had been Angela, blonde, frail Angela, who kept whimpering about coming home to a house full of dog's hair. The doctor had been categorical, no dogs or cats, or furry animals of any sort, ever again. A relapse would be fatal. After Angela had been taken away to hospital he had gone to the local library and read about asthma and some of its causes. Poor Angela had had a terrible time and, one night, they had even called him out of bed; for an hour or two, they had feared the worst. The next day, though still very weak, Angela had smiled and squeezed his hand when he had told her that he had had the vet put old Tom to sleep. It had been a ghastly business. Tom had known that the vet was putting him to death but had died quietly

in his master's arms since that was what was wanted of him.

That same night he had again been called urgently to the hospital but death had beaten him to it. Angela looked a little paler and seemed ever so small but never before had he seen such a look of calm happiness on her face. He had sobbed like a child and the matron had dragged him away and tried to be kind to him. Her attitude might have been different had she known that he was sobbing because of Tom, his faithful dog who would no longer be waiting behind the door, because his home would now be really empty.

"How do you know all these things?" he asked at last, looking up into the wrinkled face of the old gipsy who was lighting another cigarette.

"The devil can always read evil."

"That does not make sense. Besides, you are not the devil."

"Are you so sure that the Evil One is a man? You men are so inordinately proud that even in wickedness, the most wicked must of necessity be a man! How do you know that I am not here to tempt you?"

"Tempt me in what way, may I ask?"

Breathing smoke through her nostrils, she eyed him for some time before answering.

"With a little pact, of course. Another chance in exchange for your soul."

"What do you mean by another chance?"

"You were thinking of giving my fox another chance, weren't you?"

"Perhaps I was."

"He does not need it. He has had several. You do not need another chance either, but you feel that if you had one, you would act differently, don't you? Therefore, I offer you another chance in exchange for your soul."

"Sorry, I'm afraid I don't believe in the devil."

"Fine! That makes the bargain much easier, doesn't it? You get another chance and yet you don't feel that you are really giving anything in exchange for it."

"How do I know that you can give me another chance, as you call it?"

"You don't have to worry about that. If I don't, our contract doesn't hold, that is all."

He looked at her for a full minute without saying anything as she let the smoke dribble upwards from her mouth, her lips slightly parted, into her nostrils.

"All right," he said at last with a sheepish grin. "Just for the fun of it. Where do I sign?"

"In here," said the old gipsy, opening the back door of her caravan and climbing up without even looking round to see if he was following.

There was very little space between the folding table, the stove and the bed that seemed to take up most of the room. He was made to sit down on the edge of the bed; his weight flattening the enormous red eiderdown that lay on it like a great deflated balloon.

Clawing into a basket full of ribbons and balls of wool and what looked like the skeleton of a tortoise, she at last produced an old-fashioned quill pen and a broken pen-knife with which she sharpened it, and split it anew.

"Sign here," she said, handing him the pen, and holding open the bottom of a roll of parchment which, as far as he could tell, she had drawn out of her apron pocket.

"There isn't any ink."

Shrugging her shoulders, she drew a long pin from the red silk kerchief on the back of her head, took his hand in hers, and jabbed the pin deeply and cruelly into the ball of his thumb. He jumped, and repressed a cry, as the blood welled up. He felt both angry and foolish, and with the little pride he had left, he dipped the pen in his blood and signed.

"Were you ever baptized?" she asked, as she watched his signature turn brown on the parchment.

"No. You see, nothing can save me," he said. "Now what?"

"Nothing. Go back to your hotel and start again."

"Start what?"

"Go. You will soon find out," she said, opening the door.

He jumped out, and as he walked away, he noticed that, though it had not moved and still had its nose between its paws, the fox seemed to be grinning from ear to ear. He tied a handkerchief round his thumb, and

pushed his hand deep into the pocket of his raincoat, and walked quickly away.

It had been only three months before that Tom had been put to sleep, and that Angela had died. He had thought at first of moving somewhere else, but, somehow, he had been unable to drag himself away from their little Paris flat, and when his holidays had come round, he had simply driven off to the Brittany seaside resort where they had stayed for the last five years. He had gone to the same hotel, and asked for the same room, number twenty seven. "Madame will be coming later?" the proprietor had asked, not noticing his black tie.

He had not answered. It was only on going for a stroll after dinner on the night of his arrival that he had at last discovered what it was that had made him come back; it was Tom of course, Tom, whose happy little ghost he could almost see running ahead of him, snarling at big dogs and wanting to play with small ones, halting suddenly worried and looking eagerly round to see if his master was there.

He felt a little ashamed, but he did not miss Angela half as much as Tom. When he got back to the hotel, the first night, he had glanced at her bed, Angela's bed, as he slid into the one nearest the window, and felt no particular emotion. But when he looked down at the carpet between the two beds, he had felt tears sting his eyes; it was the carpet on which Tom had slept and snored, after days on the beach and in the sea, swimming with him. It was the very same carpet from which he had picked him up early one morning, to rush him off to the vet; it had been nothing more than a difficult bone to digest, but poor Tom had been ill for several days.

"The key is not here, Monsieur," said the porter when he came in from his meeting with the old gipsy.

"Oh, it's all right. I probably left it in the door," he said, walking over to the lift.

As he went along the second floor corridor towards his room, he heard the sound of someone snuffling, and it reminded him of the way in which Tom used to sniff eagerly under the door whenever he heard his master's footsteps approaching.

The key was not in the door, but the sniffing, and now a desperate sort of whining and scratching, seemed to come from behind it. White as a sheet, his heart thumping madly, he turned the handle and opened the door. In a flash, yapping and fairly screaming with joy, Tom jumped up into his arms.

"Tom . . . Tom! Dear old Tom!" he gasped, collapsing into an armchair as the dog scrambled up onto him, and covered his face with its wet, affectionate licking.

"Oh John! . . . Don't let him do it! He's ruining your raincoat, let alone that nice summer suit."

"Angela!"

"John! What on earth is the matter? Don't look at me that way. Anybody would think you'd seen a ghost. Anyway, why didn't you come to meet me at Saint Malo? I had to get a taxi, and it cost goodness knows how much. . . . The porter paid."

"But Angela . . . Angela my darling!"

"John! Let go. You're crushing the life out of me. Let me look at you. John . . . Have you been drinking or something? Where on earth did you get that black tie? It's horrid. And what have you done to your hand? Look, your handkerchief is covered with blood."

"My handkerchief? Oh, of course . . . No, really, it's nothing. A scratch. This tie? I don't know really, I put it on without thinking," he said, stepping backwards, and nearly falling over some luggage that he hadn't noticed, as the dog leapt onto his bed, and tried once more to hurl himself into his arms.

"That dog! I've had to make your bed again once already. He must have got into it the minute you left the room. It's covered with hairs. Why on earth didn't you take him with you?"

"Eh? Oh . . . er . . . I just went for a stroll to post a letter. I thought it was going to rain. By the way, dear, is your asthma any better?"

"My what? Really, I don't think you'd notice if I was dead. You know very well that the only thing wrong with me is a weak heart. Where on earth did you get the idea that I suffered from asthma?"

"I'm sorry, dear, but I was so worried when you went to hospital . . ."

"That was six years ago, when I had my appendix out, and you weren't a bit worried. As a matter of fact, I remember that the only thing that worried you was when Tom started scratching, and that was only because you'd both been living on tinned lobster because I wasn't at home to cook for you."

He didn't answer. He stood quite still, looking from one to the other. He had never suffered from any sort of hallucination before and he was wide awake. Everything was simply impossible. He found himself gazing into Tom's laughing golden eyes, and deep down under the laughter was love and understanding. Yes, without a doubt Tom knew and understood and from the way he was jumping around and wagging his tail, the dog wanted to get him out, out somewhere where they could be alone.

"Yes, that's right. Take the dog out while I unpack and get changed," said Angela as he gazed at the long leather leash which he had just found in his raincoat pocket.

"Yes, all right," he said, opening the wardrobe and taking his passport out of the pocket of his other suit.

Instead of calling the lift, he walked down to the writing room on the first floor. Tom would have to wait a few moments longer. He remembered the two documents which he had slipped into the back of his passport; he would soon know whether or not he was crazy. He felt satisfied but a little sick and the sweat moistened and seemed to tighten his collar as he unfolded Angela's death certificate and the hospital bill. Both documents were dated April 13th. And the calendar on the wall over the writing desk at which he was sitting said July 18th.

He had fought it off as long as he could but now he had to admit to himself that his adventure with the old gipsy might be more than a mere joke. He had to admit that. . . . God! he did not want to think about it. This seemed to be very much more than he had bargained for. He must see her again. Stuffing his papers away, he ran down and out of the hotel.

The large field at the back of the beach was empty. The

grass was crushed and trodden where the caravan had been. Tom growled and circled round a patch of burned grass.

He walked on to the beach and sat down, watching his dog race down to the water's edge. Tom looked back and seeing that his master was not following, raced back, rolled over wildly in the sand between his legs, dug vigorously for a few seconds, shook himself and with a sigh of contentment settled down with his head on his knee.

"Where on earth did you get to?" asked Angela, sitting down beside him a little later. "I do think you might have come back for me. Of course, I know your dog comes first, still. . . ."

"I'm sorry, dear. I didn't think."

"You never *do* think much about anyone else, except that dog, do you?" said Angela, lighting a cigarette.

He did not answer. He could feel the heat of Tom's breath on his leg, and he patted his head as he considered what Angela had said. He had heard it often before. He usually denied that Tom came first, even though he knew perfectly well that she only said he did out of spite. She had apparently not noticed that, for once in a while, he had not made his usual protest. He was sure, though, that silence would not be enough. If this was really to be his second chance, he must decidedly do something; otherwise, sooner or later, he would again find himself sacrificing the dog.

"You are quite right, Angela," he said at last.

"Of course I am. . . . What on earth are you talking about?"

"About Tom. You are quite right. He does come first, Angela, and . . . and if you don't like it, I'm sorry, but there's nothing to be done about it."

"So! I was right all the time then?"

"Yes, you were right."

"I think you're a beast."

"I was. . . . Not this time though," he said, patting his dog, as his wife ground her cigarette into the sand, and got up and walked away.

When he got back to the hotel later that evening,

Angela was changing for dinner. She completely ignored his presence, and he knew immediately that he was in for what he called a "silent storm". These usually lasted two or three days, and almost always ended in a first class row. This time, however, he made no attempt to be pleasant, but talked as though nothing had happened, a method which occasionally succeeded in averting a "silent storm". He simply took no notice of Angela's bad temper, and went about the room and bathroom as though everything was quite all right.

She took great pains over her make-up, tied her hair in a low bun on the back of her neck, and then stood waiting by the door while he made Tom settle down on the rug by the bed—dogs were not allowed in the restaurant.

He gave the dog one last pat, and opened the door—and Angela stepped through as though he had opened it for her. They walked down together in silence but when they reached the ground floor, she put on a ravishing and irresistible smile, that made it quite impossible for even another woman to guess that they were not a laughing, happy couple. He tried to play up and look unconcerned but knew that it was hopeless.

No sooner had they settled down at their usual table, by the window overlooking the sea, than one of Agela's acquaintances came across the room.

"How lovely to see you back, Angela," she screeched, barely nodding at John who had risen awkwardly. "I noticed your husband yesterday, but I knew that he wouldn't be without you long. I am sure he is quite miserable by himself."

"Oh no. Men get along very well without us, you know. He has his dog. I have only just returned from a three months' stay with my mother, and I am not at all sure he is really pleased to have me back," explained Angela with a sweet smile for her husband, who knew perfectly well that it meant nothing. Such smiles, and even endearments, in public never counted when a "silent storm" was raging.

"And how was your dear mother?" asked Angela's friend.

"Still alive, worse luck," said John, sitting down quietly.

"John dear! You really mustn't say such awful things," laughed Angela, but he knew, without looking up, that her eyes were blazing.

When he lit his pipe at the end of the meal, Angela delicately gathered up her handbag and scarf, and with another extremely tender smile, which also didn't count, swept out of the room.

Five minutes later, he went round to the kitchen to collect a bowl of soup and meat for Tom's dinner, and took it up to his room. Tom was not in the room, and he stood there for a minute, wondering where he could be. Then he put the food down in the bathroom, and ran lightly downstairs. Yes, the porter had seen Madame going out with the dog a few minutes before. Just another part of the show, he thought. People had to realise that, although it was a quite impossible dog, and as likely as not would dirty and spoil her frock, she was its slave, partly because she was kind to animals, and partly because it belonged to her dear husband.

Annoyed, he filled and lit another pipe and stood on the steps outside the hotel, wondering where she could have gone.

He was still there when she appeared, alone, at the end of the street. She was running awkwardly, her feet twisting in her ridiculously high heels, with one hand pushing the hair from off the side of her face.

"Tom . . . Tom's fallen off the cliff," she gasped.

Without a word, without looking to see if she was following, he started running towards the sea. Panting and gasping, he scrambled over the rocks at the end of the beach. Night was falling and he knew that if he did not hurry it would soon be difficult to see and he would have trouble in getting back.

His trousers were torn and wet and one of his knees was bleeding when he at last saw Tom in a sandy hollow between two rocks. Stretched out on his side, the dog seemed to be sleeping as he had so often slept in front of the fire at home in winter. But when he reached him, he noticed that a drop of blood was trickling from one

nostril, exactly as it had done three months before, at the vet's, when he had breathed, sighed, for the last time.

Tom was cold and heavy and stiff in his arms when at last he got back to the hotel.

"Oh John . . . is he . . . ?"

"Yes. He's dead," he said, laying the dog on the counter in front of the horrified hotel porter. "Have him put in a box of some sort, please. I shall bury him myself later."

"Oui, Monsieur," said the porter, beckoning to the lift boy.

"John, don't touch me . . . You're filthy with blood and mud, and . . . you're covered with hair . . ."

"All right, all right! But first, you're going to show me what happened," he said, taking her by the wrist and dragging her towards the car park.

Without a word, he unlocked their car, made her get in and drove off. He went carefully through the village but fast up the steep twisting road that led to the cliff-top.

There were half a dozen cars on the circular parking place from which a stone staircase led down over the top of the cliff to the *Chaise du Curé,* an enormous, chair shaped rock and balustrade facing the sea at the end of the promontory.

He helped her out of the car and again grasping her wrist almost ran with her down the stairs. Other people were strolling along the path, enjoying the evening air and watching the lights twinkling across the bay. There was no wind and hundreds of moths were fluttering round each of the electric lamps fixed in the rock face, that lit the path to the *Chaise du Curé.*

"Where did it happen? Show me," he said quietly, letting go of her wrist.

"There, at the end of the path."

"Where?"

"Here," she said, walking to the edge of the rocky platform and pointing at the grassy slope that plunged out of sight some ten feet further down.

"What happened exactly?"

"I don't know . . . Tom was running around and went

too near the edge . . . over there; and then he must have slipped, and couldn't scramble up again."

"Why did you let him off the leash, Angela?"

"Because he was jerking and pulling at my arm, as usual."

"Where did you unleash him?"

"Before we reached the car park up there."

"And what did you do with the leash?"

"I . . . I don't know. I must have let it drop somewhere later . . . I was in such a state."

"Angela, you are a rotten liar."

"John! How dare you!"

"The leash was still attached to his collar when I picked him up on the rocks below. And I found him on the other side of the cliff head. Tom could not possibly have dropped from here and fallen on the other side."

"Well, he did . . . and that's that, and I have had enough of all this!" said Angela, stamping her foot and turning to go back.

"No you don't," he said in a low voice, again grasping her arm. "Angela, you killed Tom . . . You murdered the poor beast!"

"John! You're hurting me!"

"I say you picked him up where the path narrows and you deliberately threw him over!"

"John! You're mad! . . . But if you really want to know, yes, I did throw your beastly dog over the cliff. Now let go . . . leave me alone."

He took no notice of what she said, but twisted her arm behind her back; he seemed not to hear when she started to scream, as he forced her over the railing, and pushed her out towards the edge of the little grassy slope.

Later each of the five witnesses explained to the police how they had seen this man, this Englishman, run the few paces to the edge of the slope, and on the very brink heave the woman out, far out, so that she fell shrieking from their sight, and how he had barely been able to recover his balance, and scramble back to safety himself.

"She was a murderess," he explained to the horrified witnesses who did not dare lay hands on him. He walked

back to his car and drove quietly back to his hotel where he had been arrested an hour later.

"My dear Monsieur, you cannot tell a French jury that you killed a ghost!" expostulated the little French lawyer, walking up and down the cold musty smelling parlour of the big provincial prison. "We can prove that your wife died three months ago. All right, good! Then it was your mistress you killed. We can tell the jury that you loved her, that you were jealous, that she no longer loved you, that she was going to run away with another man . . . anything like that is good and they will listen and understand. Of course they will want to know why she tried to pass as your wife, how she got a passport that seems to prove that she was your wife. There will be difficulties but nothing impossible, you understand. But if you try to tell them that you killed a person already dead and buried, they will think you are trying to fool them."

"I really don't give a damn what they think. As far as I'm concerned, they can work out any solution that pleases them," said his client, and accepted a cigarette.

"How about that gipsy woman? Have you been able to trace her?"

"No. Besides, she would only make matters worse. And, Monsieur, for Heaven's sake, leave the dog out of it. That would be most disastrous."

As he stepped through the heavy studded door, the lawyer saw the prison chaplain coming towards him along the narrow, deserted, cobbled street.

"Father, how are you? Have you seen my mad Englishman?" he asked, wiping his forehead.

"Yes, of course."

"Did he tell you his story? It is one that concerns you more than it does me, I am afraid, and one that is not going to help him much with a jury of hard headed Breton peasants."

"Yes, I know. He has told me part of his story. I am trying to help him."

Almost a year and a half later—French criminal pro-

cedure is slow, perhaps the slowest in the world—on a cold, foggy, November morning, the priest, the lawyer, and the British Consul who had come specially from Brest the night before, walked out of the provincial prison in the main courtyard of which a man had that morning been guillotined.

Not a word was exchanged as the three men walked along the silent street. The priest was still holding the little wooden cross which the condemned man had kissed as, trussed up, he was half dragged, half carried along the damp corridor at the end of which the guillotine was waiting for him.

"Excuse me," he said, bowing slightly to his two companions, "I must give the Devil his due, as the English say."

He went across the street towards an old gipsy woman leaning against a wall, drawing on a cigarette, the smoke of which trickled slowly from her slightly gaping lips up into her nostrils.

"You want to know about the Englishman, don't you?" said the priest, stopping in front of her. "He died bravely."

"That is not what I want to know. What have *you* had to do with him?"

"I baptized him this morning."

"The cheat!" hissed the old woman and, puffing viciously at her cigarette, she walked away.

Although the walls were dripping wet, and the street slimy with mud that oozed up between the shiny cobbles, the spot where the old gipsy had stood was quite dry, and on the ground at the foot of the wall where she had been standing, the priest saw a little heap of ashes, as though someone had been burning parchment.

ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE

To the obscure inventor of really comfortable armchairs.

Tom Delone was our neighbour and, naturally, he had been the first to enter our house after Mary had discovered Tweeny's empty cot. Tom had the whitest teeth imaginable; even dentists were dazzled and film stars hated having him around for, when he flashed his smile, press cameras had a tendency to go off in his direction. Tom also had the smallest hands of the whole Los Angeles police force. A cauliflower ear and a long white scar down the back of his head and neck showed that he was no chicken, but it seemed only the year before that I had time and again chased him off our lawn where he loved to play cowboys and Indians.

The way Mary had called him had made him run. Although he had only just come in from night duty, red-eyed from the smog which was getting worse and worse, dark patches of blue on his face where a beard might possibly grow if he gave it a chance, he was pink and fresh.

"Tweeny! Are you sure, Mrs. Palmer? I mean, he couldn't have just . . . No. All right, in that case there's no time to lose."

Pushing his cap back over his head of short cropped curls, he had picked up the telephone and dialed headquarters. Mary stood by, trembling but dry-eyed, as Tom explained that a baby had been kidnapped.

"I'll stick around until the squad men get here. They won't be long, Mrs. Palmer. Grandpap didn't hear anything, did he?" he asked, slapping my shoulder.

"No," answered Mary. "He didn't move. Besides, he's so old and getting so stiff now that he can no longer get upstairs. He sleeps down here."

"Still quite a dog, though, aren't you, Grandpap?" said Tom, shaking me in my chair, and making my rheumatism play up for a moment.

We lived in what had once been quite a residential part

of town, before people had started building palatial horrors in Beverly Hills. Within a few hundred yards of Hollywood Boulevard, the wooden framed houses of our street were still quite neat and their tenants took pride in keeping the front lawns trim and green.

I was still sniffing gently, trying to analyze a vague smell, an unusual smell, when Tom's friends chased it away by opening and closing the back and front doors half a dozen times. But it was only after they had been upstairs, opened and closed more doors and windows that they finally came into the living-room. One of them raised his hat slightly but only just enough to scratch the top of his pink head.

"Have you any reason to suspect anyone, Mrs. Palmer? Have you any enemies? Has your husband any, do you know?" asked the eldest, walking up and down as though he was on a beat.

"No, of course not."

"Where is your husband? What does he do?"

"He is an officer in the merchant marine and is at present in Japan."

"Who lives in this house, Mrs. Palmer?"

"Yvonne, a little French maid who has only been here a few weeks, my mother, Tweeny of course, and . . . and Grandpap who is so old and full of rheumatism that he hardly ever leaves that chair."

"What makes you think it was a kidnapping?"

"What else could it be, Officer?" said Mary's mother sweeping in. "Tweeny is just seven months and although a remarkable child in many ways, he is quite unable to run or fly away by himself."

"You are . . ."

"My mother," explained Mary.

"Where were you when . . ."

"Look, young man, no one ever got sunstroke in this house, so you can take your hat off."

"Look here, Lady . . ."

"That is precisely what I am doing and it could not be worse without a hat, or do you keep a bird under it?"

With a growl, the policeman threw his hat down on a chair.

"Where is this maid of yours?"

"She is crying her eyes out and she can only speak a very few words of English."

"Dan, go wipe her eyes—you're good at that—then make her cry some more with your French," ordered the shorter of the now hatless men. "Now Mrs. Palmer, what would a kidnapper want from you, have you any idea?"

"There are two possibilities," answered Mary quietly. "They might have a purchaser for a baby the age of mine —there is such a market, it appears. Also, we have just inherited quite a lot of money from an uncle in New Orleans."

"Who knows about that?"

"All the readers of the Gazette for one thing—there was quite an interview and a picture of Mary with Tweeny in her arms," snapped Mary's mother.

"Well, if it's a ransom they want, you'll soon be hearing from them. I'll have your telephone tapped," he said going over to the instrument and dialing a number. He gave the necessary instructions and hung up as his colleague came downstairs.

"Well?"

"She says that in her country they would have had trained dogs . . ."

"Did she also explain how the guillotine works?"

"Sounds like good advice to me," said Mary's mother.

"Yes, maybe," said the detective, mollified. "All right, ask for the dogs. You never know."

Both men were helping Mary's mother to sort out photographs of Tweeny when Doctor Brendon came running across the lawn and fairly bounced into the room.

"Who are you?" asked the detective, getting up.

"Who . . . who are you?" stammered Doctor Brendon.

"Police inspectors, Doctor," explained Mary. "Something terrible has happened."

"So it's true, then?"

"Hold it!" shouted the detective. "Now, who are you?'

"Doctor Brendon, our neighbour," said Mary's mother. "He is our dentist and . . . oh, Tom knows him, don't you, Tom?"

"Will you please let the man talk? Now, Doctor, is what true?"

"About Tweeny . . . I just had a 'phone call . . ."

"Who from? What about?" snapped the policeman.

"I . . . I don't know who from. A woman who said that Tweeny was safe and that I was to come over here to say that you would be getting instructions about the amount to pay and how to pay it . . ."

"Oh, Doctor, who was it?" cried Mary, breaking down. "Oh, my baby!"

"Why were you called?" asked the policeman.

"I have no idea . . . Perhaps the kidnappers knew that you were already here."

"And they would use you as a link? Mmmm . . . What's your 'phone number, Doc? We'll have it tapped, too."

"And never hear any more! No, no . . . we were probably wrong in calling you," said Mary hysterically. "Doctor Brendon, tell them I shall give them all I have, but they must not hurt my baby."

"But the lady didn't say whether she would call again . . . Oh, dear, what shall I do?" he asked the policeman.

"Give me your telephone number."

A minute later, he was talking to a post-office engineer.

"Where did the call come from, any idea?" he asked, looking over his shoulder.

"No . . . no idea."

"What time did you say it was?"

"Oh . . . about ten minutes ago, I suppose. I came right over."

The policeman said something, waited a while and finally hung up. "Funny," he grunted, about to light a cigar but putting his matches away at sight of Mary's mother, "they say you haven't had a call yet this morning."

"Who says that? How do they know? It's an automatic exchange."

"Yes, I know," said the policeman dreamily.

"Suppose they do call me, or get in touch with me again . . . what shall I do?"

"Take the message."

"But how shall we know that we are in touch with the real kidnappers?"

What a fool the man was, I thought, glancing up at him. Fancy worrying about such idiotic details. He had not even glanced at me on coming in but that had not surprised me. Doctor Brendon had never liked me somehow, probably because he knew that he would never get a chance of fixing me with a set of false teeth.

"Leave that to them. They'll have plenty of ideas."

"Don't you think I had better ask them for something to prove that they really have Mrs. Palmer's child?"

"Yes, ask for anything you like," said the policeman annoyed and gazing out of the window.

"Something that you can identify, Mrs. Palmer," went on the dentist, "one of Tweeny's socks . . . or one of his shoes . . . What do you think?"

A station wagon came down the street, turned off and ran up the alley by the side of our house.

"Here are the dogs," said the policeman.

There was only one but it was a beauty all right: a big Alsatian, followed by a short, whiskered, grey haired little man holding its leash. He smiled at me when the dog came up to me, wagging its tail. "Here, Chuck," he said, going to the other side of the table, and Chuck reluctantly obeyed.

There was again that vague smell, the same strange smell I had noticed before. Doctor Brendon had come round to my side of the table in the middle of the room, and I chuckled inwardly at the thought that he was perhaps afraid of Chuck—and in a flash I knew!

Not only did I now know the smell but I also knew why he had talked of Tweeny's shoe. And that fool of a police dog just sat on its haunches, looking at me and wagging its tail!

There was really no time to lose. Mary had run upstairs to fetch one of Tweeny's blankets for Chuck to sniff and I knew that the dentist was not going to stick around much longer. I had no choice: rheumatism or not, I would have to act, I would have to act definitely and with certainty. There must be no slip-up. I knew

that the pain would be unbearable but I would have to go through with it.

Tightening my jaw, I stiffened for action and the pain made me wince. I had not far to go; however, it was not only a matter of getting there but, once there, of not letting go until I had it out. I could feel the hair stiffening on the back of my neck and my heart was beating much too fast as, with a snarl, I jumped.

"Grandpap! Let go!" screamed Mary, as Doctor Brendon turned and tried to tear his coat out of my jaws.

"Here, make your dog let go!" he shouted, tugging desperately at his coat.

But I had it all right. I could feel it well in my jaws. Come what may, I would have to hang on until the pocket had been torn open.

I groaned when he hit me over the head but that was his undoing for, as he hit me a second time, swinging me right round the room, with a low growl, Chuck sprang up and grabbed his wrist and before Chuck's owner could call him off, between the two of us we had him down between the table and the armchair. To be quite truthful, it was Chuck, who knew all the tricks, who got him down but although he fell and rolled over me, I never once let go of his pocket and what was inside it.

Of course, all I could do was snarl like mad and hang on, tugging with painful wrenches of my neck and shoulders, hoping against hope that the pocket would tear. I was beginning to feel very sick when at last the policeman came to my aid.

"What have you got in that pocket, Doctor?" he asked, and I knew I could let go.

"Why n . . . nothing," said Doctor Brendon, shaking all over.

"Let's see," said the policeman, digging his hand into the pocket and dragging out Tweeny's shoe.

Like lightning, Tom had drawn his gun and stuck it into the small of Doctor Brendon's back.

"Quick, where's Tweeny?"

"Don't . . . in the back . . ."

"Where?"

". . . the back of the car."

"Put that gun away and go round and see," said the detective, but Mary was already half way to the dentist's house.

It was some time before two other doctors got Tweeny awake and it was not until then that Mary and her mother came down to cuddle and cry over me and hurt my poor muscles that ached so. I had to groan piteously to make them let go. Besides, they made me feel sick the way they both smelt outrageously, the same smell I had noticed earlier that morning and, again, when it was floating all round Doctor Brendon. Tweeny was fairly reeking with it. It hung around the house for days. I later gathered that it was the smell that had put Tweeny to sleep.

"Grandpap, you wonderful, wonderful dog," sobbed Mary, all over me.

There was a wonderful cushion, in a chair by the piano, a great yellow satin cushion. . . . Nothing like trying, I thought. Getting gingerly off my armchair—my paws ache something terrible every time I start walking—I went to the door of the next room and scratched. Mary opened it immediately, of course—she was in a mood to open anything. Glancing up at her and putting plenty of dramatic appeal in my right eye—the other one is blind—I went to the chair where the cushion is and very gently, ever so gently, tugged at the corner.

"Grandpap, you want Mum's beautiful cushion. Oh, you dear, wicked old dog!" she sobbed and, as I followed wagging my tail slowly for even that is painful, she took the cushion, put it on the big armchair by the fire and helped me to climb up.

PAST THE TIME LIMIT

To the memory of all future victims of relativity.

"Hello, Mademoiselle Aline . . . It's a quarter to six."

"What . . . oh, yes, thank you, Doctor. Everything all right?"

"All okay."

Doctor Pierre Martinaud put down the receiver, stretched and yawned, scratched the blue stubble under his chin, blinked at his packet of Gauloises and shook out a last wrinkled cigarette. A white line round each of the blinds at the other end of the room showed that day had come. The dials of the wide control desk in front of him glowed a soft green; their white needles were all in the "normal" position, slanting up to ten o'clock. Had any of them gone more than two degrees off, its dial would have glowed yellow. Nevertheless, Martinaud again checked them one by one: Pulse, Body Temperature, Blood Pressure, Squeezing pressure of each hand, Visual Reactions, Left and Right Foot Pressure . . . They were all normal.

There were many other dials, almost as many as in the cockpit of a jet airliner, but the Chief Engineer, sitting by him, was responsible for those. Should any of his dials go off the ten o'clock slant, a mere touch on a corresponding switch would bring into action new machinery or another instrument. The young doctor would have felt a good deal happier if he too had had the possibility of switching on some machinery should any of Yvon's organs show any sign of weakness.

Two days before he had had a shock when, through the double window of the experimental cockpit, he had seen Yvon's eyes half closed! Xavier Massel had answered his call almost immediately.

"Monsieur le Professeur . . . Yvon Darnier is going to sleep!"

"What makes you think that, Doctor?"

"His eyes . . . his eyes are closing gradually, Professor."

"Pulse?"

"Seventy one."

"Breathing?"

"Sixteen."

"Hand grip?"

"Normal . . . one kilo three hundred."

"He's no more going to sleep than you are, I hope, Doctor. Darnier is blinking, that's all. Good night."

Martinaud had cursed himself for a fool. He should

have known better! A man whose heart, whose blood-stream, whose every action are slowed down sixty times must evidently look as though he is dropping off to sleep when merely blinking.

In two hours' time, Yvon Darnier would come to after two and half days in the experimental cockpit, exactly sixty hours which, for him, would have lasted only sixty minutes.

Prim and pretty in her blue and white nurse's uniform, Aline Barenne entered the control room.

"He must be tired, poor dear," she said, looking over Doctor Martinaud's shoulder.

"Unless the Professor is all wrong, he'll be as fresh as a daisy after three days of a test that has only lasted an hour as far as he is concerned."

"Then . . . Yvon is in truth two days younger?" asked the nurse, opening a metal cabinet full of surgical instruments.

"Well, no . . . that is, not really," said the Engineer. "We are three days older and Yvon is one hour older than when we started."

"Isn't that what I said?" asked Aline with a little shrug, as she prepared a tray and a hypodermic syringe. "And if Professor Massel kept him there long enough . . ."

"We would grow ever so old and he would still be young!" chuckled Martinuad, reaching for one of the Engineer's cigarettes.

"I don't believe it," said Aline, breaking open a small phial. "What time is it?"

"Four minutes to six."

"Do we have to wait for the Professor?"

"He said he'd be here, but you know what he is . . . All his work is based on time, the only thing which he personally seems to know nothing about," said Martinaud, again sitting at his desk. "Prepare everything, nurse. Yvon's got to have that shot at six."

"What is it going to do to him, do you know?" asked Aline, carefully filling the syringe.

"Start the acceleration process that will bring him back to normal. Ready? You can get in there, the air is normal."

The engineer got up to spin the large wheel that locked the thick oval door at the other end of the experimental cabin.

"Thank you," said Aline, stepping carefully through with the tray in her hands.

Yvon sat perfectly still, his eyes on a chart in front of him. His right hand was clasped on the rubber handle of a joystick but his left arm was stretched, palm up on a surgical arm-rest. On the chart, in red type, she read: "Minute 57—Hold out your left arm for an injection. Do not worry if you do not feel it or if you only get a blurred vision of the doctor." Under, in black type, she read: "Minute 58—Two minutes to go. Lie back and relax for your return, but keep pad and pencil handy for anything worth noting."

The loudspeaker purred and she heard Martinaud's voice:

"All right, nurse, give him his shot. The old boy is on his way, I just called his house."

Aline leaned over Yvon's arm, raised his sleeve and shivered slightly at finding his skin so cold. With professional outward calmness, she dabbed some alcohol over his vein at the bend of the arm and deftly dug in her syringe, punctured the vein, pushed it up, made sure that she was well in by drawing a drop of blood with a slight pull on the pistol, then slowly pushed it home, injecting the medicine.

She had just come out and the Engineer was closing the heavy door when Martinaud looked up and shouted. Yvon's mouth had opened and his face was getting redder and redder. Half a dozen dials of the control desk were flashing yellow with their needles jerking way off "normal".

"Switch back to normal, I think he is coming to," said the Engineer, watching over the Doctor's shoulder.

Martinaud turned some switches and, one by one, the dials glowed green again, all except two, over which he leaned.

"Body Temperature 123 degrees Fahrenheit and pulse a hundred and forty!" he exclaimed, looking up at Yvon who was now frothing at the mouth and twisting in his

chair. "Stretcher! Open up and get him out!" he snapped over his shoulder, then switching on the cabin loudspeaker he said smoothly, his mouth close to the microphone: "Yvon, can you hear me? Try to keep quiet."

Rushing to the door, he helped the Engineer open it.

"Hurry, damn it! The man's dying," he muttered.

"Quick!" gasped Aline, as a cloud of steam seemed to rise from the body of the man in the cabin.

The dials of the control desk were again flashing warning lights and Aline screamed as she saw Yvon shaking like a puffed up jelly gradually losing its shape.

Martinaud and the Engineer at last swung the door open and reeled back as a hot blast scorched them. Aline was swept off her feet and thrown bodily onto a stretcher ready against the wall and the glass panel of the door was shattered as the blast swung it open.

"Yvon! Where are you?" shouted the Engineer, already inside the experimental cabin. "Where did he go? Did you see him go?" he asked, rushing out again, as Aline got slowly to her feet.

"I . . . I didn't see him," she said.

"He must have run through that door," said Martinaud, grabbing the telephone and pushing his finger down on a red button in the centre of the control desk. Instantly lights flashed and bells started ringing inside and outside the building. The steel doors that separated the research laboratory from the nuclear station closed slowly as armed men, firemen and decontamination units began forming up. Martinaud pressed down the switch marked: "General Address". Instantly his voice boomed outside and in all the halls, laboratories, corridors, dressing rooms, private rooms: "Lieutenant Yvon Darnier is wanted back at the experimental laboratory immediately! Anyone seeing him must bring him back, by force if necessary. He is under the strain of a difficult and dangerous experiment. He has only just left the laboratory and cannot be far. Patrols please start searching immediately and watch all exits. Thank you."

Professor Massel was annoyed because he was late and because the main entrance gates were closed. He had to

get out of his car and get a call through to Martinaud before being allowed in. He guessed that something had happened when he saw General Calovet, who was both Commander in Chief and Director General of the research station, stamping up and down the control room of the experimental laboratory.

"Do your animals also run away like that after your experiments, Monsieur le Professeur?" snapped the General, catching sight of him.

"What happened?" asked the Professor, taking no notice and going over to where Doctor Martinaud was collecting some notes.

"Yvon Darnier disappeared shortly after his six o'clock injection."

"Now, Monsieur le Professeur and you, Doctor Martinuad," said the General walking up to the two men, "I have to take over here, now. You must . . ."

"You must leave me alone to finish my experiment if you wish to see Lieutenant Darnier again," said the Professor quietly, turning round and carefully wiping his glasses.

"Not until you tell me where Lieutenant Darnier has gone to? These men are not guinea-pigs, Professor! They are . . ."

"Human guinea-pigs, volunteer guinea-pigs! Now get out and let me get to work, or I leave," said the little Professor, putting on his glasses.

"I warn you, Professor . . . you are responsible for this!"

"Have one of your secretaries type it out and I shall sign it, if you wish. Meanwhile, if I am responsible here, then I want obedience, mon Général. So, please get out." And, step by step, the General was pushed towards the door. Closing it gently behind him, Massel again wiped his glasses.

"Now, Doctor Martinaud, what happened, please?"

"Al . . . Nurse Barenne had just given the Lieutenant his six o'clock . . . his first . . ."

"Were all the registering instruments in order? Films, charts and so forth?"

"Yes. All the temperature, pulse, pressure and general

reaction charts are there on my desk. The films, of course, will have to be developed."

"Right. I am sorry I interrupted. Carry on, please."

"Shortly after, Darnier's reactions became hectic and, realizing that he was returning to normal rather faster than expected, I switched over the controls of all recording instruments back to normal. This did not last more than a few seconds and again the instruments began to register a rising temperature, an impossible pulse, etcetera. Through this window, I could see that Yvon Darnier was beginning to suffocate. I switched the oxygen full on in the cabin and, while we struggled to get the door open, he got redder and redder, seemed to swell and grow hazy . . ."

"Hazy?"

"Yes, it's difficult to explain. He became blurred, like a picture out of focus. When or how he left the cabin, I don't really know, though there was a blast of sorts when we did get the door open, but I did not see him go by."

"Did you see him rise from his seat?" asked the Professor, marking some of the charts with the stub of a red pencil which he had extracted from his waistcoat pocket.

"No, I can't say I did."

"Right, thank you, Doctor. How about you, Nurse? Did you notice anything?"

"No, Professor, it all happened just as Doctor Martinaud . . ."

"I am sure it did, my dear, but I want your story. What was the Lieutenant like when you went in to give him his injection?"

"I . . . I don't know . . . Oh, Yvon! Professor, what was it you made me give him that caused him to . . .to run away!" sobbed the girl.

"Miss Barenne, please!" snapped Martinaud.

"No, no . . . that's all right," said the Professor, gently patting the girl's shoulder. "Try to tell us all you know . . . When you went in, for instance, had he lain out his arm for the injection?"

"Ye . . . es."

"Was it hard or soft? Hot or cold?"

"Cold but not . . . not hard, I don't think. I had no

difficulty in pushing the needle into his vein."

"And you noticed nothing. He did not react or move in any way during or after the injection?"

"No. It was like giving an injection to a person under an anaesthetic."

"Doctor Martinaud, please, what does the chart give as that young man's temperature at the time of the injection?"

"At minute 58 . . . let me see . . . here we are: 37 point 1 centigrade on the slow reading and in true temperature, that is normal reading 1 degree point 2 centigrade."

"That is correct; his body should have been just above freezing point."

Martinaud picked up the telephone that had started ringing.

"Yes . . . Yes, bring them over."

"Have they . . . ?" stammered Aline.

"The guards are sure that no one has passed the main enclosure and they propose bringing over a couple of police dogs," explained Martinaud, lighting a fresh cigarette.

A moment later, a van pulled up outside and a man leading two big dogs jumped out and walked in. Martinaud took him into the experimental cabin where the dogs were made to sniff the seat where Lieutenant Darnier had been for the last two days. The dogs put their noses to the ground and started running round in circles from the cabin into the control room. One of them sniffed as far as the door; the other threw up its head and howled.

"I can't make it out," said their guardian, "they don't usually act like that."

"Perhaps Lieutenant Darnier's own dog would be better," suggested Aline.

"He had . . . has a dog? What sort?" asked the Professor.

"A black cocker-spaniel. He asked me to look after it during the experiment. It is upstairs . . . in my room."

"A very good idea. Will you get it, my dear?"

When the nurse reappeared with Darnier's dog on a

leash, Professor Massel was in his shirt-sleeves, preparing a syringe.

"Oh, no! . . . Professor, you are not . . . ? This is Yvon's dog and you cannot . . ." gasped Aline, trying to hold down the brown eyed, fat pawed, black silky spaniel jumping round her feet.

"I know exactly what you think and feel, nurse, but I have a reason for this, believe me," said the Professor. "Of all the dogs in the world, this one is the best suited for this particular experiment."

"I am sorry, Professor, but this is Lieutenant Darnier's dog and I cannot allow you or anyone . . ."

"My dear, Lieutenant Darnier's very life may be in danger and, if we are to help him, we must first know exactly what happened . . . Nine times out of ten, nothing much will happen, anyway, My hand is trembling, though, and dogs' veins are not particularly easy to get at."

"I think I can probably manage," said Doctor Martinaud, gathering the dog into his arms and carrying it over to a long enamel topped table, where it struggled to jump off until Aline put her hand on its neck.

"It's all right, Jyp . . . It's to help find your . . . But don't you think Jyp might find . . . ?"

"Please, Mademoiselle! We are losing time, and time may count far more than you think," said the little Professor, scissors in hand, carefully snipping hairs off the dog's hind paw.

"That will do, thank you," said Martinaud, feeling around for the dog's vein with the tip of his finger. Then, asking Aline to keep the dog still, he extended the paw and deftly inserted the long needle of the syringe. Jyp panted a little but did not move as Martinaud slowly injected the liquid prepared by the Professor.

All stood round, watching, as the dog sat up, scratched behind one of its long ears, then stood up and shook itself vigorously. At a nod from the Professor, Aline let go when Jyp struggled and barked.

"But Jyp never barks like that! It is like the yap of a terrier! Oh, Jyp! . . . Look at him!"

"Chasing its tail, that's all," said the Engineer.

"No, look! Look out!" shouted Martinaud as Jyp seemed to whirl round faster and faster.

"Jyp!" called Aline, but the dog was but a blurred mass that seemed to spring off the table and disappear. Where it had been a moment before, a slight bluish smoke, like that of a cigarette, was slowly spreading around.

"Bon Dieu! Just like Yvon," said Martinaud.

"And the same smell of burning," added the Engineer, as Aline sat down, weeping.

Martinaud went to the door and came slowly back. He was sure that the dog had not had time to leave the room before . . . before he knew not what, but he began to fear that it was what had happened to Lieutenant Yvon Darnier.

Aline got up slowly and Professor Massel was about to ask her not to leave, when he saw her go down flat on the ground as a shot was fired close by the side of his face, and a smoking pistol was thrown on the enamel topped table where the dog had been.

With a curse, Martinaud rushed to pick up the nurse who was already struggling to her feet.

"Aline? Are you all right? What do you mean by it, Professor!" he said, running his hands over her shaking limbs to make sure that she had not been hit.

"I did not fire that shot, but it was fired from very close to my face," said Xavier Massel, wiping his glasses.

"Professor, I can't say I saw you fire that pistol, but no one else was near you when it was fired," remarked the Engineer drily.

"Gentlemen, be calm, please. I am not mad and I have never fired a gun in my life. I am certain that neither of you were near enough to have fired that pistol, and the nurse was standing over there. Don't you see, it can only mean one thing!"

"And what does that mean? A conjuring trick to amuse us, perhaps?" said Martinaud, rudely, picking up the automatic and tugging gently at something protruding from the muzzle. He carefully unfolded a rolled up piece of paper, singed at the edges, and examined it for a moment and looked up. "I can't imagine that any of you would play such a hoax but, by God, if it is a hoax, some-

one is going to pay dearly for it, I can assure you," he went on in a quiet voice, handing the sheet of paper to the Professor who slowly read the pencilled lines.

"You are all sure that it was in the muzzle of the pistol?" he asked, carefully folding it and tucking it into his pocket.

"You saw me take it out, didn't you?" retorted Martinaud.

"And it could not have been there when the pistol was fired," went on Massel smoothly.

"Of course not! And, what is more, I am sure that it was not there when the gun hit the table," said Martinaud.

"And you recognise Lieutenant Darnier's writing?"

"Yes, and I cannot understand it," said the Doctor.

"Perhaps I can," said the Professor. "Listen, that note was inserted in the muzzle of the pistol after it was fired, very soon after, less than a second. Now, since none of us put it there, someone else did."

"Who else? This is ridiculous," snorted the Engineer.

"Do you mean to say that you think . . . But, Bon Dieu, Professor! No . . . this is madness!"

"Perhaps, or perhaps it only seems like madness," said Professor Massel, "and we have very little time in which to act."

"But what can we do!"

"Are you both mad, or am I?" said the Engineer. "What are you talking about, or perhaps you don't know?"

"About the disappearance of Lieutenant Darnier and the possibilities of rescuing him. Now, please be quiet and let me think," said the Professor.

Time passed slowly as, wiping his glasses again and again, Professor Massel trotted up and down, watched by Martinaud, smoking nervously, and Aline, who sat quite still. The Engineer walked out, shrugging his shoulders.

"There is only one hope," he said at last, still walking up and down the room. "Do you think Lieutenant Darnier capable of giving himself an intraveinous shot?" he asked, stopping in front of Aline who looked up at him wide-eyed.

"I don't know. I shouldn't think so . . . Why?"

"There is a bare possibility of bringing him back that way but, since he is beyond our reach, he would have to administer the shot himself."

"I'm afraid I don't follow you, Professor," said Martinaud wearily.

"No? No matter. Miss Barenne, please load three syringes with three cubic centimetres of the H.C. formula in each."

"That's the hibernating-conscious formula with which you put Darnier to . . ."

"You were going to say to death? Well, we can see about that later, Doctor. And have no fear, I am not going to use it on anyone else. Hurry, please, nurse. I fear . . . I know that every second counts," said the Professor, sitting at Martinaud's desk, extracting an old-fashioned fountain pen from his coat pocket, carefully unscrewing the gold nib and writing slowly. He finished as Aline came up with a metal tray containing three syringes loaded with a yellowish liquid. "Bring the stretcher here by this desk, please, nurse," he said, taking the tray from her.

"What next? Another pistol shot?" asked the Engineer from the doorway as, a moment later, Professor Massel waved them back into a corner of the room and stood by them, watch in hand, waiting. "What have you written? Is it a magic formula, perhaps?"

"You must be patient just a little longer," said the Professor. "Either Lieutenant Darnier is going to return much as he left or . . . or it will mean that we can no longer help him."

"I'm afraid this is more than I am willing to stand!" cried Martinaud, suddenly.

"Five minutes, I beg of you. Five little minutes. Not much, is it? Well, unless I am much mistaken it is something like a month for Darnier. He may be away hunting or something, but if he is not back at the end of a month, then perhaps his body will be found, for something will have happened to him."

Martinaud and Aline gazed at each other, then at the

Engineer, who slowly shook his head and touched his forehead.

"Look!" gasped Aline.

"What? Nurse, are you . . . ?"

"Look, there is only one syringe left . . . and . . . and it's gone!"

By the desk, the stretcher creaked and they all stood rigid, watching a blurred, moving mass that appeared on it, seemed to gather weight and become darker and clearer.

"Mon Dieu!" gasped Aline, crossing herself, as they all stared at the half naked, blistered body of a man who was trying to sit up on the stretcher.

"What is this devilry?" gasped Martinaud. "Who is . . . ?"

"Silence!" hissed the Professor, stepping forward. "Nurse, call the ambulance and have the infirmary warned of the arrival of a badly burned patient! Quickly, now!"

"Jyp! Where's Jyp?" gasped the man, and recognising Yvon's voice Aline ran out sobbing.

"We shall see about that later, my friend," said Professor Massel. "We must first take care of you. Are you in pain?"

"No. Wh . . . where is . . . Aline? Oh, hello, Martinaud. I . . . I wrote it all out . . . complete report . . . I put it on the desk in . . . in the experimental cabin," he croaked, and fell back in a dead faint.

When the Professor and Doctor Martinaud returned from the infirmary, they found the Engineer, reading sheet after sheet of the pencilled report of Lieutenant Yvon Dernier. Without asking any questions, they sat down and started reading.

If only to prove that my memory has not suffered and though it now seems many years ago, I will start from the beginning. It was to have been an experiment of "conscious hibernation", as Professor Massel called it. From first tests on animals, it seemed that the Professor's medicine did the trick and had no after effects; I say seemed, because, although animals big and small were "slowed

down" about sixty times and seemed relatively conscious none of them were able to give us their impressions—true that, as expected, their Pavlov reactions had been correspondingly slowed down. Why did I volunteer for the first "human" experiment? Simply because I happen to be one of the five French pilots being trained for the first trip to Mars, a trip that is to last many days, many days during which we will have to live on very little air, very little food, in a very confined space indeed. Therefore, a state of conscious hibernation is the ideal solution.

A first, very short test which only lasted one hour but which, for me, seemed to last a bare minute or two, had been quite successful. When Professor Massel announced that the next test would last sixty hours, sixty hours which would pass like one for the subject, naturally I volunteered again.

Ordinary aircraft controls had been set up in our experimental cabin. In order to test my alertness and reactions, I was given a map and a compass course which I would fly blind.

After Martinaud had applied his control instruments to various parts of my body, I at last donned my flying suit and entered the experimental cabin, followed by Professor Massel and Aline.

"Don't you worry if you don't see Martinaud properly through the window in front of you. It is simply that he will be living sixty hours while you are living one."

"Doc Martinaud is such a slow-coach that I shall no doubt still see him," I said, laughing as Aline zipped open my sleeve and prepared my arm for the injection.

"All ready? Well, good luck, Lieutenant. Don't forget your leg-pad and pencil and make plenty of notes about your reactions, thoughts, feelings and so forth."

"You can count on me, Professor, I'll do my best," I answered as, tightening the rubber garrot round my arm, Aline deftly inserted the shining needle of a syringe into my vein, pushed it well up, loosened the garrot and, at a nod from the Professor, slowly pushed the plunger home and injected an amber liquid into my bloodstream.

"Good luck, Yvon. I'll be here all the time," she whispered.

"Don't be foolish; this is going to last sixty hours for you. If you don't promise to rest properly, I call everything off."

"Too late," said Aline, smiling and flushing as Professor Massel stepped back to hear what I was saying.

The next moment, I began to feel sick and giddy and had to close my eyes. When I reopened them, Aline was no longer there and, through the cabin window, I got a very blurred vision of Martinaud. I grinned and waved to him, took over the controls and started flying my blind course. In no time, everything became quite normal for me. The blurred image of people seen through the cabin window was annoying, but I had been warned. I had less than an hour to go, fifty-four minutes exactly by the clock on my instrument panel. The blind course I had to fly was an easy one and, as far as I know, I reacted normally to the flight incidents created outside. Once or twice, I asked if everything was going according to schedule but go no reply. Thinking that, for some reason or other, they could not hear me, I scribbled a note on my pad. The television camera over my shoulder must have shown them what I was writing for when I tore off the sheet to hold it against the cabin window, I saw, stuck on the other side, a note with the words: "All okay. You have twenty-eight hours to go, twenty-eight minutes as far as you are concerned. Cheers."

Following the instructions on the working chart pinned up by the instrument board, at 57 minutes and 30 seconds, I opened my left sleeve and extended my arm on the rest by my seat, ready for the injection that was to bring me back to earth time. A few seconds later, I felt a rush of air but did not see Aline, nor did I feel the prick in my arm, but I was suddenly conscious of the syringe and of Aline's hands.

Again I felt dizzy, hot and cold and for a moment I lay back choking with the sensation of being catapulted. The blood raced through my ears, my nose was pinched and I had to clench my teeth in order not to faint. My head was thumping madly and, somewhere, I could hear a high cackle and smiled sickly at the thought that it

sounded like the tape recording of a lecture in Chinese being run backwards.

I sighed, looked around, and felt well again. Through the cabin window I saw Doc Martinaud with a glassy stare, probably drunk with fatigue. I waved to him, but he did not wave back and when I called him over the intercom, he did not answer, then I remembered that the intercom had broken down. Thumbing my nose at him, I got up and felt the heat! It was like midsummer. Something out of order with the aeration system, I thought, making for the door. I had a little difficulty pushing it open but managed to do so at last and, as I stepped out into the control room, I ran into a blast of burning hot air, so hot that my nose and throat and lungs hurt. Feeling that there must have been an accident of some sort, probably a fire raging close by, I looked round. Outside, the light was indeed reddish, but all was silent, strangely silent in fact. It was then I saw them!

It took me some time to realize that they had all been struck dead at the very same second, in the middle of their thoughts, work, attitudes, probably some great and new sort of atomic blast, the heat of which I could still feel. That, of course, explained why the air was so hot and so thick, why I had such trouble breathing. The experimental cabin had protected me from the paralysing blast but I would probably also die very rapidly now. But I would find Aline first! I did not have far to go; she was standing by the infirmary door, her mouth half open, evidently petrified in the act of saying something! It was doubtless some new sort of bomb that killed in a fraction, perhaps a thousandth's, of a second. What could be its range of destruction and how long would it be before troops, or people, or red-cross decontamination units arrived? I would have to try to survive as long as possible and note down all I possibly could.

The best would be to touch nothing, but I could not bear the thought of leaving Aline like that. She seemed to have gone quite stiff, as stiff as a wooden statue when I picked her up to carry her to the nearby stretcher on which I laid her down. The look on her face, her mouth still half open, everything seemed so strange and yet so

live that I felt her pulse, then tearing open her blouse I put my ear to her breast. No, the heart had ceased functioning all right.

Out of her hands, I took a towel she had been holding and tied it round my face; that made breathing a little easier. The others I would leave where they were. I soon discovered that if I touched things quickly, they burned and that if I was careful to touch them gradually, they were not so hot! The sudden thought that it was only a laboratory accident and that, outside, everything would be normal sent me flying to the door. I pulled it open with some little difficulty and stared stupidly at one of the guards of the research centre who had been struck dead, petrified on his bicycle, as he turned the corner of the lane leading to our experimental building. But what made my eyes bulge was that he was leaning inwards and although he was no longer moving, he had not fallen! I laughed idiotically, suddenly remembering a science fiction story of my childhood in which explorers had found a planet so cold that all forces, even that of gravity, were frozen!

I sat down and mopped my forehead; my eyes and nose were hot and dry and my tongue was parched. Why had I not also been struck dead? Was it some weapon, or some fearful accident or universal calamity? Would I ever find out? I felt a raging thirst and went back indoors. I found a cup and turned on a tap in a corner of the laboratory, but nothing happened. No water! Perhaps it was just as well; the very idea of dragging on for hours or days, perhaps even weeks, in a dead world was sickening. Had the universe suddenly come to a standstill? If it were so, would people be struck, petrified for ever or, what seemed more likely, would they simply be swept off the face of the earth and into space? In any case, if something of the sort had happened, how was it that I was an exception, one tiny exception? Or were there other exceptions!

As I looked down at the empty cup and turned off the faucet, I saw something swelling slowly from the tap. Water! It was coming out slowly, in a solid form! I touched it hesitantly, and it was cool, marvellously cool! I shrugged at the thought that it was probably highly dan-

gerous to touch and, leaning down, I bit off the water that protruded like a stem of soft glass and, in my mouth, it melted into water! Feeling a little refreshed, I made up my mind that if there were other survivors, I had better start looking for them and that, in any case, I would have to think of writing out a full report for the benefit of eventual survivors or . . . invaders, I really didn't know.

Outside, the cyclist was still there, miraculously leaning inwards and not falling. Slowly, for the air was so thick that I moved about somewhat like a diver under water, I made my way round to the main entrance gate. It was open and a car was about to come in. In it, I recognised Professor Massel, struck dead as he was leaning forward, holding a lighter to a cigarette he had been about to smoke! I walked up and opened the door slowly for, in the chauffeur's back, the flame of the lighter was also petrified, still and steady like the tiny bulb of a Christmas tree. I touched it with the tip of my finger and burnt myself. Some things therefore did retain their properties; though solid, water could still be consumed and fire could still burn. I still had many discoveries to make before stumbling on the terrifying truth.

I walked round to the car park where everything seemed intact. I climbed into my little Simca and was delighted to see the contact light glow red when I switched it on, but when I pulled at the starter, nothing happened. Sweating profusely, I got out and made my way round the guard's cottage and stopped dead at the sight of his little girl who had been petrified in the act of jumping or running away. Judging by the swirl of her frock she had turned to run! Then, looking up, I saw her coloured ball six feet up, where it had just bounced off the wall. I took the ball in my hand and felt its weight, but it only seemed to have any when I raised my hand. I tossed it up gently, and it stopped in mid air!

"It's impossible!" I yelled at the dead child whose bright eyes were fixed on the spot where her ball had been before I touched it. Could these strange new laws of nature apply to me, I wondered, digging my hand into my pocket, pulling out a handful of coins and tossing them into the air, where they stopped, spread out! Angrily, I swept the

coins into my hand and opened it with a yell; they were red hot!

I glanced at my watch, that had been such fun to look at during that experiment that had probably somehow saved me momentarily; the second hand had raced round in just one second while the minute hand had gone round the dial in sixty seconds. Now, it had stopped at two minutes past six. Was that the time of the catastrophe, I wondered? Two minutes more, or two hours of real time, and I would also have been petrified like the others and, for all I knew, like the rest of creation.

By the wall was a bicycle. Though it looked in good condition, it seemed hard and rusty as I pedalled very slowly towards the main road leading to Paris. I passed a petrified cow, then a car from the exhaust of which petrol fumes looked like dirty wadding hanging in mid-air. Reaching the main road at last, I saw a good dozen cars, all of which had evidently been moving quite fast. In them, dead people were still in various attitudes and none of them seemed surprised. Whatever it was, it had happened at a terrific speed!

It is only a short run from the research centre to the Sèvres bridge and the avenue leading to the Porte de Saint Cloud, a distance I would have normally cycled in ten or fifteen minutes, but the heat was such and the air so thick that I could only move very slowly, wobbling from side to side, and even where the road drops sharply towards the Seine I still had to pedal! Nearly at the bottom of the hill, my front tyre went flat; the bicycle wobbled slowly and I stepped off easily and gently, as in a dream. There was practically nothing left of the front tyre which seemed to have melted.

By the bridge, a bus full of early workers was just drawing away from the curb. The large signalling arm that waves slowly up and down by the driver's cab when they pull out into traffic was still up and though motionless, the orange bulb in it was still glowing, which meant that electricity might be an exception in a world where everything else except daylight had simply ceased!

Walking over the Sèvres bridge, I passed by one of the Renault factory entrances where I had to weave my way

through hundreds of dead men still on their way to work. With a shiver of horror, I realized what an apocalyptic sight the place would be in less than a week with all these standing bodies putrefying, with perhaps millions, hundreds of millions of flies buzzing round them, unless, of course, flies were also petrified. I had not noticed any.

The Seine which had stopped flowing looked like glass and the smoke rising from the high factory chimneys seemed carved out of chalk. Flies or no flies, the early morning sun that was rising over Paris, casting long shadows that made the dead look even more frightful, would soon start the process of putrefaction, unless . . . unless the sun had also stopped moving!

I spotted another bicycle against a tree and, looking round like a thief, I took it and rode away in a hot syrupy air towards the Porte de Saint Cloud. If there were any survivors to be found, they would more likely be in Paris than out in the country. Weaving my way through dead traffic was tiring but I noticed that, though they were no longer changing, the traffic lights glowed red, green, or amber. If the electric current was still on, then, somewhere, turbines were still turning! I would have to find out where the power stations of the Paris region were. As I pedalled laboriously on, the word "Telephone" on the awning of a café caught my eyes. My heart beating faster at the idea of perhaps talking to someone, I got off the bicycle, stepped carefully round a smiling old man, petrified in the act of posting a letter that would never go anywhere, and entered the café. By the counter, a rather pretty girl had been struck dead as she was about to dip a croissant in a large cup of coffee, the sight of which made me thirsty. It would be cold, of course, but since she would never need it, I picked it up, raised it to my lips and put it down with a curse; it was still boiling hot! At the other end of the counter, the barman had just finished pouring out a glass of white wine. I drank that or, rather, chewed it out of the glass. In my mouth, however, it became liquid and tasted like Beaujolais. Picking up a sandwich, I found the telephone booth, lifted the receiver off its hook and listened. The line was dead. I knew it was useless, but I tried dialing seventeen, the

police emergency number. I pulled down the figure one, and the dial did not return to its normal position.

Chewing the sandwich, I walked out into the total silence of the street, looked round and shouted. It felt like shouting in cotton wool. I looked at my hands, clapped them together and produced a sort of explosive sigh. The atmosphere must have thickened or something, and sound waves were different. By my shoulder was one of the red, squat, fire alarm boxes to be found every half mile in the streets of Paris. I jabbed my elbow into the small glass panel and brushed aside the pieces that stayed in mid-air.

"Hello!" I shouted, "is anyone alive?"

Fighting down the panic and the urge to shout again and again, I tried to reason things out. How long could I live? I had no idea, but all round putrefaction would soon drive me to destroy myself if nothing else did. I would have to write out a detailed report and find a cache for it, some spot which scientists would be attracted to. What would I write down? The fact that the world had come to a full stop seemed fairly obvious. The only scientific facts I could think of were two: Electricity still worked, which meant that, somewhere, current was still being produced, and, though distorted, sound waves still travelled through the air.

I picked up the bicycle and let go with a curse; the handle bars were red hot, and again the tyres were flat! Just across the street was a bicycle shop. Picking up an iron chair from the café terrace, for the shop was not open, I smashed in the plate glass window. Carefully pushing aside the pieces of glass floating in mid-air, I stepped in and touched one of the bicycles. It was cold. Here was another scientific problem I would have to try to work out. Was I a heat producer, or did things I touched become hotter and hotter? Why had that coffee been so hot instead of cold? And if I had heated it up somehow, then why had the wine remained cool? And all those millions of petrified people? Were they hot or cold, I wondered. Aline had seemed warm but that was natural since the mysterious catastrophe had happened only a short time before I had left the safety of the ex-

perimental cabin. Feeling that I would never live long enough to investigate and solve a minimum of basic scientific facts and questions, I selected a strong looking machine and stepped out.

A policeman petrified in the act of walking along the edge of the pavement made me blush. I hesitated but finally went up to him and touched him. His arm felt quite normal through his sleeve and, gently, I touched his face. It was normally warm, like that of a live person. Though the air had grown much hotter and thicker, perhaps as a result of the absence of all wind, or perhaps because, for some reason, its density had increased; heat and cold, changes of temperature of certain things only changed in exceptional circumstances, I thought, getting on the new bicycle. But getting off, I walked back to the policeman and took his pistol from its holster; he would never need it again but I might be glad of it later, if only to put a finish to an impossible situation.

Again my tyres went flat as I reached the Porte de Saint Cloud. Leaning down to look at it, I noticed that the leather of my shoes was dry and shrivelled and that my trouser legs were singed! Getting other clothes would not be much of a problem but the thought of having to walk everywhere was much more discouraging. Abandoning the bicycle in the gutter, I stepped gingerly through a crowd of petrified people that had been struck coming out of the underground station where the lights were still on. The Metro! What a wonderful idea! If I did have to walk, why not along the tunnels—surely cooler than under the sun that was going to get hotter and hotter as the morning wore on. Turning round, I weaved my way through the people and skipped, or at least tried to skip, a couple of steps. For a fraction of a second, I thought that I was meeting my end, that I also was being struck, petrified, for I simply stayed in mid-air, above the stairs! I turned and squirmed, but remained in the air. It was not until I managed to grasp the iron banister and pull myself down that I felt better and came to the conclusion that something had also gone wrong with gravity and that if I had not been able to reach that banister, I would very likely have stayed there to die of hunger and exposure!

Getting down to platform level proved quite an effort for, all the way, I had to struggle down, much as I would have had to under water. There, people had been petrified as they poured out of a train and since the platform door was closed, I had to clamber over the iron railings, careful not to let go, lest I should find myself simply struggling in space. At the end of the platform, I entered the tunnel of the Montreuil line which, I knew, would lead me right into Paris. Though as thick as up above, the air was certainly not so hot and, walking slowly, I started out. The live rails of the Paris underground are always between the tracks and I knew that as long as I kept to the side of the tunnel, I did not run any risk of electrocution.

The lights failed suddenly as I approached the first station, Exelmans, and for a moment I was panic stricken. Did it mean that the paralysing death was spreading and had at last reached some distant power-station? Wondering what might fail next, I moved on slowly. At last I found the steps leading up to the station platform. At the other end was a faint bluish light, probably daylight, I thought, carefully groping my way along the platform crowded with petrified corpses. Then the lights began to glow and, slowly, they came on again, and I felt a wild exhilaration, for that could only mean one thing: I was not the sole survivor! Somewhere, someone had switched the current on again and if only I could find that person or, for all I knew, group of persons, my chances . . . our chances of survival would be so much better. Meanwhile, since the light had returned, I decided to keep to the tunnel. I passed the next station, Michel-Ange-Molitor, and was following a bend of the line when, once more, the light failed! Groping my way round the bend, I saw a spot of light ahead of me. Wondering what it could be, I moved on and felt the hair stiffen on the back of my neck when I almost bumped into the petrified man holding it, a lantern with which he had probably been inspecting the rails when he had been struck dead. He was holding the big brass lantern loosely and I only had to lift it gently out of his curled fingers. Again, the lights went on but I kept the lantern and wisely too, for some minutes later, they failed once more. Thus with

the lights going on and off for minutes at a time, I plodded slowly along from station to station. Every mile or so, I passed silent, petrified trainloads of early workers who would never know what had happened. Some, I could see, were reading morning papers, but the majority who had been thinking or day-dreaming and looking at nothing in particular were now gazing at eternity.

I was getting very tired and hungry when after what I estimated was a good two-hour walk. I reached the Havre-Coumartin station, close to the Opera. The sun would by now be high in the sky over the silent capital and, for all I knew, the heat might well be unbearable, but I had to get something to eat and drink. Feeling a little groggy, wondering if I was perhaps going to run into the first occupation troops, or robots, or whatever it was that was to come after the surprise attack, if attack there had been, I slowly climbed to street level.

On the other side of the Boulevard Haussmann, opposite the Printemps, the big store that would never reopen, was a café with standing corpses round the counter. I walked in and looked up at the clock through a column of solid yet semi-transparent steam, petrified as it had risen from the percolator at three minutes past six—evidently the time of the cataclysm. Though nothing seemed to have moved or changed, time had passed, a good four hours I estimated since the moment when I had stepped out of the experimental cabin at the Sèvres research centre.

In the cups, the coffee was as hot as when it had been served. Drinking one off and picking up a couple of croissants, I walked round the corner of the Rue Auber towards the Opera, past the American Express office, still closed but outside which a petrified newsvendor was offering the day's papers to petrified passers-by. Yes, indeed, the last edition ever to be printed, I thought, picking up the *Figaro* and glancing through it rapidly, just in case there had been some warning, some unusual event that could have given me a clue; but I found nothing, no science notes and not even the usual page three leader about international tension or threat to peace in this or that part of the world.

Since all clocks had stopped for good, I would have to

find a sundial. There were dozens in Paris and I had seen many of them but I tried in vain to remember where. If I did not find one, I could of course easily enough set one up wherever I decided to settle down. The most important thing just now, however, was to get to the Bourse post-office which, I knew, remained open day and night, and where I might find some long-distance telephone-line with a voice at the other end. Cutting across the Place de l'Opera, I turned down the Rue du Quatre Septembre and with a horrid sinking feeling faced the sun, still much too low in the sky, as a matter of fact no higher than when I reached the Porte de Saint Cloud hours ago! To this, there was but one solution, one answer: the Earth had ceased rotating! If the Earth had stopped, then all the other planets and the sun had also stopped which, in turn, meant that our whole galaxy had stopped. In other words, all the universe had come to a dead stop. Why I should have been an exception was a mystery which I would probably never fathom. One thing was certain, however; in a very short while, a matter of hours at most, that part of our planet which was in the dark would get cold, terribly cold, and the part in the glare of the still burning sun would get hotter and hotter. Unless I was much mistaken, I would be dying of the heat very soon. I was, of course, very much mistaken, but so would anyone else have been under similar circumstances.

Still reeling under the shock of my discovery, I entered another café and sat down by a young man, petrified in the act of puffing at his cigarette. He had had a night out, as was revealed by his tuxedo, his tie under one ear and the lines of fatigue on his unshaven rather handsome face. There was also a sort of despair in his eyes, I thought, examining him like a portrait in a picture gallery. Some silly love affair, perhaps? Or something more serious? Whatever the reason of his despair, he was now happy, and I broke down completely and cried like a child, as I used to cry in the warm comfort of my mother's arms.

Feeling better and wiping my nose, I went round the counter into a dark, dirty kitchen where I found some ham and eggs and some cold potatoes. There was plenty to drink and in a few minutes, I had eaten heartily and

picked a cigarette out of the packet by the sad young man's hand. I put it against the end of his, which was still glowing red, and threw it away with a curse, as it burned to a cinder and blistered my lips with the sudden flame I drew through it! Yet another experiment and a mystery to investigate, I thought, leaving the place and moving on towards the Bourse post-office.

At the main switch-board in an underground room which I found easily enough, seven tired looking men—evidently the night-shift—sat petrified. One was reading a book of science-fiction, which made me smile, and another was paring his nails. With my heart in my mouth, I gently lifted the earphones off the head of one of the operators whose right hand was moving a plug towards a hole marked Dublin and over which glowed a small white light. Pulling the plug out of his fingers, I pushed it in and listened, but could hear nothing. I tried other holes, pressed dozens of switches, but though the little Dublin light went on glowing, I was unable to get the slightest sound from anywhere.

In another room, I found the transatlantic teleprinters, all stopped in mid-action. On two of them I found business cables, overnight letters, but nowhere any indication of alarm, surprise or fear. It seemed more and more evident that everywhere on Earth, hundreds of millions of people, trillions of animals big and small, insects and possibly microbes as well, had suddenly ceased to exist . . . except for me, the one and only survivor. There was of course no possibility of their suddenly coming back to life for, even if all the forces of nature were to be re-established, all those billions of hearts that had stopped beating everywhere could not start beating again and, everywhere, the process of putrefaction would soon start. This might well—and probably would—give rise to some monstrous form of insect life that would be able to devour an entire plant-load of putrefaction. Having devoured everything, the insects would devour each other and, gradually, if Darwin was right, would start a new evolution which, some million years later, might produce some new intelligent animal, perhaps in the shape of men, perhaps in some other shape, an intelligent being who would

one day discover the traces of an extinct civilization, the last man of which had survived . . . how long, I would never know, since I had no means of measuring time!

Tired and feeling parched and dirty, I walked out. If only it had happened at eleven or noon instead of six o'clock in the morning when none but a few cafés were yet open. Walking back the way I had come, I turned down the Rue de Richelieu, out of the sun. Ahead was a red traffic light, and my heart missed a beat when it switched to green! But, of course, the two cars that had been waiting remained motionless. The driver of the one nearest the pavement had been struck dead as he leaned forward to look up at the light which he would go on looking at long after electricity had at last failed completely. I waited a few minutes but the light did not change again. Another mystery!

At the end of the Rue de Richelieu, opposite the Theâtre Français, was my favourite bookshop, closed of course and, next door, an early traveller leaving the Hotel du Louvre and petrified in the act of pushing his suitcase into a taxi. A hotel, of course! Why hadn't I thought of it sooner? Hotels never closed and there I would find all I needed. I walked in, past the night porter, still glancing at the tip in his open hand, round the breast-high reception desk, and selected one of the twenty odd keys hanging in front of various cubby-holes. If the key was there, it meant that the corresponding room was unoccupied or that its occupant was out. I picked the key of room 27—my lucky number! I walked up two flights and, following the arrows on the walls, soon found the room. I was lucky, for it was occupied but its occupant was out . . . for ever. I glanced round at some open luggage, the neatly opened bed and the pair of pyjamas which the maid had carefully spread out the night before. In the bathroom, I found his toilet kit, for it was a he. I tried the taps but nothing happened; however, I did not turn them off again for I knew that the water would come slowly out in a solid form. The light over the washbasin went on when I pressed its switch, revealing an electric shaver on the tablet under it. I plugged it in, but it did not work. Why was it that light bulbs worked and not other instru-

ments, or was it perhaps out of order? It might have been for I also found a safety razor kit. No water came out of the taps, so I hunted around and returned with a bottle of mineral water. Shaking the water out into the wash-basin proved a failure. I finally had to smash the bottle, peel off the pieces of glass and dump the water like a strange transparent pudding into the basin. Getting my face wet was not too difficult but although I had found a stick of shaving soap and a brush, working up a lather was hopeless. Shaving was therefore rather painful, but I managed. Twice the light went out and came on again while I was doing this, and I could not help feeling that, somewhere, people were trying to keep a power station working.

The telephone directory carried dozens of addresses of Paris electricity company offices but nothing concerning power-stations. I remembered a sub-station of sorts next to the *New York Times* office in the Rue Caumartin. There, I might perhaps find some information and, in any case, it was not very far.

Outside, nothing had changed. The sun was no higher in the sky and as I walked slowly up the Avenue de l'Opéra, I was reminded of the three-dimensional pictures of my youth. Perfectly motionless, stopped dead, the passers-by stood out in exactly the same way they did on three-dimensional pictures. How soon would death really set its seal on all of them, I wondered; or had even death been cheated in some way?

The power station was still there, but all was dark and silent inside. Tired and dejected, I shuffled towards the Rue Auber. I was really exhausted. Perhaps this was but a symptom of my approaching end; it did not matter much, really, much as I disliked the idea of dying foolishly or uselessly after surviving this unique—was it unique?—cataclysm. Remembering the Grand Hotel, I turned into the Rue Scribe. I had to squeeze by the petrified porter to get at the keys. Room 123 was unoccupied. Closing the heavy window curtains, I undressed, opened the bed and crawled into it. In a matter of seconds I was fast asleep.

It had all been a dream. I could hear voices, the hum

of traffic, music somewhere, and I sat up, wide awake, plunged back into the fearful silence of a petrified world. A bell, a great bell with a low note—or was it a gong?—had pierced right through my sleep and made me sit up. Throwing back the bed clothes, I jumped out and ran to the door, which I opened very gently, and listened. I could only hear the wild beating of my heart. Coming back into the room, I opened the curtains and saw the early morning traffic in the slanting rays of sunlight. Over the wardrobe, the clock marked three minutes past six and I knew that I was back in the real timeless world of silent horror. I must have slept a good many hours, I thought, looking in a mirror at the thick stubble of beard on my face; it was certainly more than twenty-four hours since I had shaved last. In the bath-room, I tried the taps and, this time, water came slowly out of them like jelly. Crushing it over my face and hands, I was able to wash though I was only able to work up a very, very light lather with the soap. Later, I would have to find a razor, unless of course I decided to let my beard grow. If only I had some way of measuring time. If the entire universe had come to a standstill, I suppose that time no longer existed, but for me at least, it still existed since I was alive, since though it would be six in the morning for the rest of my life, I ate and slept and thought and acted. Already I had practically lost count. How long ago was it that I had stepped out of the experimental cabin? Twenty-four, thirty-six or forty-eight hours? More? I had shaved once and was badly in need of another . . . That would be my way of marking time! I would find a calendar and mark off a day every time I shaved. Unless the speed of growth of my beard had also changed, I would be able to keep track of time. I would have to go hunting for a razor, but that should not be a difficult thing to find in a hotel.

Poor old Einstein, I thought, dressing rapidly. What would he have thought of my time-keeping idea in a universe where time no longer existed? He would probably have tried to explain that time had never existed, that it was only relative . . . and I stood dead still as, again, I distinctly heard the low but clear note of a gong! The

next second I was frantically running up and down the silent corridors. Nothing! No one! I ran back to my room for I was certain that the sound had been quite nearby. Nowhere did I find a gong or anything that looked like a gong or a bell. I tried the telephone, I pressed on all the bell buttons, but nothing happened. In the room next to mine, the door of which was not locked, I found a man in bed, petrified in the act of looking at his watch which, I could see, said six o'clock. In his bathroom, I found a handsome gold plated shaving kit in a black leather case which I tucked under my arm. I was hungry and deciding that I would shave later, I made my way down to the kitchens where I found a waiter in front of a gas stove, just about to transfer some eggs from a frying pan to a plate. Picking up another plate and wondering if the fried eggs would be hot or cold, I scooped them out of the pan. They were hot and, two minutes later, I had gulped down the eggs, a rasher of bacon, some bread and butter, and drunk the contents of a coffee pot.

One thing seemed certain, I thought, shaving carefully in a washroom I had discovered by the kitchens: I would not die of hunger. I would soon know whether or not the process of putrefaction had also ceased to exist. If it had, then barring accidents, I might live for quite a time, a sort of Robinson Crusoe in the heart of Paris, able to see and touch millions of people, nevertheless quite alone in the world, without either a parrot or a goat, possibly without even a microbe to help me fall ill and die. How long could I stand living in the silence of this gigantic waxwork show? I preferred not to think about that and, instead, let my mind tackle the problem of what could and should be done. In the first place, I had so far made no real effort towards finding out if there were any other survivors. More important, however, a duty to civilisation, was to write out and to deposit in some really safe place a very complete report of all I had witnessed. If there were survivors somewhere, if there was to be a new civilisation, or in aeons of time, intelligent visitors from elsewhere, they must be able to find out what had happened. Perhaps I had been specially chosen and spared for this.

Again, I walked out into the morning sun and the

strange stifling air, trying to put myself in the shoes of an explorer, wondering where he would first go, what would attract him most. Much depended on whether he knew or had heard of Paris before. An explorer knowing anything about Paris might head for the Prefecture of Police, or the Ministry of the Interior, or the Observatory, in the hope of finding some clue, whereas another would be attraced by landmarks like the Eiffel Tower and the Arc of Triumph.

I finally decided on four main spots: the Obelisk on the Place de la Concorde, the top platform of the Eiffel Tower, the main altar of Notre-Dame Cathedral and deep under ground, in one of the Metro stations. In each of these four spots, inside a stong box of some sort or other, would be a copy of my report. In a number of other places, I would leave explanatory notes about the contents and exact situation of these four boxes.

Walking round the back of the Opera, I found myself opposite the Galeries Lafayette. There, I knew, I would find all I needed in the way of boxes, paper, typewriter, carbons, etcetera. Averse to the idea of breaking in, I found a side entrance where cleaners, still on their way in, stood petrified. Feeling much as Ali Baba must have felt in the cave of the forty thieves, I wandered slowly round the great department store. In the men's department, I found myself a pair of strong whipcord trousers, some sandals, a light beach shirt and a broad-brimmed straw hat. I changed, and wandered over to the stationery department, picked out a typewriter and took it upstairs where I had discovered a comfortable office. Unfortunately, the typewriter was quite useless; the keys stuck, the space-bar did not work properly and the paper I put into it tore every time. I tried one or two other machines with the same result. This was rather distressing for it meant that I would have to write out everything in longhand. Half a dozen ball pens I picked up did not work, nor did a fountain pen. At last, I found that I could write with a pencil; it had a tendency to tear through the paper but did leave a legible trace if I took care to write slowly.

Writer's cramp and pangs of hunger at last made me stop. Picking up the sheets I had filled with my ugly but

legible handwriting, I went down to the leather goods department on the ground floor and selected a strong brief case to keep them in and a strap to carry it over my shoulder.

Outside, I hesitated between Saint Lazare station where there was an all-night restaurant and the Halles, the Central Market, where there were quite a number. At the Central Market, I would find a greater choice of food and also, plenty of fruit. Keeping to the shady side of streets, I finally found what I wanted, a good-looking steak and fried potatoes on a table in front of a petrified butcher who had evidently just finished his night's work. Outside, it was difficult to move without bumping into the thousands of motionless people who had been swarming around when time had called a stop. Picking up the plate and taking it to a nearby counter, behind which a cashier was still laughing silently and for ever at the last joke pronounced by a man tendering a thousand franc note, I quickly ate the meal, which was still hot. There, eating in the midst of dozens of people who could neither see nor hear me, who would never know that the world had come to an end, or even that they had ever existed, I suddenly felt the full weight of my terrible loneliness. Pushing the empty plate away, I turned and knocked into a maid carrying some beer mugs. Though I had pushed her off-balance, she did not fall. I put an arm round her to straighten her up again and shuddered, for she felt as warm and live as I did, so much so that I put my ear to her warm and well rounded breast, but her heart had stopped beating long ago.

Feeling depressed and tired, I decided that I would stay in the vicinity of the Halles which was near the Hotel du Louvre where I had had my first shave. Also, right opposite was the Louvre department store where I could work, and which I entered as I had the Galeries Lafayette, through a side-door. I found an empty office upstairs. After going through the stationery department and selecting a strong, leather-bound diary I crossed off two days, since I had shaved twice since the end of the world and perhaps since the end of time, in which case I was marking off time that no longer existed! I put in a

few more hours' work on my report, got up, walked down to the street and made my way towards the Hotel du Louvre where I would get some sleep. There, I received quite a shock, for the early rising traveller who had been getting into a taxi was no longer there!

"Bon Dieu!" I gasped, staring. Where his taxi had been was a small car driven by a woman, petrified and as dead as all the other people in cars or out of cars that I had seen.

Wondering and vaguely frightened, I pushed through the swing door of the hotel and got my second shock. The porter who had been near it, glancing at the tip the traveller had given him was now behind his desk, his hand on the telephone! I was sure I had seen him by the door and equally certain that there had been no one behind the desk when I had walked round it to pick a key!

Pulling myself together, I walked up to the desk, leaned across it and looked him full in the face. It was the face of a statue, yet so terribly, so horribly alive! I touched his face, and it was warm! Slowly, I held up my finger and moved it towards his eye, nearer and nearer, until I touched it. The eye was moist! Shaking with fear and rage, I grabbed the lapels of his coat and shouted:

"Wake up, damn you! Wake up! You're cheating! You're not dead!" and in a frenzy of insane rage, I let go, picked up a pen and was about to jab it in his eye when the gong, the same gong I had heard at the Grand Hotel, made me scream with fear.

This time, I searched everywhere, thoroughly. There was no gong. The gong was in my head and I was going mad, I was having hallucinations. The strain was beginning to tell, but I had a job to do and, running up to my room, I locked the door and undressed. Rest, a proper sleep would, more than anything else, help me pull myself together.

When I awoke, this time after a long sleep of several hours I felt, I was much refreshed. The porter? The gong? I must have dreamed it or, if not, then it was not the same man. But that made little difference really, for whether or not it was the same man, the man behind the counter had not been there before. Someone must have

put him there. That was it! Someone had put him there, and I was not alone! There were other survivors and I would have to find them. What had made them move people around, though, was more than I could fathom.

Having shaved and washed—I was now getting used to the strange solidity of water—I dressed and checked that my pistol was loaded, I walked down to the first floor vestibule and tiptoed to the brass balustrade overlooking the ground floor lobby. The porter was still at his desk, but I felt sick when I saw that he was now holding the telephone receiver to his ear!

"Hey!" I shouted, forcing my way down the stairs as rapidly as I could and drawing my gun. Nothing moved and nothing else seemed to have changed. On the desk in front of him was the pen and nib which I had nearly jabbed into his face. The nib was still wet!

Outside, everything seemed the same as before. No! The car where the taxi had been, the car driven by a woman was no longer there. I ran out and saw it, twenty feet further along. Perhaps I had been too tired to take much notice of its exact position, but the porter was another thing altogether. I would have to pluck up enough courage to examine the porter thoroughly. If only I had taken Doctor Martinaud's stethoscope! But quite near by I remembered a shop of surgical instruments. As rapidly as I could through the thick hot air I went round the corner of the Rue Montpensier. Yes, there it was and the very thing I was looking for in the small side window! With the butt of my pistol I smashed the glass and pulled out the stethoscope.

I walked back to the hotel where the porter was still behind his desk. Slipping round beside him, I touched him and after hesitating a little, undid the buttons of his waistcoat and shirt and slipped in the end of the stethoscope. For a long time I listened, closing my eyes so as not to miss the slightest sound, but there was no possible doubt, there was not the slightest heart flutter or sound of any sort to be detected. And yet he seemed so alive, as alive as that girl in the restaurant by the Halles. Could she too have been moved, I wondered—but I was already on my way.

Edging my way through crowds of petrified buyers, I at last entered the restaurant. Where the maid had been was a fat old woman in a dirty bedraggled old fur coat. I looked round and spotted her by the kitchen door, which she was pushing open with her shoulder. I went up to her. She was as warm and live-looking as ever. On her bare arm there were four red marks, the marks made by my fingers when I had put my arm round her to prevent her from falling! I looked around, trying to remember the positions of other people. Yes, the cashier! She was still behind her desk, head up, laughing, but whereas the customer had been tendering a thousand franc note—of that I was certain—it was she who was holding it now!

Turning back to the maid, I touched her arm, and her flesh was warm and soft. With a horrid feeling that it was I who had caused the sudden silence of the restaurant and that as soon as I had my back turned, all eyes were fixed on me, blushing like a schoolboy, I opened her blouse and applied the stethoscope to the warm elasticity of her breast. For a long time, I listened in vain. Silence was complete and in a sort of despair I stepped away; there was nothing to hear since the girl's heart had stopped shortly after six three or four days—or, at least, the rough equivalent of three or four days ago. I was faced with yet another mystery. Without a doubt some of the dead went on moving, probably much as chickens will go on running around for a second or two after their heads have been chopped off. These movements, however, were taking place hours, days after . . . After what? Were they really dead? Was I perhaps blubbering childishly in the padded cell of some lunatic asylum, simply imagining all this? Or perhaps I was the only dead man?

Dazed and walking unsteadily, I left the restaurant. In the street, I bumped into people, petrified people. Those bumps were real enough, they were real bodies that I touched, or were they merely nurses trying to handle me without being rough and which my crazed mind was thus distorting into standing corpses! For hours, it seemed, I wandered around, trying to think, trying to reason logically from impossible facts and, naturally, every idea, every supposition was too ludicrous and fantastic to be worthy

of any sane consideration. I remembered my old science professor explaining that the best way of tackling a new problem was to refuse the easy jump to any sort of conclusion but to examine it carefully from every possible angle and to "collect facts and take notes about them".

Unable to face the idea of returning to the hotel with that horrid live corpse downstairs and, for all I knew, others who might enter my room while I was sleeping, I went back to the Louvre department store and in the furniture department on the fourth floor, I slept on one of the numerous beds. The next fortnight, I spent hard at work, preparing my reports, taking notes and carefully writing up my diary, every day of which was based on the shaving of my face. I did not go back to the restaurant where I feared the maid might have moved again, but there are plenty of other restaurants open at six in the morning round the Halles, and I found all the food I wanted. I tried not to look at the petrified people everywhere, taking what food I needed and going straight back to my work.

All went well until one morning—it was always morning for me after a long sleep—when I opened my eyes and saw one of the department store cleaners standing by the top of the stairs, not twenty feet from the bed on which I had been sleeping! He was an old man in blue overalls, with a mop in one hand and a pail in the other, and was looking straight at me with a strange expression of surprise, his mouth half open, as though he was about to gasp or shout something. It was exactly the sort of expression he would have had if, alive, he had suddenly spotted a man sleeping on one of the beds of the furniture department.

That day, I moved into a small hotel which I passed on my way to the Central Market. It was a very modest but clean hotel. There was no one downstairs when I moved in that night—when I was tired of working and had satisfied my hunger, was the time I called night—I hunted round and found the pass key in a drawer. I first visited every room. Eight of them were occupied. All except one of the lodgers had been petrified in their sleep and were therefore unlikely to move, only one man had

died in front of his mirror as he was shaving. I carefully locked all their doors after having taken away their keys, however, and, before going to bed, locked and barricaded my own door.

Like a recurrent nightmare, the mysterious gong made me sit up, sweating and shaking like a leaf a few hours later! It was not as close to me as on previous occasions, but I was sure that I had heard it. What was this one and only sound outside of those I made which seemed to haunt me, as though to warn me of some terrible fate! I was still sitting up some minutes later—ten or fifteen, I don't know—when I heard it again. It was strangely reminiscent of Big Ben in London on a foggy night and I was sure that it had rung somewhere downstairs. I knew how useless it would be to go hunting for it and I lay back, having decided to take no further notice of it, but that night—sleeping time was always night for me—I got very little sleep. It rang at least twenty times!

Wherever I went, the gong seemed to haunt me and though I never got really used to it, I tried to forget it. I noticed that if I stayed around after it had sounded, it sounded again and again at longish intervals, and though sometimes it sounded quite close, I was never able to pinpoint it in any way.

On marking up my diary some time later, I was surprised to see that I had filled one complete month! By old standards—or at least my shaving standards—it was therefore close enough to a whole month since creation had come to a standstill. One of the great mysteries was that, in coming to a dead stop, the world had not got hotter or colder, temperatures seemed to remain constant everywhere and though there was not a cloud in sight and it had not rained during all that time, nothing seemed to dry up. Whatever had thickened the atmosphere at the time of the cataclysm had had no further effect and I was able to live in it. In that relative short time, however, I had had to discard my clothes and shoes three or four times. The leather of the shoes I wore seemed to dry up and shrivel and the clothes turned yellow as if singed and gradually began to tear.

Working steadily at my reports, eating whenever I was

hungry, sleeping when fatigue was too much for me, shaving and marking up my diary every time the stubble of my beard had reached a certain roughness, time passed. Deep in my subconscious mind was a fear, a great fear which sometimes bubbled up through my sleep and resulted in nightmares that made me scream myself awake. It was something which I refused to think about, a feeling which must never be allowed to become conscious thought for the fearful nightmare of my sleep would then become true and I would be immediately driven to suicide, or worse. I often thought of suicide and, as a matter of fact, had practically made up my mind to kill myself when my work was finished and my messages duly hidden. There was also that haunting gong that seemed to follow me everywhere and which, I knew, had some relation to my subconscious fear.

I gradually got used to moving around among all those poor petrified people, though I often stopped to examine some of them closely, knowing from experience that those I touched I would find soft and warm! By a Metro station, I one day came across a woman with a child. They had been walking side by side, and the little girl had been laughing when the great silence had come down on creation. Her mouth was still open and, sitting on my haunches, I had examined her closely. As the mother was looking the other way—I could not have done it had she been looking down at the child—I pushed my little finger into her open mouth. It was hot and soft, and full of saliva! Again the terrible feeling of some frightful truth came creeping up from my subconscious and only just in time, it seemed, I got up and ran away!

The truth hit me full in the face the day I looked up at the great clock tower of the Gare de Lyon. My first reaction was that it must have been fast the day everything stopped, but I knew that I was only trying to fool myself. The first café I entered had a clock over the counter, and it marked twenty-five minutes past six, five minutes ahead of the great station clock—a precaution all hotel and café proprietors take near railway stations. As I walked back towards my usual haunts of the Louvre and the Central Market, I saw at least fifty clocks; with the exception of

only one that must really have been out of order, all gave the time as twenty or twenty-two minutes past six!

It was a blow and a confirmation. Now at least I knew that it was not the world that had come to a standstill, but I who had been pushed out of it simply by being thrown out of time and rhythm. The world and the whole of creation had not come to a stop; it was I who had come to the opposite of a full stop. There was only one corpse—mine! It was I who had been shot out of time and, therefore, out of sight of the rest of humanity, though, strangely enough, not out of space; something which I could not yet explain reasonably but something which I felt would not have baffled an Einstein.

The great subconscious fear had at last burst through and, as is usually the case in such circumstances, I felt relieved. Of course, I had to prove to myself that I had hit on the real truth, but that was easy. If all those people walking around were really alive and not petrified, then they all moved and, except for those who were sitting or standing motionless, all those in action necessarily went on moving. I picked a piece of chalk off the push-cart of a woman "petrified" in the act of dragging away a load of cauliflowers and drew a circle round her feet. In no time I had thus marked circles round the feet of some fifty people walking one way or another. Just in front of the wheel of the push-cart, I placed a grape picked out of the gutter. Then I sat down on a nearby barrow and waited. For over an hour, I sat quite still, watching my chalk-marks. By the time I got up, every foot which had been touching the ground inside my marks was off the ground! None had moved more than an inch or so, but they had moved, and the push-cart wheel was slowly but surely crushing the grape I had put in front of it! Nothing had happened to the world or the universe and time was passing normally for all. It had not even stopped for me; it was I who, somehow, had changed into another gear.

This explained many things but posed new problems. Why was it that no one seemed aware of my presence? Now, I knew that gravity still existed and had in fact never changed; it was only because I was out of time that things seemed to remain in mid-air, though, in truth, they were

falling, but so slowly that I had not noticed. Perhaps it was that, relative to the normal rhythm of life, my movements had become so rapid that the human eye did not have time to catch sight of me. Yet I had done a number of things that had definitely left their trace; there was that window which I had smashed to get a stethoscope. Several times I had since passed by it and seen the pieces of glass on the pavement. Suddenly remembering the girl whose blouse I had opened to listen to her heart, I walked back to the restaurant opposite the Central Market. The same client was still talking to the cashier, who was no longer laughing, however, but leaning to one side, putting change into a saucer which the barman was waiting for. The waitress was nowhere in sight, but I found her in a corner of the kitchen, very red in the face and apparently angry, sewing a button to her blouse. On her arm, where my fingers had gripped her, a bruise had now appeared.

The battered alarm-clock on the corner of a dresser marked twenty-one minutes after six. Impossible as it seemed, I had therefore only been pushed out of time a bare half hour at most; yet I had shaved close on a hundred times according to my diary, over three months which I felt I had really lived. Though I clapped my hands together and felt their grip, I felt faint at the thought that my body had remained behind in the test cabin of the Sèvres laboratory, that, right now, Aline and Doc Martinaud were desperately trying to revive it, unless it was already on the stretcher on its way to the mortuary! The stretcher! The stretcher on which I had laid Aline down rather than think of her standing petrified for ever! And my ridiculous report and those boxes which I had been about to place all over Paris for future scientists to find! All that useless work which had lasted weeks and weeks, not twenty minutes of human time!

The thing to do, of course, was to get back to the laboratory which I should never have left. There at least I could try to leave a note for Martinaud and Professor Massel, and if bringing me back to . . . to life was an impossibility—it probably was, I thought—I could put a finish to Yvon Darnier with the policeman's gun which I still carried with me.

Having torn up and dumped all my papers down a gutter, I set out for Sèvres. I would have to do it in stages for, of recent weeks, I had found a growing difficulty in going any distance in the hot syrupy atmosphere. Opting for the relative coolness of the underground, I returned the way I had come. Again I passed silent trains full of apparently petrified early workers and again the light kept failing and going on again—a thing which I now completely failed to understand. Wondering if I had really broken a fire alarm months or minutes back, I came out at the Porte de Saint Cloud station and walked back the way I had come.

From a distance, I saw the crowd of people gathered round a red cheeked young fireman who might well have come straight out of the Museé Grévin*, who seemed petrified in the act of inserting a new pane of glass in the open window of the red alarm box. On the other side of the street, a crowd had gathered round the cycle shop, gazing at the broken glass. I had really done those things then, I thought, vaguely comforted and going slowly on.

Where the petrified cyclist leaning inwards had been were now two guards; otherwise, the laboratory seemed unchanged. I went in and stood amazed, trying to understand what was going on. They were all standing round Jyp, my dog! It was standing on a table and seemed to be barking at Aline who stood, looking at it and biting her lip. The door of the test cabin was open and I was relieved to see that I was not inside, unless . . . unless my body was already at the morgue! No, it was impossible for they would not have been playing with Jyp, poor old Jyp whose large watery eyes seemed to be looking my way. Walking round, I saw the bruises on Aline's arm and neck, where I had touched her to lay her down on the stretcher; then I saw the syringe in Martinaud's hand, the scissors which the Professor was still holding and, clinging to them, a tuf of Jyp's hair, and it all became suddenly clear. But why had they given Jyp an injection? Surely, not to . . . ? No, Aline would never have allowed it. Again I looked at Jyp and his big brown eyes were fixed on me!

* Paris waxworks museum.

"Jyp, dear old Jyp," I said, stroking its head, and I drew back when I felt it trembling under my hand! Slowly, like a very slow-motion film, my dog turned its head, and its tail was wagging. "Jyp!" I shouted, and the hot tears blurred my sight as he moved quicker and quicker and with a sudden deep, strange yell, sprang up at me and stood squirming in mid-air. The next moment, he was in my arms, sniffing, struggling, grunting and licking my face.

I had to make quite sure that I was not in the morgue and putting the dog down, I walked out. Jyp tried to run past me in the thick hot air and panting and barking strangely, he jumped at me and again remained squirming in mid-air. I could not help laughing as I pushed him back to the pavement. The small outhouse which had once been used as a morgue was quite empty. Feeling suddenly tired and hungry—hunger and fatigue always came suddenly, it seemed—I walked round to the canteen. It was not open but I had no trouble getting in and there found some bread and butter. Upstairs, I knew, was a rest-room with easy chairs and one or two couches. With the cord of a blind, I tied Jyp to my wrist, terrified that he might vanish out of my loneliness as suddenly as he had appeared.

Sitting up suddenly—I always awoke with a start, never with the feeling of having had a proper rest—I realised how, having accidentally "pushed me out of time" as I termed it, Professor Massel had tried to discover what had happened by submitting Jyp to the same treatment! Had he found out, I wondered, dragging Jyp round to the laboratory where they were still standing round the table on which Jyp had been given the injection that had "pushed him into my time". Jyp must have disappeared from their sight and since they were still looking at the spot from which he had gone, I estimated that a bare second or two had elapsed for them, whereas we had lived a number of hours, five or six perhaps. If only I could make the Professor understand what had happened! I could of course move them around, lift any of them off the ground, but would they understand? The pistol, that was it! They could not fail to hear it, and then they would

see it on the table; and before they could pick it up, I would try leaving a message under it or, better still, attached to it, somehow.

Drawing out the pistol, I squeezed the trigger. For a second or so, nothing happened and I was about to check that it was properly loaded when the butt moved in my hand, as though someone were trying to twist it out of my grip. With a rumbling, strangely muffled explosion, a yellowish flame like that of a blow torch being lit protruded from the nozzle and, through it, like a brass fly, the bullet appeared, moving slowly forward at a speed which did not seem to exceed two or three inches a second. I watched it, fascinated, wondering how long it would take to reach . . . and sick with fear, I realised that it was making straight for Aline's white blouse! Springing round Professor Massel, I grasped the slow moving bullet and made a new and fearful discovery: I could not stop it or move it off its course! It was so hot that I had to let go and when, desperate, I leaned down and put my shoulder to it, it seared through my shirt and burned me. People, I knew, I could move, so stepping ahead of the slow-moving bullet, as gently as I could and in order not to bruise her I pressed my body against Aline's and slowly pushed her out of the way and off balance, and so that she would not hurt herself in falling, I pressed her gently to the ground.

The bullet went slowly on and just as slowly, bored a deep hole in the wall opposite. Jyp who could not understand was running from one to another of the three petrified people in the room and I had to restrain him from scratching them as he tried to attract their attention.

Judging time is never easy and, in my predicament, it was practically impossible, but it seemed like fifteen or perhaps twenty minutes passed before, to my delight, I began to notice facial reactions to my pistol shot. Martinaud's eyes had become round and wide open and Aline's mouth was slowly but surely opening as an expression of fear was spreading over her face. Going over to one of the desks, I found a pencil and a pad and slowly wrote out:

"I am here with Jyp, but you cannot see us. We are no longer in time as you know it and, to us, you are as statues. One second of your time lasts between three and four hours for us. Can you help us? Hurry.

Yvon."

Rolling it up, I inserted it in the muzzle of the pistol which I put down on the table which they had been looking at.

After that, it was a matter of long hours of patient waiting and watching as, little by little, they reacted to the pistol shot. Martinaud was the first to spot the gun. Jyp was fast asleep and I was struggling to keep awake, as the Doctor leaned forward and reached out to pick it up, as very gradually, the Professor turned towards Aline, whose mouth was still wide open and who was in the ridiculous position of a semi-conscious boxer struggling to get up. My head nodded once or twice and I dozed off to sleep. Aching all over, I woke up some hours later. The Professor was helping Aline to her feet, it seemed, and Martinaud's hand had only just lifted the pistol off the table. He was sure to see the note in the muzzle now, but it would take many, many hours, days perhaps, before I could expect anything like an answer. Getting up, I nudged Jyp out of a happy sleep and made for the canteen in search of more food and some rest.

When I returned, Martinaud had at last unrolled my note which he was reading. Still holding Aline's arm, Professor Massel was looking at him, his mouth twisted, as though he was saying something.

The rest you know, but it was a good month for Jyp and me before Professor Massel at last got around to ordering me to try to inject that stuff into my arm. I have had plenty of time in which to write out this report which I intend leaving in the experimental cabin, in case the Professor's idea does not succeed.

When Yvon Darnier came to that evening, he was in the infirmary and Aline was smiling down at him.

"How do you feel?" she whispered.

"Like hell . . . I ache all over. Where . . . ? Bon Dieu! Jyp! Did the old boy get Jyp back?"

"Doctor Martinaud and the Professor will be here in a minute, Yvon. They will tell you . . . No, you must be quiet."

"Why? What is the matter? Why all these bandages?"

"You were burned."

"When? How? Ah! Professor, what happened?"

"You have had a very rough time, I fear," said Xavier Massel, taking a seat by the bed. "It is difficult to explain exactly what happened. Three days ago, you were put into a state of conscious hibernation . . ."

"I know all that, Professor. What happened later?"

"Well, when at the end of the experiment you were given an injection which was to bring you back to a normal rhythm, something went wrong and instead of accelerating back to normal, you went past it, accelerating to . . . I don't know . . . perhaps a hundred or two hundred times beyond the normal rhythm of life."

"I had guessed right, then. While you lived a fraction of a second, I was living an hour or more? But what about Jyp? Were you able to get him back?"

"Your dog is back. You must not worry any more, Lieutenant."

"How did you . . . ?"

"I'll tell you all about it later," said the Professor, getting up. "Let me see those burns."

"How did I get burned?"

"You had difficulty in moving, did you not? And you must have felt very hot?"

"Yes, the air was syrupy and thick. How do you know?"

"The very speed of your movements, breathing, everything must have caused friction through the air. What surprises me most is that you did not burn outright, like a meteor."

"Like a meteor?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. Think, you were moving at such a speed that the human eye could not see you."

"So that explains why my clothes were always torn to shreds and burned. I remember trying to use bicycles but

the tyres always melted. But those gongs I kept hearing, what could have caused that particular hallucination?"

"It was not your imagination, Lieutenant. The explanation is simple, really. What you heard was more likely a telephone bell. What is a continuous ring for us was, for you, isolated sounds separated by long periods of silence; and if the sound was more like the deep note of a gong, it is because sound waves, like everything else, were correspondingly slowed down for you. If you slow down a gramophone record, sounds get deeper and deeper."

"But why was it the only sound I could hear?"

"I don't know, perhaps because the range of perception of your ears was reduced to only a very short band of vibrations."

"But the electricity that was continually being cut off?"

"Wherever you had alternating current, you got that impression. Alternating current goes on and off fifty times a second. We have it here; look at the bulb over your bed through half closed lids and you will feel the light flickering. Each flick off was, for you, a period of darkness that lasted or seemed to last several minutes. If only you had had some more accurate method of measuring time than the growth of your beard, we might have discovered at what speed you did live for almost a full hour."

"Four or five months, I think."

"Perhaps . . . It is difficult to say, Lieutenant. You see, living at such a rhythm wears one out faster than . . . We are not made to live at such speeds . . . and . . ."

"And I have aged a good deal, is that it?"

"I . . . I really don't know. Biologically shall we say. you are perhaps some years older. Much depends on what you feel."

Doctor Martinaud and the nurse came in and looked at the Professor, who nodded:

"Yes, I have told him and . . . he understands, I think."

"Yes, I understand. Aline, be a good girl and get me a mirror, will you please?"

"I . . . I don't think . . ." stammered the nurse, looking helplessly at the Professor.

"Suppose you wait a while, Yvon," said Martinaud. "You have been pretty well scorched and your appearance may be only temporary. You have to get well and back to . . . to normal."

"Bad as all that, eh? Aline, please be a good girl and run and get your handbag; I am sure you will find a mirror in it."

When, a few minutes later, nurse Aline Barenne returned, wiping the small mirror Yvon had asked for, Doctor Martinaud was closing the eyes of a very old man who had just died. Her eyes filled with tears, as she slipped the now useless mirror in the pocket of her blouse.

"He is . . ."

"Yes," answered Xavier Massel. "He was ageing faster and faster."

"What age had he reached, do you think?"

"Difficult to say," said Martinaud, straightening up. "That is the body of a very, very old man indeed, over a hundred years old, I should think."

"Why did you tell him that his dog . . . ?"

"His dog is back," said the Professor, wiping his glasses. "It is there, under the bed."

Martinaud bent down and dragged out the stiffened body of an almost hairless cocker-spaniel that seemed to have died of old age.

"It was not here at lunch time. How did it get in?"

"It probably was there, but you could not see it until it died," said the Professor, getting up and leaving the room.

RECESSION

To the memory of our father who may some day read this story, little dreaming that it was written by his sons.

"Death is but a recession!"

"Who said that?" I asked, sitting up, panting and gasping on the hard yet comfortable, narrow hospital bed, blinking round at the shadows ready to close in and snuff out the inadequate, yellowish night-light—probably some economy scheme.

"Who said what?" asked the nurse softly, wiping my forehead, readjusting the stinking oxygen probe and pushing it gently back, all the way down my right nostril.

"Probably right," I whispered, thinking of the telephone by the bed, the 'phone on which I might yet hear the voice of my boys before . . .

"What is right?" asked the nurse, fumbling for my pulse.

"You are, my dear . . . you should know . . . a nurse is always right."

I knew now that I was dying. I had known for some time, of course, but that had been a mere subconscious knowledge. It was not the pain, or the fatigue, or the difficulty I had in breathing at times, all normal enough for a man of eighty; it had been something more, something strange, both an urge to leave and an urge to see the people I loved and the things I loved as much and as often as possible. 'Hate to bother you, son, but I am getting on, you know, and I won't last for ever', had been my usual excuse to drag one or both of them round. Consciously, that was a lie, I only wanted their company; but deep down, I knew that it was the truth.

It had been much the same situation when after a couple of weeks in bed at home, my two sons had one evening brought round one of those expensive doctors. He had been polite, efficient, cheerful, but the subconscious

mind of an old man can read anyone's thoughts, even those of a specialist.

The boys had done me well; they were good boys. The nursing-home with its flowers and lawns was a nice one, the day nurse quite pretty and the staff all smiles, and so efficient. Everything about it was so unexpected, my room was such a cheerful one that I had momentarily felt that all would be well, that I really would soon be up and about. In fact, I felt so well that when the nurse came to undress me, I cracked a rather poor joke about leaving the room cold and horizontal. She chuckled helpfully, as her two pink acrobatic hands strip-teased me. I felt so well that she annoyed me; true I was unwell but I was not an invalid or a little boy!

"I'll keep my socks on, nurse," I announced in a quiet, matter-of-fact, neutral but determined voice.

"Certainly, if you wish."

This simple acquiescence made me uneasy. I had always thought that clinics, hospitals or nursing homes, even luxurious ones, had strict rules. The astonishing ease with which the nurse got me into my clean pyjamas, the smile with which she hesitated, decided to leave the top button undone and patted down my collar as though I had been an aged little boy in a new sailor suit made me furious. I very nearly announced that I would wear my waistcoat in the daytime and a bowler hat at night. The certainty that she would have said: "Certainly, if you wish," made me climb into bed without a word, thankful that she did not pat my backside as I did so.

I was grim and determined; she would never know that one of my toe nails had years ago and for some mysterious reason turned black!

Very probably in order to ingratiate my subconsciousness, I had adopted the false-possibly-true-though-probably-false line of humour that I was indeed a dying man. There are some people, however, who only understand a limited number of jokes and whose sense of humour is limited to slap-stick. The house doctor was one of these and he rebuked me, as though I really believed that I was dying!

"Don't be silly," he snapped, looking at the chart

already at the foot of my bed. "Your temperature is coming down fast."

"Not nearly as fast as I am," I said with a chuckle that turned to a cough.

The nurse smiled, but he frowned slightly and felt my pulse.

"Your pulse is sharp and regular... It has already improved."

"That may be because it hasn't yet found out that I am worse."

This time, he looked me full in the face, and he knew ... and the fact that he knew went right through to my subconscious mind.

Death is but a recession. Where had I heard or read that before? There are so many nooks and corners full of words and phrases and stories and doubts and truths collected in an old man's brain, especially that of a book-lover, that it is difficult and sometimes quite impossible to trace the origin of a thought. "Death is but a recession!" It had sounded like the echo of a man's voice but the words had been quite distinct. I must have dreamed it. It couldn't have been the nurse. No nurse, not even a night-nurse, would ever say such a thing. Shakespeare? The Bible? La Rochefoucauld? No, not La Rochefoucauld? Bossuet? Arnold Bennett? Hemingway? Some obscure Hyde Park Corner verbal maniac? It was no use guessing like that, that never worked, I knew. Death is but a recession! It could fit most religions, if not all... at least all those I knew anything about. It did not seem to mean much any way, the sort of remark any man of any faith might well make. I could imagine some bony-handed padre pronouncing the words ever so suavely, or some podgy-fingered priest thundering them deliberately into the high vaulted roof of a cathedral. Death is but a recession . . . I could also imagine a tea-sipping Oriental whispering the words through the curved crack of one of those half-hour smiles which they are so apt to wear when at all uncomfortable.

Why was it then that, for me, at that precise moment, the words had, somehow, a different meaning? Was it a warning that I had better let the subconscious knowledge

come through, that the end was much nearer than I had somehow expected? Was it a warning, a signal, a comfort?

"Nurse, why should death be but a recession rather than an end or a step forward, have you any idea?" I asked, as she pushed the blood-pressure armlet up past my elbow.

"Be quiet, please," she begged, adjusting the stethoscope to her ears and switching on the bedside lamp.

I must have dozed off for I did not see her leave the room, but when I found all the lights turned on and white-coated doctors standing each side of the bed from which my pillows had disappeared, the subconscious knowledge of the truth crashed right through! I knew I was dying and this was it.

"Death is but a recession," echoed the voice again in my head.

"All right," I grumbled, "you said it before. And it doesn't mean much after all, does it?"

"What is it, tell me," said one of the doctors, putting his face close to mine as another pushed a red hot needle into my arm.

"Nothing to bother about. . . . Hadn't you better . . . telephone. . . ."

"Now, don't worry. Just relax and let us do the worrying," he explained as another needle was shoved into my other arm.

The clashing of instruments in trays was disagreeable. Otherwise, their voices sounded just as voices used to sound round the tea table when I was a very little boy and, hugging my mother's neck, I used to fall asleep on her soft warm breast, inside which I could hear her breathe and talk and live.

My heart turned a couple of somersaults and brought me back to my senses. Someone leaning over me was holding my chin, and there was another tube in my mouth. The voices and the noise of instruments sounded fainter and fainter on each side, rather as though I had been standing in the middle portion of a long corridor with the same sounds coming from each end. And just over my

head, at the end of a three-hundred-foot chimney was a light like the one over my bed.

That was it! That was the recession! I was receding from sound and light... and life of course. What a surprising and interesting experience, so very different to what I had expected. I was not leaving life; life was receding from me in every direction.

Once a voice came quite clearly all the way down the long sound corridors. It was that of my eldest son:

"Is he still conscious?" he asked.

"No... not really... He is already far, far away, you know."

"All right, little man, I'm here!" echoed my son's voice down the corridor.

"Thank you, son," I answered, wondering if my voice would carry all the way back along those corridors that now seemed lined with metal.

Both corridors had narrowed considerably when my other son so innocently announced that he was by me. They had dwindled to two narrow brass tubes, one on each side, pipes that barely fitted my ear-drums, and judging by the sounds at the other end, about a mile long. Over my head, the well had also dwindled to a very narrow tube and, there too, a good mile up, I could vaguely see the pinpoint of a throbbing light.

"Death is but a recession!" I chuckled. This time, however, the words stayed by me and did not travel along the tubes. The light above was getting dimmer and dimmer. That was the approach of death. I knew that the moment my heart stopped or, at most, a second or so after, I would cease to hear, see or feel. Come to think of it, I had not really felt anything for some time.

The black-out of sound and light did come, but it was some time before I accepted the scientific fact that I was dead. Old men are prone to argue and to put forward embarrassing questions; for instance, I reasoned that since I could still think, it could only mean that my brain was working and, since my brain was functioning, blood was flowing through it, which in turn could only mean that my heart was still beating. Logically, I was therefore in some sort of coma and death would come later.

It was only a good deal later that I began to feel that my body was indeed dead, that my brain had also ceased to function and that what was left, what was active, could only be ME, my soul, or whatever it was that could not perish. That was it! Something that could not, did not perish. What surprised me, though, was that I could both remember and reason, but that was all, I *knew* nothing else! Was I inside or outside my body, I wondered? Judging by the last sensations I could remember, I had an uncomfortable feeling that I—my ME—was in the very centre of my head, perhaps in the pituitary gland. In that case, it might mean a good many months, or years, before I could be freed... unless, of course, some bright doctor decided to have a post-mortem. But that was highly improbable in the sort of nursing home my sons had treated me to: I could well imagine my body all done up ever so nice in some sort of *de luxe* morgue, with a deep-freeze box of sorts purring away under my backside. Or perhaps I was already buried? No sensation of any sort, no means of measuring time: it was frightening. How was I to know whether I had only been dead a few minutes, two days or ten years? Of course, I could measure ten seconds, or a minute or two by counting the seconds, but I could not do that all the time!

Deliberately, I tried to panic. Here I was, completely, totally shut up in a prison without light, without sound, without sleep, unable to move or do anything as I knew or had known action and, for all I knew, shut up with one thing: eternity! Unfortunately, it is quite impossible to panic without a heart maddened by adrenaline, without a mouth to scream, without eyes to turn up and without fingers and nails with which to scratch them out!

If only I could sleep, but oblivion was evidently out of the question. I tried counting sheep, slowly and fast. I counted millions of sheep and that in itself might have become a sort of oblivion but my soul, or my ME, or whatever it was, soon became able to think of other things while I went on counting more sheep than Noah or Australia had ever dreamed of. I next tried to estimate how much time I had taken to count my sheep for, without ever ceasing, I reached the surprising figure of nine

hundred and ninety eight million sheep, all imagined, thick with wool, and counted one by one as they jumped over a sunlit fence. They had only very exceptionally jumped in pairs and, in my mind, each sheep had taken a good second to jump over the fence. Therefore, at the rate of sixty sheep a minute, or three thousand six hundred an hour, it worked out to eighty-six thousand four hundred sheep a day. A million sheep was therefore about twelve days' work and a billion—I was close enough to a billion, something like twelve thousand days. At the rate of three hundred and sixty-five days a year, that amounted to... Heavens!... something like thirty years! Three times ten years!

Einstein came to the rescue; how did I know that my estimated time of one second per jumping had any resemblance to a G.M.T. second? In my total isolation, I might well be able to imagine a sheep, jumping in a thousandth, a millionth or, after all why not, a billionth of a second.

It seemed evident that I would have to find some other occupation or go mad. But what a wonderful idea! Insanity was a form of oblivion. There again I failed miserably. How can one go mad without a cock-eyed brain, without nerves to jingle and help, without a body to shudder and sob, and a mouth to slobber and rave? Quite impossible.

Day-dreaming while counting sheep was the nearest I got to sleep, or honest dreaming. A real dream would have been so refreshing, for a dream is ever full of the unexpected; it is a form of life, of entertainment. Not only was I obliged to produce every one of my thoughts and images, but I could not cease producing them, interminably, day and night, if day and night meant anything.

Was I buried? How long ago? Were worms already getting at my carcass? What would happen when they reached that inner me? The thought did not amuse or frighten me, it only produced a mild curiosity.

How about living my life all over again? Some people write their memoirs? Horrible cheats, every one of them, the biggest being probably Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Since I had no audience, I could at least enjoy an honest autobiography. I started with first memories and tried to go

back further, as Jung or Adler, or someone, once suggested, but without success. My life seemed to go by a good deal quicker than counting a billion sheep, which meant that I had not, therefore, remembered very much of it.

Priests and nuns, I knew, were able to attain a state of ecstasy through prayer, repeated prayer. I remembered the Lord's Prayer and tried that. I also tried a special prayer made up for my particular case . . . or was it so very particular? There were very likely dozens of others, hundreds and even thousands, imprisoned all round me, wherever I was buried. Or was my case a unique one? Perhaps I was only in a dead faint or coma and, sooner or later, I would come to or, worse still, wake up in my coffin and go raving mad in a matter of minutes. But I had thought of all that before. Everything had happened before.

History tempted me for a while. Here I was undisturbed and able to concentrate as no live being can possibly do. With my knowledge of the French Revolution, I might well be able to solve the mystery of the Dauphin. I soon concluded that my knowledge of that part of French history, vast as it was supposed to be, did not amount to very much and I gave it up. Then I tried painting. There had been at least one famous artist among my ancestors and my youngest son earned a good living with his pencil. Though I could conjure up scenery, still life arrangements, canvasses, paints, brushes, I was unable to paint any better than I had during my past life. Chess tempted me but in spite of the immense concentration I could put into any occupation, I soon got all muddled up and, in any case, playing chess with one's self is never much fun.

After trying to remember every book I had ever read, and failing rather miserably, I resorted to the memory of the pleasures of love. Just try to concoct the pleasures of love without a body, and blood to surge through it!

The idea of communicating with other prisoners or with living people attracted me a good deal, but I had no ideas. Was that what took place at spiritualist meetings, I wondered? I imagined such meetings, even meetings attended by members of my family, but it was not at all convincing. For some time, I worked hard at thought transmis-

sion. There again, the only successful thought transmission would have been to convince someone that I should be dug up and cut open until my soul, my ME, was able to go free. Free without a body with which to communicate with the world I had known? For all I knew, I was free. For all I knew, I was in wind and sunlight. After all, all that mattered little. What did matter was that I was conscious of ME and ME only, a prisoner in the most perfect prison ever invented by man or god. Compared to me, the genie in the bottle was a free man. One can dream of escaping from a dungeon, a room, a bottle, even a coffin, but no one can escape from nothing, no space, the atom of the atom, anti-space perhaps.

An intellect, for I was in truth nothing else, cannot possibly dig tunnels. Therefore, my only possible escape was an intellectual one. The uses of the intellect are really far more limited than one would think; outside of remembering, trying to solve problems, rearranging the past, working out might-have-beens, and creating, it has nothing to do. Creating was, of course, the most interesting and the most difficult of my limited pastimes.

After a rotten novel which centered round an impossible prisoner unable to escape from his prison, from his past or even from himself, I childishly tried inventing things that did not exist within the realm of my earthly knowledge, new shapes, new colours, new words. I got no further than Joyce and Picasso.

Building a bridge over the Channel between France and England was more fun. Without the slightest knowledge of architecture or engineering, I went bravely to work, drawing, planning, calculating, starting all over again because I had not thought about the tides and the nature of the soil into which I was going to sink the pillars of my bridge. I resisted the temptation to short-circuit difficulties by imaginary magic or comic-strip "Supermen"; I really worked very hard in my mind and did thousands of jobs. Once, for fun, as a diver, I let my pipe break and drowned myself, but since that would have put an end to my bridge, I had a skin diver save me in the nick of time.

That bridge was the first thing that gave me any real

pleasure, perhaps because the only possible satisfaction of a mind is to create. I would have to go on creating. I thus built and launched a big ocean liner. That was followed by a new city, compared to which Brazilia was but an exhibition village. With eternity before me and no rest or need of rest, I was able to do all that, as best I could, without "cheating". After a ship and a city, I grew more ambitious and tried a gigantic dam, but even with up-to-date machinery, I got terribly bored of pouring ton after ton of cement into my dam. I finished the job because, somehow, I felt it would be unworthy not to go through with it. It was while letting the water rise behind my new dam—the water was to take about five years to invade and fill the valley where I had sacrificed a town and a dozen villages, already rebuilt in better situations of course—that I was attracted to a new idea, the creation of life!

In order to create life, however, I would first have to build a cell and with my limited scientific knowledge, that was quite impossible. The solution at last flashed through my mind in the very middle of the inauguration ceremonies of my new dam, just as the new Secretary General of the United Nations was about to drive along its half mile broad rim. It was so easy, really... I would be the first cell!

My knowledge of embryology was, to say the least, limited, even more so than my knowledge of building and engineering. While building, I had ordered other people to do jobs which I could not do personally; I had used machines which I would have been incapable of making, let alone putting together; but in order to create life, I would have to do everything on my own. All I was certain of was that, to start with a cell divides into two new cells, each of which divides into two more cells, and so on, until a very mountain of cells amounts to something which might or might not be (I was not sure) barely visible under a powerful microscope. However, by keeping up the division procedure, I might get somewhere. What then? What if I did obtain a mountain of something akin to soapsuds, where did life come in? I would have to try to start with a life-giving cell, but I was not at all sure that cells really

had anything to do with life. The only possible solution was to give my imagination total liberty.

Becoming a cell was not easy for, somehow, I felt quite certain that what existed of me, if anything, was indeed much smaller than a cell. My captive ME had, therefore, to concentrate and make a tremendous effort in order to grow in size, a million times or more, in order to become one minute cell. Since I gave my imagination a free hand, I had to accept what it produced and though I succeeded in starting with a roughly spherical cell, somewhat to my surprise, I divided into two, then a number of elongated cells, not very many though. After a while, the elongated cell which was ME again divided and, since I could not be in more than one cell, just before it separated in two, I chose what promised to be the larger of the two.

Here came an unexpected change. I awaited a new division, but nothing happened; instead, I began to grow and, behind me grew a body, or was it a tail? Was I...? Could I be? I was not conscious of any environment or media, or even movement, but I did know enough to make me wonder. Whatever I was could neither see nor hear, nor feel, but I had a strange urge of movement, of accomplishment, of an end, of a beginning, or both.

It happened all of a sudden. She was there quite close! It was mother Earth and I was a homing astronaut after a long, long time-space voyage. If only I could reach her! I knew she was there, ahead of me, beautiful and spherical as I strove forward, madly, desperately. If only I could pierce through the thickness of the atmosphere without getting destroyed . . . if I could only land!

Through! I had come through . . . and I was inside! How I shouted and screamed and laughed . . . and ate! I was so hungry and happy! I knew that my love was there, somewhere in the warm darkness, waiting for me! Having lost my body or tail, or astronautical suit, or whatever it was, I had again become a cell or nucleus. I was still a prisoner, but the happiest prisoner imaginable in an inverted world. Yes, I was inside the world and somehow, victorious. And my love was waiting, close by, waiting for me. waiting . . .

How we mixed and destroyed and created and re-

created each other is something no poet has yet sung. All I know is that we are I and, naturally, I am we . . . for again, we have started the halving process, this time, however, with a difference; I no longer go from one to another of the dividing cells. I remain in most, in ever so many that are . . . ME. There are other cells which seem friendly enough but which are not ME. Another astonishing thing. For the first time since my . . . recession, I have had blank periods, yes, periods of rest!

My me, my soul is also undergoing a change of sorts. I again feel brain rather than just soul and outside my brain which is long and curved, not at all like the brain that left me, I have cognisance of a mass, of something that is brainless that is nevertheless also me.

Sleep! Yes, a wonderful, wonderful sleep. Did it last a minute or a century? That is unimportant. It was sleep, sleep in comfort, sleep in the night of a purple paradise. On awakening, however, I had quite a shock: I am an entity, I have a tail!

Now, I know! I have accomplished a proper marvel of imagination, far superior to my ship or my dam. Without the necessary scientific knowledge, I have succeeded in imagining life and in imagining life, I have found sleep! Yes, I am an imaginary embryo, and I know that that warm mass outside my enormous brain is a heart ready to live and that, somehow, I must get outside it. Am I a chick in an egg, or a future calf, or perhaps some fantastic horse that will win untold millions for others? Whatever I turn out to be, I will live its life through. After? Now that I know how, I can easily start on some other animal.

What a success! Wonderful! Believe it or not, I am a baby. A baby boy. I knew the moment I started kicking, around the fifth month, I guess. How I sleep, and sleep and sleep! Better than I ever slept as a man.

The moment is approaching, perhaps a matter of minutes. It was an awful shock when the warm surrounding medium suddenly drained away, leaving me cloaked in contracting flesh! The only comparison I can think of is this: imagine the exact opposite of a man in a submarine that is suddenly flooded. My only hope is to struggle out.

I have been fighting and fainting and sleeping for a long

while now. Lord! The length of that tunnel . . . a tunnel that grips and sticks and crushes you! Now I know why so many people have recurrent and terrible nightmares in which they find themselves struggling through impossible small gaps, or under great walls or mountains, or working their way along passages much too narrow for them.

Oh, that iron band round my head! Forceps, of course. Mind my ear, damn it! Mind my ear! What a noise! What a hell of a noise! And that fearful clammy iciness. I'm out! I can't see with my eyes, but my ME can see the whole scene perfectly well. A real swell nursing home, even better than the one I died in, it seems. Gloved and masked, doctors, surgeons, nurses. . . quite a show! I don't like the way they handle me, though. They all seem to take a keen sort of delight in picking me up by my heels and throwing me around!

At last, I'm all done up and carried into a room full of flowers. Rather pretty, that girl in the bed. My mother! Good. She's really quite beautiful. What about that overgrown, whiskered boy frowning down at me? Oh, no! That, my father! He's a liar, an abominable liar! He has never seen anything quite so horrible as me and yet he turns and slobbers all over the girl in bed and tells her that I am beautiful!

I'll have to do more lives, now that I know how. The sleep, the total oblivion of sleep is well worth it. Perhaps it is, after all, a way of reaching oblivion. I'm getting a bit muddled, but sleep . . . gorgeous!

"We have decided to call him Edward, after his great-grandfather. He is only five days old but ever so beautiful since this morning. I don't know why but until this morning he had the face and head of a very old man. But now he is just a beautiful baby.

All our love,
Peggy."

THE LADY FROM NOWHERE

To the poet Jean Cocteau, this other Eurydice.

It is a miracle that only one of the three "portable" atom bombs stored at the Government Nuclear Research Institute exploded. It only killed 6,083 people outright. Fall-out and radiations were, however, much deadlier; of the 122,349 cases rounded up and put in the camp hospital of Willowback, 29,846 died in the first month. It is doubtful if more than eight or ten per cent of the total number of casualties will survive.

As chief local security officer, I moved in with one of the first rescue parties. I was convinced that it was an accident, if only because all the scientists had guaranteed that an accidental nuclear explosion was absolutely impossible. However, even though we did not expect to find a signed confession, it was our duty to take a look round. Also, I knew that my brother Bernard, or what was left of him, was somewhere in there.

We did find a few people still alive and an awful lot of terribly dead ones in the mountainous shambles of what had once been one of the most important experimental stations in the country.

Of course, if it meant saving an innocent or preventing a war—because some of our papers promptly suggested that a foreign power, etcetera, etcetera—I would turn in a full report and risk finding myself in a lunatic asylum, for now I know that it was not sabotage but, let us say, an experiment that turned out worse than my brother had expected.

Since I was Bernard's only relative, it was natural enough that I should have assumed the task of looking through his personal belongings. As a matter of fact, I had moved into his lakeside cottage because the small flat which I occupied near the Ray Falls City Hall had been completely destroyed, as had most of the houses east of the bus terminal. Call it what you like, intuition, instinct or, what is more likely, some thirty years of experience,

but I knew that Berny had had something to do with it the moment I entered his living-room. When a dog has a bone to hide, it digs a hole and covers it up; when a man has a secret which he thinks others might discover, he writes it down, burns it and leaves the ashes all over the place. The ashes were in the fireplace and there were quite a lot of them. Collecting them would have been useless because my brother had evidently moved his foot around in them; however, down under the heap—therefore one of the first sheets destroyed—a short strip had not been burned. I was able to read the typewritten words "... NE FIFTEEN TOMORROW. LOVE YOU." Banging out the same words on his typewriter and comparing was mere routine but I knew somehow that he had written them. According to all the seismographs, Ray Falls had had it at exactly 1316 hours, which is close enough to one fifteen. It also seemed that Berny had been having a love affair.

"So, it's a *cherchez la femme* job," I muttered, lighting my pipe and poking around the ashes. I did not find the *femme* but I found what looked like the remains of a photograph and as a frame stood empty on the television set, I supposed it must have been hers.

The next thing I noticed, close to the empty frame, was the microphone. It was wired to the television set. Switching it on, I let it warm up, and by talking into the mike was able to hear myself over the television loudspeaker. It was not wired to anything else.

On his desk, under a pile of technical papers, I found four sheets of paper. In the middle of each a few words had been typed in capital letters. Wondering if they were messages that Bernard had received or perhaps prepared I tried to find some order for them. Three of them seemed to hold together but the fourth one had me guessing. It was the shortest, only three words: "ARE YOU HAPPY?" The other three ran:

JUST WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME THEN?

I WISH I COULD GET IN THERE WITH YOU.

SUPPOSING I BELIEVE YOU, WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?

Bit by bit, little by little, it took me two whole years. To be quite honest, if it had not been for my wife, who later told me the full story, I would probably still be at it. I did not believe her at first but she soon hammered essential proofs home and when at last I had the story straight, I knew that no one would believe me and, what is more, that if I did make an official report of it, I would stand a fifty-fifty chance of ending up in the local asylum. However, written as a story, if it ever does get published, I can always say that it is but a story and nothing more. Only my wife and perhaps a few scientists will know that, as usual, truth is so much stranger than fiction.

My brother Bernard was without a doubt the brains of our family and I was not at all surprised as the years went by to hear of him collecting degrees much as other people collect stamps or butterflies. I was of course delighted when he came back to Ray Falls as Doctor Bernard E. Marsden and still more delighted when he informed my one man reception committee that he had been assigned an important job at the Nuclear Research Institute.

Berny lived in a small but comfortable cottage by the lake above Ray Falls. An old lady who lived close by came early every morning to cook his breakfast and clean up the house. He cooked his own dinner at night. Except for his early morning swim in the lake every day of the year, he did not much care for sports; he had nevertheless inherited the Marsden build and the Marsden blue eyes and though I had plenty of experience in the police force, I am pretty sure that he would have got the better of me in a fight.

One night when he had been working late on some figures, Berny yawned, stretched and decided it was high time to go to bed. He knew from bitter experience, however, that if he did not first get his work out of his mind, he would not get a wink of sleep. He usually walked down to the lake, smoking a last pipe, but as it was raining quite hard, he turned on his television set and fetched himself a glass of milk and some biscuits from the kitchen. The screen flickered as he got back. Two men rather out of focus were talking together, but he could hear nothing.

Having tried to regulate sound and picture, he supposed that either his set or the local station was out of order and switched off.

A few nights later, having finished typing a long report, he again switched on the television. The confused and distorted sound of a man's voice came through after a minute or so and when the screen flashed white, there were only vague shadows passing across it.

"Must be out of order," muttered Berny, playing around with the various buttons.

He was about to switch off when a hand, very clear and sharp, slid across the screen as though groping for something. It was followed by the head of a very old man who blinked, turned his head to say something which he was not able to understand, then slid away, not unlike a fish in an aquarium, thought Berny. There were more confused sounds and flitting shadows and nothing more.

Berny looked at his watch and picked up the evening paper. The last item on the television programme seemed to be the late newscast at 11.35. It could not possibly have lasted till one in the morning, therefore there must have been something else. He would have to have the set repaired, unless, of course, the local station was experimenting with colour, or perhaps some new method of transmission. That would account for blurred pictures and bad sound. Next morning, he called Dick Rowlands, one of the local station engineers.

"No, Berny, we haven't been experimenting. What time did you say?"

"One or a few minutes after. Also a couple of nights ago, later still."

"No. What channel were you on?"

"Channel two."

"That's ours all right. Could be a long distance fluke. They happen, you know. What sort of an aerial have you got?"

"Indoor."

"It's certainly strange. Let me know if it happens again and I'll run round."

Two nights later, they were on again, the same men out of focus and with the sound guttural and barely audible.

"Nothing wrong with your set, Berny," was Dick Rowland's verdict the next day. "I'll change this valve for you and stop that slight flickering at the top of the screen, but that is all it needs. What you have been seeing late at night must be some distant programme reflected from the stratosphere. For no explainable reason they occasionally get picked up by quite ordinary receivers."

"Where would it be, then? Russia, Australia, or what?"

"Not that far, I shouldn't think, but you never know. You did not hear what language they were speaking?"

"No."

Berny knew that he had run up against something really unusual the day he borrowed my portable set. The indistinct shadows had again been appearing on his screen and he wanted to see if they would appear on another set than his. He turned them both on after the final goodnight of our local station. Two minutes later, shadows began to appear on both screens but what made Berny sit up was that, although they were the same shadows and indistinct faces, they were not identical on both screens! That ruled out the possibility of a distant programme, for there would have had to be two programmes since he had quite evidently two different pictures. When the shadows disappeared and the sound died down to the usual gentle purr, he switched off and lit a pipe. There were evidently some experiments going on, near or far, which Dick did not know about. They could not be very secret though, since anyone was liable to pick them up.

Berny was, however, quite mistaken—as he discovered a few nights later, when the sound came on rather louder than usual. As he was about to tone it down, a strange cackling voice came through with perfect clearness and almost immediately another answered on a higher pitch. A second later, the screen lit up and in perfect focus he saw two men, obviously Japanese, talking. One of them turned and pointed towards the screen and both came forward.

So Dick was right after all, thought Berny. It was only a fluke and he had been picking up a Japanese programme. The two men on the screen had stopped talking and were looking at the camera. One of them spoke and

pointed. He pointed his way and a little to the side, then pretended to pick up a glass and drink. Just a coincidence, thought Berny, glancing at the glass of milk next to him and searching his pocket for his matches. But the little man on the screen was also searching his pocket and when, scowling, Berny found them and lit his pipe, the little man on the screen pretended to light a pipe. The other one who had been merely watching, laughed and said something, and three or four other people, some in flowing robes it seemed, came crowding round the screen, staring at Berny.

The milk, the pipe, the way they were looking at him and talking about him, could only mean one thing: he was on the receiving end of a fantastic experiment. They were probably engineers—Japanese judging by their looks —who had invented a way of making a two-way television out of ordinary receiving sets, and that over tremendous distances. But he had to be quite sure and without taking his eyes off them, he slowly pulled off his tie. With a quick bow and a grin, the little man in the middle of the screen pretended to do likewise. There was no possible doubt!

"Can you hear me?" asked Berny, surprised at the sound of his own voice.

They stared at him, then one of them said something very rapidly and an old man with spectacles came to the centre of the screen and said quite distinctly:

"Speak English?"

"Yes," said Berny, excited, "Can you hear me?"

Again they all chatted together and the one who had been imitating his movements said something to the old man who shook his head. After discussing for a while, the old man looked at him and said:

"Wait, please . . . yes?"

"You wish me to wait?" asked Berny, pointing at himself and they all bowed.

He did not have to wait long, but stood transfixed when, brushing her long hair back over one ear, a rather beautiful girl in a simple white frock came into view. She looked at the men round her, hardly listening to what they were saying but touching their clothes and their hands, then touching her own arms and smiling at her two long white

hands. She must have heard what they were saying, however, for, looking at the screen and Berny, she came quickly forward until her hands seemed to touch and feel the screen. The men had gathered round her and were all talking together. She waited patiently for them to stop; then looking straight at Berny, she said in perfect English:

"Do you speak English, please?"

"Yes. Can you hear me? Who are you? Where are you?"

She looked at him in dismay and again they all talked rapidly.

"It would seem that you can hear us but we cannot hear you," she said. "Do you understand?"

"Yes," nodded Berny, and rushing to his desk, he picked up a coloured pencil and wrote in large capitals across a sheet of paper the words: "CAN YOU READ THIS? WHO ARE YOU?"

"Yes, we can read," she said when he held his message in front of the television set, "We . . ." But she was interrupted by the rapid cackling of half a dozen excited voices round her. Looking up at Berny, she said quietly: "I am told that we will answer your questions in due course. We first wish to know who you are and where you are."

Nodding his agreement, Berny rushed to get a small table and his typewriter which he set up by the television set. He slid in a sheet of paper and quickly typed in capital letters: "MY NAME IS BERNARD MARSDEN. THIS IS MY HOME IN RAY FALLS. WHO ARE YOU AND WHERE ARE YOU?"

He held the sheet of paper near the screen and, leaning forward, the girl was able to read it and translate.

"Where is Ray Falls? Is it the Atomic Research Centre?" she asked a moment later.

Yes, nodded Berny, pointing to the last question of his message.

"Wait, I will ask," said the girl, turning to her companions.

"ARE YOU A PRISONER?" typed Berny rapidly during this consultation.

The girl looked at the message and smiled.

"No. These men are wise and it is through them that

we have been able to communicate with you. It is difficult to explain where we are because, to be quite truthful, we are nowhere."

Jerking back to his typewriter, Berny banged away rapidly as the girl and the men round her watched him through the screen. He typed:

"I AM QUITE READY TO BELIEVE THAT THIS IS A FANTASTIC EXPERIMENT BUT I WILL NOT BE MADE A FOOL OF. TELL THOSE GUYS THAT IF THEY WISH ME TO CO-OPERATE THEY MUST COME CLEAN. I REPEAT, WHO ARE YOU AND WHERE ARE YOU?"

He held the sheet of paper close to the set while the girl translated to the men looking over her shoulder. They said something and looking up at Berny, she said:

"They must decide on the best way of telling you. Will you please be patient for a few minutes?" Berny nodded. "Meanwhile, I can tell you my name, Mr. Marsden," she said, glancing over her shoulder, "I am Mary Miles. I come from Hull, in Yorkshire."

She was interrupted by the group of men who gathered round her. The old man with spectacles talked for several minutes. At last, she turned with a smile:

"They first wish me to assure you that this is not a joke. They are going to attempt to make you understand but it is not easy and you must be patient. We are not of your world any more . . . No, Mr. Marsden, I swear this is true and you must listen, please . . . As far as you are concerned, we are dead. No, we are not ghosts. Please don't be impatient!" she said, seeing Berny shrugging his shoulders. The men had again gathered round and were talking rapidly. "They say that if you do not wish to hear me out, we will simply fade out and try somewhere else."

"ALL RIGHT. I'LL HEAR YOU OUT," typed Berny rapidly.

"Thank you. Where was I? Yes. The people round me are Japanese. They are some of those who were caught in the full blast of the Nagasaki atom-bomb. I was also there and, as you would say, killed in the same circumstances."

"ROT!" scribbled Berny over one of his messages.

"Please!" begged the girl. "Only one of us here, Professor Kizoki, is able to explain. I know nothing of these scientific things but I shall do my best to translate. He wishes me to state first of all that we were not killed and that this was because we happened to find ourselves in the very centre of an atomic and molecular disintegration. The chain reaction which produced this disintegration jumped ahead of time—I am quoting the Professor's words—jumped ahead of time as you know it. To give you an idea, it took place at a much greater speed than that of light which, as you may know, is not the greatest speed known to ordinary man."

"AT WHAT SPEED?" typed Berny with a grin.

She asked a question, listened to the Professor's answer and turned back:

"You cannot understand but to give you an idea, the Professor says: suppose that it happened at such a speed that by the simple theory of relativity and your standards of measuring time, the disintegration was complete before or almost before it had started. Do listen, please! The Professor says that that is the only way in which he can give you a picture, a possibility of comprehension."

Berny nodded vigorously, and she went on:

"The result of all this is just as difficult to explain but the Professor suggests two pictures. From a three dimensional state in a four dimensional universe, we have been transferred or changed into a four dimensional state in a five dimensional universe. Or, if you prefer, we have become a form of anti-matter, which amounts to the same thing, says the Professor. Does that make sense?"

Berny typed rapidly: "THEORETICALLY, IT COULD, BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE IT. CAN YOU PROVE IT?"

"I expect they can, somehow," she said, smiling, before translating.

"DO YOU BELIEVE HIM?" he typed while she was listening to the Professor.

"Yes, because there is no other possible explanation."

"HOW DO I KNOW THAT YOU ARE NOT IN A STUDIO SOMEWHERE, HAVING THE TIME OF YOUR LIVES?"

"No, Mr. Marsden. I assure you that this is the first time I have seen myself since . . . since I vanished in Nagasaki. But listen, the Professor says that he can prove it in a roundabout way. For instance, you could easily check up on at least two of the people present who were well known in Nagasaki. The Professor says that you can find his photograph in a number of books in Tokio and also that he was on the list of victims of the Nagasaki bomb. He says he was known in scientific circles for his research work on the formation of the eye. He says that, when you have checked this, which should not take you very long, then the very fact that you have been able to talk to us over your television set will be another and perhaps more convincing proof."

"WHAT ABOUT YOU, MISS MILES? IS THERE A PHOTO AND INFORMATION TO BE FOUND CONCERNING YOU SOME PLACE?"

"Yes! I still have an aunt in Hull. I know that she has a photograph of me as a nurse when I started training at the Hull Infirmary. You should have no difficulty in looking up my records. You will see that I was sent out to Singapore and written off as missing after the arrival of the Japanese forces. I was brought over to Japan with two other nurses. One of them who is still alive—and whose name and address I can give you—can corroborate my story. We were separated in Yokohama."

"HOW DO YOU KNOW SHE IS STILL ALIVE?"

"I have seen her often. You see, we can move around quite easily."

"HAVE YOU APPEARED ON HER TELEVISION SET?"

"This is the first time I have thus appeared. The Professor has tried unsuccessfully on a number of sets. The proper conditions are not easy. You see, we can only integrate a picture of ourselves in the stream of electrons when a set is switched on and idle, that is, when there is nothing on the air. If we came on with a telecast, it might be dangerous. As you can readily imagine, people do not usually leave their sets turned on when there is nothing to see. You simply happened to be the first person whose attention he was thus able to attract."

"SUPPOSING I BELIEVE YOU—MIND YOU I DO NOT SAY I DO—WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?"

"Act as liaison with certain scientists with whom the Professor would like to communicate.' '

"ARE YOU NUMEROUS? HAVE YOU MET OTHERS?"

"Yes. Many whom we cannot understand so easily, beings from other worlds."

"WHAT ARE THEY LIKE?"

"I don't know. Shapes, features, sound, mean nothing in our . . . dimension. It is impossible to explain."

The picture on the screen quivered as with a crash of cymbals and a blare of trumpets, the Ray Falls city hall clock appeared on the screen. Surprised, Berny glanced at his watch and went to the window. A little below him, reflected in the smooth water of the lake a streak of pink sky confirmed that it was really six o'clock and the birth of another day.

As he stripped for his morning swim, Berny was only sure of one thing: it had not been a dream. However, when he got back, his body still tingling and dripping with ice cold water, when he saw dear old Mrs. Ambrose laying the table and when, as he walked in, the smell of coffee and bacon made him realise that he was hungry, he could not help wondering. When, having shaved, he came back and sat down to his breakfast, he first went to switch off the television set where a very muscular young man was energetically illustrating the morning lesson of keep-fit exercises.

Berny decided not to speak about his "vision", at least for the time being, but when he reached the Research Institute a little later, he went straight to the library and spent part of the morning consulting books which he had not looked at for years it seemed. Theoretically, it was barely possible that the atoms composing an object or even an animal could be transposed into something totally different and yet remain or go on forming an entity.

"It would not lack any of our known three basic dimensions but it could then conceivably include one or more other dimensions," he mumbled, tucking a copy of

Ouspensky's *New Model of the Universe* under his arm.

He went home early and told Mrs. Ambrose that he would not need any dinner but that if she would prepare a little cold supper for him, he would be quite happy. Setting his alarm clock for midnight, he went to bed and to sleep.

Berny sat up all night but the flickering screen of his television remained hopelessly empty and the loudspeaker purred and cracked until the appearance of the city hall clock and the blare of music the next morning.

Could it be possible that the sudden flow of current through the cathode tube generated by the local station coming on the air had disrupted a few atoms and possibly killed... "people who have been dead almost twenty years, you darned fool!" he concluded aloud, as he undressed rapidly for his morning swim.

For a whole week, Berny sat up every night, waiting in vain for Mary to reappear. Though he could not imagine how, he was not at all sure that he had not been fooled. Even if it were so, someone, somewhere had made a stupendous scientific invention. However, he doubted that any girl could have played the part of Mary Miles so well. There really had been something so truthful, so simply tragic and so very sweet about her face. Did Mary really exist, he wondered, and the thought that perhaps she did not made him do the impossible and cut himself with his electric razor. Berny stopped and looked at himself sternly, as his school teacher used to look at him. Was he falling in love with a face, a shadow he had once seen on his television screen? Did Mary exist or not? She had told him she was not a ghost but she had also given him to understand that she was no longer human.

By the time Berny sat down to his breakfast, he had made up his mind. Hang the expense—in any case, it would count as his annual holiday—but he was going to check the story of this Mary Miles and, to do that, he was going to ask for time off to go to Hull.

On his return to Ray Falls three weeks later, Doctor Marsden was sure of one thing: Mary Miles had existed. In Hull, the Matron of the Royal Infirmary had confirmed that Mary Miles had indeed been a nurse there. Without

having to consult her records she had told him that nurse Miles had left for Singapore with a group of doctors and three other nurses in the very early days of the war and, on his way out, she had shown him the memorial marble plaque on which the name of Mary Miles had been engraved.

At the local Y.W.C.A. where she had lived for some months, the Secretary remembered Mary Miles and even the number of her room. She did not, however, know of an aunt living in Hull. That could have proved a stumbling block but Berny had been lucky. The very first A. Miles which he had found in the telephone directory had been the right one. Yes, Mrs. Anne Miles had had a niece who had disappeared during the war. Could he come round? Certainly. The old lady had confirmed all he knew and under the excuse that he was checking up on people who had been in Singapore in the early part of the war, he had left with what he considered a proof that it had not all been a dream, a photograph of Mary Miles in her nurse's uniform the day she had entered the Royal Infirmary. It was the girl he had seen and talked to on the television screen all right, and though the picture had been taken almost twenty years ago, the face was the same!

Before even unpacking his bags, Berny sat down at his desk to sort his notes. He had made up his mind. He was going to turn out a complete report; it was going to be precise, factual and as complete as possible. He would first submit it to Professor Holmes who was Director General of the Research Institute. Holmes, he knew, would believe him but even if he advised against it as too fantastic, Berny's mind was made up: he would publish his report, even if he had to go round to the local paper to get it into print. He stopped to examine the photograph of Mary Miles. Getting up, he reached for a frame on a bookshelf, took out of it an old photograph of his mother and slipped in that of Mary; instead of putting the frame back on the shelf, however, he put it over the television set in the opposite corner of the room. Glancing at his watch, he switched on and a minute later, before even the screen lit up, he knew by the screech of tyres, police sirens and pistol shots that yet another gangster film was going

through. Turning the sound down, he went back to his notes.

He must have worked quite a long time for, when he yawned and turned his head, Mary was there, on the screen, talking to him.

"Mary!" he gasped, jumping up and turning the sound full on.

"... not want you to."

"PLEASE REPEAT," he typed rapidly.

"We know that you are preparing a report about us but we beg you not to."

"MARY, I KNOW IT IS ALL TRUE. WHERE ARE THE OTHERS?"

"They do not wish to appear any more. It is harmful and ... two of ... of our friends were destroyed last time."

"ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?"

"No, but will you please promise not to make that report?"

"WHY?" scribbled Berny with his pencil.

"It was decided by others. Even if we could return, we do not wish it, and the majority voted against any further communications with ... with people on Earth."

Berny again held up the piece of paper on which he had written: "WHY?"

"Humans ... people on Earth are bad."

He took down her photograph and showed it to her.

"Yes, I know," said Mary with a smile, "I was there."

"Mary! Did you follow me around?"

"I cannot hear you ... Berny."

He typed the question and showed it to her.

"Yes. We go where we wish quite easily and I happened to be in Hull when you turned up."

"MARY, ARE YOU HAPPY?" he typed.

"It is so different ... so different. Yes, Berny, but it is a happiness which you cannot understand."

"HOW DO YOU LIVE? WHAT DO YOU DO?"

"It is impossible to explain. You see, all the things that are simple and that mean something to you simply do not exist here. For instance, we have no shape, we just are."

"HOW CAN YOU SEE EACH OTHER THEN?"

"We don't, we *know*, and it is so much better. How can I explain? When you look at me, you only see my face. When we meet—and even without having to meet—we do not see but we know everything inside and outside people. I mean that if all we *know* of people could be translated into *seeing*, it would be as though you could see a person all at once and from all angles and inside as well."

"CAN YOU READ EACH OTHER'S THOUGHTS?"

"No, I don't mean that . . . though we do not have to read each other's thoughts. We are simply aware of them."

"HOW DO YOU COMMUNICATE THEN?"

"We never have to. We know but . . . you cannot understand."

"I COULD TRY."

"Yes, Berny but . . . I guess I cannot explain, that is all."

"DO YOU SEE US AND READ OUR THOUGHTS IN THE SAME WAY?"

"No, because you are only three dimensional, but we can be among you, watch you and listen to you."

"WHY CAN'T YOU HEAR ME NOW THEN?"

"Because, so that you can see and hear me, I have to get myself, my atoms shall we say, through your cathode tube, I believe it is called."

"HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ME, MARY?"

"I think I know all about you, Berny. I have been with you an awful lot, especially since you visited my aunt in Hull."

He blushed, hesitated and typed: "I SUPPOSE YOU KNOW THAT I AM IN LOVE WITH YOU."

"Yes, Berny. As a matter of fact, I knew before you did, I think."

"DO YOU ALSO KNOW THE FUTURE?"

"Not in the way you know it, I guess."

"DO YOU CARE FOR ME, MARY?"

"Yes . . . but in a very different way."

"THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE WAY."

"Oh, no!" she laughed, "but, there again, you could not possibly understand."

"BUT YOU DO CARE FOR ME."

"Yes. To be quite honest, by . . . by your standards, I . . . I suppose I also am in love, Berny."

"I WISH I COULD GET IN THERE WITH YOU."

"It wouldn't mean a thing to you, Berny. I assure you it is quite impossible to kiss what is not, what you are yourself and what is another all at once. But I had better be going. Is it getting late? In here we no longer feel time, so it exists again."

Yes, nodded Berny, showing her his watch.

"My! it is late. Good night, Berny. Bless you," she said, blowing him a kiss and sliding off the screen that flickered white and silent.

For the rest of the night, Bernard Marsden sat up working and thinking, and typing, and the typing included a three page letter for Mary Miles.

The next day, instead of working at his report, he went to his local electricians and purchased a microphone. Back home, he mounted the microphone in such a way that, when speaking into it, the voice came through his television loudspeaker. In a separate typewritten note, he explained that he thus hoped that Mary would hear him and so do away with all the laborious typing of whatever he wished to say. This he carefully hung up with his three page letter in front of the screen and, late that night, when the local programme ended, he did not switch off, hoping that Mary would come through.

He was in the kitchen getting some milk and biscuits when he heard her calling:

"Berny! Please don't use that microphone yet. I am afraid it might have a similar effect to a telecast coming on. It might be dangerous, don't you think?"

Realizing that she might be right and terrified at the possibility of the telephone ringing close by, Berny slammed the door of the refrigerator and rushed back to disconnect the microphone.

"Berny! It works, it works beautifully!" said Mary excitedly, "I distinctly heard that door slam and it did not hurt me. Try saying something . . . softly, just in case."

Trembling like a leaf, Berny whispered:

"Mary, I love you."

"Thank you, Berny. I knew that. I also know all that you have typed because, you see, as soon as I return to my other state, I stay with you and can therefore see all you do."

"And you were watching over my shoulder as I typed?"

"No, not exactly. I was all at once in your fingers, in the papers on which you were typing . . . but how can you understand!"

"What I do understand, Mary, is that you love me . . . and we have got to do something about it."

"Do what?"

"Hang it, dear! You're not a ghost. You're alive, very much alive! The proof is that you can appear on a television screen and talk and discuss intelligently. It therefore boils down to this: you are alive, so there is hope."

"What hope, Berny?"

"I don't know, but if an atom bomb put you where you are, intact, we must find a way of reversing the process. And that is why I must report all this immediately so that the best heads can get to work on the problem."

"Berny, you are a dear . . . but it is quite impossible," said Mary, and he gulped when he noticed that her eyes were full of tears.

"Mary, there must be a way of . . . of saving you!"

"We don't need saving, Berny, and the others don't want it."

"I am going to talk it over with Professor Holmes. He is my boss . . ."

"I know, but you mustn't."

"Don't worry, dear."

"I do worry. You promised. . ."

"Mary, I must save you!"

"Berny, if you so much as breathe a word to anyone, you'll never see me again."

"How can you say such a thing!"

"It's up to you, Berny. I'll be here tomorrow night if your secret is still a secret. Otherwise . . . you will switch on in vain."

"Mary! Wait a minute . . ."

"Remember, I'll be with you and watching you, dear."

"No! Don't go yet . . ." but her smiling picture had disappeared.

He was twice on the point of picking up the telephone to call Professor Holmes the following day. Each time, however, the feeling that Mary was watching and listening somewhere near him made him hesitate and desist. She did not appear that night, nor the next. On the third night, almost as soon as the local programme ended, she appeared, holding what looked like a shawl to the side of her face.

"Mary! What's the matter? Look at me!" said Berny coming up to the screen.

"Berny, dear . . . I shouldn't have come. It is beginning to affect me and it is feared that if I continue, I shall gradually disaggregate."

"Oh, darling! How does it affect you? Show me your face."

"I would rather you remember me as the Mary of the photograph. I must go now, Berny. You understand, don't you? And, remember, I shall be with you because, by earthly standards at least, I do love you, dear."

"But, Mary, wait! How are we going to communicate?"

"I shall be with you, Berny. If I stay longer, it will be a very different sort of separation. Remember, I am not dead. Good-bye, my . . . good-bye, Berny." And as he bent down over the screen, she came close up, kissed it and faded out.

Bernard Marsden let his work slide a good deal during the next few weeks, so much so that it was noticed and Professor Holmes called him into his office and asked him if he had any trouble.

"Yes and no, sir. I'm . . . I'm working on a report . . . something quite new and . . ."

"I see. Well, don't kill yourself, Marsden, and let me know when it is ready. I'll be glad to read it."

He had had Mary's photograph copied and attached a print to his report which was now complete. He read it over carefully, hesitated almost a week longer and, having finally made up his mind, typed out a note for Mary. He had once or twice tried talking aloud and though he felt

that she was probably around, listening, he had not been able to go on. He read over his note:

"Mary, I am going to attempt to get you back. To do that, I have to get the best thinkers to help me and that is why, as I suppose you know, I am starting with a full report on the whole thing. I know that you do not approve but I know that you understand and, who knows, perhaps some day you will be glad."

He signed it and left it in evidence on top of his desk. Now that he had come to a decision, he felt strangely relieved and, for the first time in months it seemed, he felt so hungry that he decided to dine out. Just as he reached for his hat and coat, his telephone buzzed.

"Yes, this is Doctor Marsden speaking," he answered.

"My name is Perkins, Doctor. I just found your 'phone number in the directory. Were you listening to the radio just now?"

"No. I am sorry but I have no time . . ."

"Hold it, Doctor, this isn't a gallup. I heard a message for you."

"What sort of message?"

"It came through as an urgent call between the sports and the symphony concert."

"How do you know it was for me? What was the message?"

"Oh very short, just to the effect that Doctor Marsden of Ray Falls should call nurse Miles without fail tonight."

"Who said it?"

"I don't know, the announcer I guess."

"Man or woman?"

"Hell, Doctor, I'm not fooling. Why don't you ring up the station? They should be able to give you all the information. I just tried to be helpful."

"And I am extremely grateful. Thank you very much indeed."

He had just put the receiver down, when it buzzed again.

"Doctor Marsden? There was a message for you over the radio five minutes ago."

"Yes, I know. Thank you very much," said Berny, hanging up and, as the 'phone again started buzzing, he disconnected it, put on his hat and coat and walked out.

A police car pulled up at the edge of the curb.

"Are you Doctor Marsden?" asked a policeman, getting out and flashing a torch on him as he turned.

"Yes, why?"

"There was an urgent radio call for you and we have had a number of calls from people who heard it."

"Thank you, Officer. I got it and will attend to it."

"Okay. Any place we can rush you, Doctor?"

"No, thank you very much. It is not that urgent."

Berny knew that he would see Mary that night. He wondered to what extent she was really free. In any case, his mind was made up. Waiting any more would not help and the only feasible thing was to try to do something, no matter how hopeless it seemed.

Berny switched on his television set at eleven-thirty and sat patiently through the end of a film, the late news, a final weather forecast and a last good-night. It was almost an hour later that the light on the screen flickered and he found himself looking at a bald-headed man he had never seen before.

"Doctor Marsden, I volunteered to appear here and was accepted because I speak English."

"Where is Miss Miles? Why hasn't she come?"

"Simply because her coming here again might well prove fatal."

"And it is not fatal for you."

"It could be if I stayed a long time or if I came often. It is as dangerous for us as radioactivity can be for you. I have therefore little time and I beg of you to listen carefully."

"Is Miss Miles all right?"

"Yes, you can be reassured—we are not worried about her so long as she does not expose herself again."

"Can I talk to her, even without seeing her?"

"No, and please do not interrupt me any more. What I have to say is important and my time is nearly up."

"Right. Go ahead."

"Miss Miles has told us about your plans and we object.

We object for two reasons: first, we do not wish to go back to our previous form of life and, secondly, any experiments you might undertake could be extremely dangerous."

"What does Miss Miles have to say about that?"

"You promised not to interrupt, Dr. Marsden. Yes, Miss Miles agrees with us. We know and warn you that you cannot possibly succeed but we are quite honestly afraid of some of your possible experiments. We have therefore decided to offer you something in exchange for your silence. You can come to us without too much difficulty if you wish. And, in this connection, I am instructed by Miss Miles to say that, though she begs you to stay in your present form, if you do decide to come she will not shun you."

"Will she . . . marry me?"

"If you wish, yes, but that means nothing. You cannot understand."

"How can I join you?"

"For you it should be relatively easy. Just stand in the full blast of an atomic explosion. Though you are not directly concerned with armaments, you can probably arrange to take part in some future test."

"Ridiculous!" snorted Berny.

"Yes, perhaps. Well, I must go because my safety time is up. Unfortunately, time counts when we appear like this. Let Miss Miles know if and when you make up your mind and we will of course arrange for her to meet you."

"Hey! Wait a minute!" shouted Berny, but the man had vanished.

Marsden was not the sort of man who would commit suicide but then this would not really be suicide since he would merely undergo a transformation that did not in any way resemble that of death. In any case, no one depended on him and his disappearance would not mean anything or cause any serious trouble. Having reasoned that far, Berny began to wonder how really difficult it would be for him to get into the experimental side of atomic explosions and, from then on, he was doomed.

He soon discovered that security precautions were such that getting left within range of a bomb was practically

impossible. Setting one off accidentally was, it seemed, even more difficult; that idea he promptly discarded in any case because it might and probably would endanger a good many lives. It was by no means as easy as the messenger had seemed to think. Then, one morning, he found a way. By glancing at some notes that had been accidentally put in his tray at the Research Institute, he learned that one of his colleagues, Professor Brendon, was about to test an A-grenade. This was a hand grenade which, according to its inventor, would create a minute nuclear explosion that would "thoroughly destroy everything within a limited range of thirty feet". It also had the advantage of having no fall-out and within a matter of seconds, it was possible to occupy the terrain on which it had exploded without any risk of radiation. Unlike ordinary grenades, it had no time-fuse detonator. Once the safety pin was removed, any shock in excess of four pounds would detonate it.

Berny knew that if he showed too much interest in Professor Brendon's work, the security rules of the Institute were such that, not only would he be questioned but a new security check would be automatically made and, for all he knew, would reveal his secret. They would be sure to find out about his trip to Hull, after which the rest would become almost automatic. Having carefully thought it over, he roughed out a report on the possibilities of a very limited nuclear explosion, something that could easily be contained in a rifle bullet and that would only be dangerous within a very few feet of the point of impact. He knew perfectly well what the main difficulties were but in his preliminary report he hazily outlined possibilities of overcoming them. Having put it in Berny did not have to wait long. Professor Holmes walked into his office one morning.

"Your ideas are interesting, Marsden. You seem to have gone even further than Brendon. Of course, you know about his work?"

"About his grenade? I did hear about it vaguely, sir."

"Look, Marsden, what would you say to working with Brendon for a while? He is just about ready for his first tests and you could be of considerable help to him."

"If Professor Brendon will accept my collaboration, I'll be delighted to work with him, sir."

In a very few days, Berny knew all he wanted to know and had accordingly established a plan of action. He would prime one of Professor Brendon's grenades, walk down into one of the storage vaults, close the steel door, and smash it at his feet. He would have preferred taking it out to an open field but he knew that he would never have got the grenade past the automatic detectors and geiger counters on all the Institute exits.

When he knew for certain that all he now had to do was pick his own time, Berny went home and typed a note for Mary, explaining how he proposed to proceed and asking her to have a messenger appear that night on his television.

At a quarter past twelve, just thirteen hours before the time he had chosen for the experiment, the same bald-headed man he had seen once before appeared on the screen.

"Miss Miles still asks you to desist. However, she wishes me to say that if you do nevertheless carry out your experiment, she will of course be waiting for you." And without even waiting for an answer, he disappeared.

Berny made one ghastly mistake; he should have inspected the other storage vaults. In one of them were three tactical medium bombs. One only, thank goodness, went off. It must have been quite close to Berny's grenade. Even with such a small bomb, Ray Falls suffered considerably; all the west side of town was totally destroyed, if not by the explosion, then by the raging fire that followed. The Lakeside district was spared though, for some strange reason, the lake welled up and overflowed. Berny's house, where I now live, only had a few windows broken.

How do I know what happened to Berny? My wife told me. I met her shortly after the accident and, for a long time, she was our suspect number one, though, as already explained, I felt convinced that it was an accident. She had been found wandering among the ruins of the Research Institute by one of the first rescue parties. Rushed to hospital with a bad burn that has completely shrivelled up the right side of her face, she was suffering

from shock and loss of memory. She thought her name was Mary but she was not really sure and in spite of all our efforts, we were never able to identify her. What seemed to interest the doctors even more than her loss of memory was the fact that she was not affected in any way by the intense radioactivity that has killed and is still killing so many. As a security man, I saw quite a lot of her and, somehow, she seemed to like me—she thought I reminded her of someone—and when, one evening, I proposed, she accepted me, very simply.

After our honeymoon, I brought her back to our new home, the Lakeside house which I had inherited from my brother. It happened the next morning; we were having breakfast when she suddenly caught sight of the television. I thought she was going to faint. It was then she remembered.

We now live very quietly and we are quite happy. I destroyed the television set because it made her nervous. As a matter of fact, we never go near one if we can possibly help it. I think I know what she is afraid of. So am I.

THE OTHER HAND

To the memory of the teacher who taught me to use my right hand by caning my left hand so persistently and so very hard.

"Doctor, can you please cut off my right hand?"

Looking over the rim of my glasses at the slim, athletic man sitting at the other side of my desk and meeting for a second his steady gaze, in which I could read both fear and determination, I picked up a blank index card.

"Your name, please, Monsieur?"

"Manoque . . . Here is my card . . . Jean-Claude Manoque."

"Age?"

"Thirty-two."

"Address?"

At each question, I glanced at him. Well dressed, at his ease in spite of his request, softly spoken, he seemed a man of the world, and his address showed that he must be quite wealthy. His eyes, however, betrayed his nervousness, but people who have made up their mind to undergo an operation are normally nervous.

"Was it your doctor who suggested this operation, Monsieur Manoque?"

I put my pen down and sat back when he explained that he had not consulted any other doctor but that he had come to me because I was a surgeon and happened to live near by.

"Show me your hand, please, Monsieur Manoque."

Leaning forward, he pushed it palm up over my desk. It was the strong, well shaped hand of a man of action with long, square tipped, robust fingers. At the base of the thumb and on the edge of the palm, just below the little finger were two callouses which I touched with the tip of my finger.

"Tennis," he explained with a smile.

Turning the hand over, I looked at the neatly manicured nails and pressed my thumb here and there over the tendons and veins on the back of his sunburned hand. A slight growth of hair from the wrist down to the fingers spoke of his strength, and one or two old scars on the knuckles could have been proof of a certain aggressiveness.

"Your other hand, please."

His hands were much alike; the only perceptible difference was that his right hand shook slightly, but too much tennis could again be the explanation.

"Thank you, Monsieur Manoque. Now will you please explain?"

"Is an explanation necessary?"

"I'm afraid so. What is the matter with your hand?"

"It is no longer mine, Doctor," he said slowly, looking me straight in the eyes.

"I see, and whose is it?" I asked, drawing a sheet of note-paper towards me and beginning to write. Years of experience had taught me never to show surprise or so much as smile at anything a patient said.

"I don't know and I don't care, but I want to get rid of it."

"Monsieur Manoque, I am afraid I can do nothing for you, but here is the address of one of my colleagues who I am sure can help you."

"A psychiatrist, I suppose. Thank you, Doctor, but what I need is a surgeon. I'm sorry I bothered you," he added, standing up; "but, of course, I should have known. I suppose I shall have to manage some other way."

"Yes, this is the address of a psychiatrist, Monsieur Manoque, but you are mistaken in thinking that he cannot help you. I strongly advise you to see him."

"Thank you, no. I'll come back to see you, though," he said, bowing slightly and moving towards the door.

"I shall not be able to see you, Monsieur."

"Oh, yes you will."

My assistant showed him out and as I waited for the next patient to be ushered in, I looked at the card I had just filled out, hesitated a moment, then tore it up and dropped it into the waste-paper basket.

Trying not to gape, I was examining a collection of X-ray photos of the stomach of the perfectly healthy wife of a famous art-dealer, who was convinced that she should be operated on for an imaginary ulcer, when my assistant knocked and opened the door—a thing she never does.

"Excuse me, a very urgent case," she muttered, glancing at my patient who stared back at her, then at me.

"Well, what is it?" I asked, going to the door and closing it.

"That young man, just now. He is in the surgery . . ."

"Do you mean to say he is still here?"

"He left but he's back . . . He's had an accident."

"An accident?"

"His hand, Doctor."

He moaned and came to as I was doing some tricky sewing on the end of his maimed wrist.

"Can you keep quiet for another minute, or would you rather I put you to sleep?"

"I . . . I'll be quiet," he whispered.

"There," I said five minutes later, lighting a cigarette and sticking it into his mouth as my assistant gave him a double shot of morphia. "The ambulance will be round in a minute."

"Thanks," he said, puffing at the cigarette. "Now I suppose you want to know . . ."

"No, not now. I'll see you later, at the clinic."

"Just as you like," he said, smiling. "Oh, by the way, I thought you, or the police or someone, might want it so . . . so I picked it up. It is in the left-hand pocket of my coat."

"What is, Monsieur Manoque?"

"My hand, of course," he drawled, blinking as the morphia began to act.

That evening, I had the visit of the local Commissaire who told me how the cabinet-maker round the corner of my street had seen Monsieur Manoque enter his shop, go straight to the back where one of his employees was cutting chair legs, lean over him and hold his wrist against the whizzing saw-blade.

"The cabinet-maker is certain he did it deliberately, but his employee is not so sure. Did he say anything to you about it, Doctor?"

"Only that should the police want to see his hand, he had picked it up and put it in his coat pocket. It is there in that tray if you want it."

"No, thank you, Doctor."

I hesitated but finally decided against mentioning Monsieur Manoque's earlier visit; even if he was mad, he had confided in me of his own free will and I felt I had no right to reveal his secret.

At the clinic the next morning, I met the Commissaire coming out of my patient's room. Monsieur Manoque had apparently assured him that it was a deplorable accident due to his foolishness and that the cabinet-maker was in no way to blame.

"It was very good of you not to have told the police about my first visit yesterday, Doctor," he said as I examined the chart at the foot of his bed. "Otherwise, I suppose they would have had me certified."

"I never discuss the ailments of my patients, Monsieur Manoque, not even with them."

"I suppose you still think I could do with a psychiatrist."

"Of that I am sure."

"But, supposing there was an explanation, Doctor?"

"There is always an explanation."

"Yes. Would you like to hear mine?"

"In a few days' time, when you are well enough to come to my consulting room. And, if you don't mind, I have a friend who would be interested—a doctor, of course."

"Trying to help me in spite of myself?" he said with a broad smile. "All right, but your friend will surely find me a queer customer."

"Why should he?"

"Because I don't happen to be insane."

"Yes, of course."

His bandaged arm still in a sling, perhaps a little thinner, but smiling, Monsieur Manoque came into my office a week later and I introduced him to my friend and colleague, Professor Boucot, who had arrived a few minutes before.

"Monsieur Manoque, I do not want you to feel in any way obliged to discuss your affairs, or even to give any sort of explanation. However, if you still want to, and only if you want to, I think that Professor Boucot can probably help you. And, of course, if you wish, I can leave you alone with him."

"No, Doctor, it is only fair that you should know the whole story."

"One more question, Monsieur Manoque. Would you mind very much if I switch on this tape-recorder."

"Of course, it will never be used against me in any way?"

"That I can promise," I assured him.

"Switch on then, Doctor."

Here is Jean-Claude Manoque's story, as I myself typed it from my tape-recorder later:

It really started the day I picked up my brother-in-law's gold lighter and slipped it into my pocket. Once or twice before that, however, I had noticed that my right hand shook slightly and felt very hot, but it was only later that I remembered this detail. Even on the day when I picked up Ludo's lighter, I did not take much notice. I was worried, of course, and had hardly left the room than I rushed back, put the lighter down in front of him and apologised. Ludo did not take much notice either it seemed. He merely laughed and said that he also had a knack of picking up other people's pens or cigarettes and then feeling foolish when he discovered them in his pockets later.

What worried me, though, was that it had not been accidental. I tried to reason it out; I am not a thief, nor a kleptomaniac. It was not a joke, either, nor was it to tease Ludo; I never tease people and, in any case, Ludo is not the sort of person one teases.

It was only later, a good deal later, when other things happened that I suddenly realized that it was not me, but my hand that was acting with my knowledge, yet quite independently of my will. It was then too that I noticed the connection between these strange actions of my hand and the heat and trembling that preceded them. For instance, when walking down the Champs Elysées with my wife and Ludo one evening, I did a most outrageous thing, and the very fact that my wife was there proves that, though it was my hand, it was certainly not my will! Suzon was walking between us and so that she could hold my arm, she had given me her fashion magazine which I had rolled up in my right hand. Walking ahead of us were two girls, the type of girls which, for some mysterious reason, tourists consider as so typically Parisian and who, of course, are not—you know, the sort of girls that are just a little too well dressed, with heels two centimetres too high, skirts two centimetres too short, round hips, a little too tight, that swing just a little too much. Ludo grinned at me and winked, and I grinned back and Suzon shrugged her shoulders as we swung out to pass them. As we did so, I raised the rolled up magazine in my hand

and brought it down with a resounding smack on the plumpest part of the girl nearest me! I was far more dumbfounded and shocked than the girl who turned, white with rage, and was evidently going to slap my face when her companion dragged her away, saying: "Can't you see he is drunk!" I said nothing and Suzon did not speak to me for two whole days.

A week later, something else happened. Ludo had come to pick me up for lunch, after which we were to drive out to the Racing Club for some tennis. As we were walking out of the little restaurant where I usually lunch, my hand deliberately picked a hat off a stand and put it on my head. It was a horrid, green velvet hat, a good size too small, and although I was terrified that its owner would come running after me, I walked slowly out with it on top of my head! It was only once I had reached the street and that Ludo stopped dead and stared at me that I was able to tear it off with my left hand, run back into the restaurant and hang it up where I had found it. No one seemed to pay any attention and I did not have to use the lame excuse that I had mistaken it for mine. It was the only excuse I could think up and when I told my brother-in-law, he was kind enough to pretend to believe me and to laugh heartily.

"But, Jean-Claude, you must be colour-blind! Suzon would drop dead if she saw you with a thing like that on your head," he joked.

As we were driving back from the Racing Club in the Bois dé Boulogne, a few hours later, my hand again felt hot and started shaking. I stiffened, ready to react but felt somewhat reassured; nothing much could happen, since we were alone in my car. I therefore waited for an urge or a desire to do something which I was confident I would easily and immediately repress. The only thing within reach seemed to be Ludo's handkerchief, unless of course the urge would be a more devilish one, perhaps an urge to pull his tie or his nose. I slowed down as a nurse wheeled her pram across the road ahead of us. She had almost reached the curb when my hand pulled the wheel down and not only was I unable to react, but I had no desire to do so! It seemed only much later—a bare frac-

tion of a second really—that I tried, in vain, to pull the wheel back with my left hand. We were gathering speed and heading straight for the nurse now on the pavement, when I managed to stamp down on the brake and stall the car.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" I gasped.

"What's wrong?" queried Ludo. "For a second I thought you were trying to run that girl down."

"A . . . a sort of cramp in my hand," I lied. "It's all right now and we're nearly home."

"First you hit them with a rolled up magazine, then you go at them with your car. Next thing you know, you will be driving engines over open level-crossings," chuckled Ludo as I pulled up in the underground garage of our house.

Luckily Suzon had some friends and Ludo did not mention the hat or the car incident. With a word of excuse, I left them to their tea, cakes and cards, and stepped into the next room where I have my books, a desk and some comfortable armchairs that don't look like instruments of torture saved over from the next world war.

"Jean-Claude, have you any cigarettes?" asked Ludo, coming in uninvited.

"In the right-hand drawer of my desk over there, *mon vieux*," I said, pretending to be reading a letter.

"I say! That's a pretty piece of artillery, isn't it!"

"Yes, a souvenir of the Resistance. It is an American Colt forty-five automatic."

"Is it loaded?"

"Yes, leave it alone."

"Ready to shoot?"

"Well, the safety catch is on."

"That thing there?"

"Yes," I said, a little annoyed, getting up and going over to the desk to pick up the gun to put it away in another drawer.

"How does it work? Tell me."

"Never mind," I said as my thumb flicked up the safety catch and, swinging the gun round towards Suzon's head which I could see through the glass panelled door, I squeezed the trigger.

Nothing happened. The trigger did not budge. I sat down, feeling sick and dizzy. Had the gun been cocked, I would have blown my wife's brains out, for there was a shell in the chamber.

"Jean-Claude, what in . . . what made you do that?" stammered Ludo, white as a sheet. "You knew it wasn't loaded, but still . . . you frightened me, you know."

"It is loaded or, rather, it was," I snapped, pulling out the clip and throwing out the live shell with a flick of my wrist.

"Why didn't it go off then?"

"Because it wasn't cocked . . . and that was something my hand didn't know!"

"Didn't know! What are you talking about? Jean-Claude, are . . . are you all right? I mean . . ."

"Yes, I'm all right now," I said, throwing the empty gun into the drawer and putting away the clip and loose shell in the bottom drawer. "At least, that won't happen again."

It seemed that this time my hand had not shaken or given me any warning and that night, as I lay awake, I again shuddered at the thought that had the gun been cocked, I would have killed my wife before a dozen people. Trying to explain that my hand was no longer mine, that it had also tried to run down a nurse in the street, would not have got me very far with the police and nowhere with a jury. Turning on the light, I looked at my hand, touched it, clasped it with the other hand. Yes, it was mine all right and co-ordinating perfectly with the other; yet, when it acted strangely, it was as though some other hand had got into it, forced its way in. What I could not understand, however, was why I remained so passive, just as though I were watching another person. My left hand had somehow never reacted till too late. Had my left hand really tried to straighten out the car when my right had had pulled it in towards the curb and the nurse with her pram? It was difficult to say. My foot had, thank goodness, stamped on the brake pedal in time.

Though I could not explain it, there were therefore times when my right hand was no longer really mine, but I knew that telling anyone about it would be quite useless.

A doctor, it was evident, would have diagnosed some form of schizophrenia, a typical case of split and even opposing personalities, etc., etc. Therefore, before going to see a doctor—or the police who would inevitably call in a doctor—I would have to be able to prove that the hand was not mine.

That proof I had the next day.

At the office, I was jotting down a telephone number when it suddenly occurred to me that, whereas I always do my sixes downwards and very straight, I was starting with the loop and doing them upwards, with curved tails. Fascinated, I sat at my desk and tried scribbling a few words on a pad. As I did so, my hand went hot and began to tremble, and I found myself holding my pen in a totally different way, across my second finger with much more slant than usual, and the writing was no longer mine but that of another! Amazed, I drew a sheet of paper towards me and let my hand write. With a strange detachment, I watched it writing quite fast, faster than I can usually write. Perhaps the strangest thing of all, the one thing that showed I was not my own master but a mere machine, was that I did not know what my hand was about to write. I read the words as they appeared on the paper, one by one, letter by letter, as though I were watching over some other person's shoulder. The hand, which was certainly that of someone else at that particular moment, stopped in the middle of a sentence, and felt like mine again. In front of me, were some fifteen lines, evidently written by someone who had seen a play, but a play I had never heard of. Was there such a play, I wondered, opening my paper and looking for the films and theatre page. There was, and the leading article was a criticism of it! The critic had been rather harder on the actors than the one who had used my hand, but there was no possible mistake, it was about the same play. I read the hand-written text over and over again, and, on a hunch, sent the office boy out to get me all the morning papers. I was right; the fourth paper I opened—one I never read—contained, word for word, the text my hand had written down.

Again I thought of going round to the nearest police

station; but no, it was no use. I could imagine myself trying to explain that I had someone else's hand, or that someone else was using my hand. Then I remembered Suzon's friend, the graphologist who worked for the police. Finding her telephone number was quite easy. Could she kindly give me her opinion on a half page of handwriting? Yes, it was important.

"Why do you want a report on this handwriting, Monsieur Manoque?" she asked an hour later, frowning.

"It is the writing of . . . of a person who applied for a job this morning, and . . . and . . ."

"And you do not like him, for this is the writing of a man . . . yes, you are quite right. It is the writing of a bad and perhaps even a dangerous man, the writing of a very determined man who will hesitate at nothing to reach his ends, but with, it would seem, a marked preference for stealth and cruelty. It is one of the most unpleasant handwritings I have ever come across."

"That just about sums up my feelings about . . . about him. Thank you very much indeed."

Outside, as I fumbled for the key of my car, I saw a small leather wallet in the gutter. It was a cheque-book belonging to a certain Monsieur Ch. Ralingue, and since the cheques were payable at the Crédit Lyonnaise branch office of the Avenue Victor-Hugo, which was on my way home, I slipped it into my pocket and drove off.

Suzon was out when I got home and as I took off my coat, I remembered the cheque-book. I hesitated, then decided that I would drop by the bank on my way to work next morning, but so as not to forget, I put it on my desk. As I turned, my hand felt hot and heavy, as though it had been suddenly filled with hot water. It was still hot and shaking as I sat down and let it grab my fountain pen, unscrew the cap, open the cheque-book and tear out a cheque. It seemed to hesitate, then slowly but in a bold handwriting which I had never seen before, wrote out a cheque for ten thousand new francs to my order! It dated the cheque then, with a slow flourish, very carefully and laboriously it seemed, it signed the name of Ralingue. By the time my fountain pen had been put back in my pocket,

the ink on the cheque was dry and the hand folded it, took out my wallet and put it carefully away!

The surprising thing is that I left it there, that I did not react afterwards, and I had the horrid feeling that the hand was beginning to get the better of me. It was not merely a hand but also an arm that was no longer mine. Another thing that made me shudder but which I could do nothing about was that my left hand, though still mine, was now co-ordinating with the mysterious hand on the end of my right arm. I had used both hands to put the cheque away in my wallet. Of course, I could do nothing with such a cheque, but the mere fact that I had written it out and put it away like a lunatic, was terrifying.

When I walked into the Crédit Lyonnais branch office the next morning, my mind was made up: I would simply hand in the cheque-book and say nothing about the cheque I had torn out. However, instead of taking it out of my pocket, I went to the paying teller, opened my wallet, drew out the forged cheque, turned it over, calmly endorsed it in my own handwriting and pushed it across the desk together with my driving licence. With barely a glance at me, the cashier noted the number of my licence and passed the cheque to someone behind him. I waited as calmly as though I had handed in one of my own cheques in my own bank and when my name was called, quietly stepped up to collect the money. Ten thousand new francs is a million old francs, quite a sum, and although I was paid in brand new notes, I had to stuff three of my pockets with them.

No sooner did I get outside than I felt sick and faint. My hand, *the* hand, had forged Monsieur Ralingue's signature so well that his cheque had been cashed with the greatest of ease!

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Suzon, surprised at seeing me back home. "Oh, Jean-Claude! You look ill. Shall I call the doctor?"

"No, thank you. I'll be all right. I just need a little peace and quiet, dear."

That afternoon, I went back to the bank and paid into Monsieur Ralingue's account the million francs still in my

pockets. The cheque-book, I tore into pieces and dropped down a drain.

From then on, however, my life was hell. I wrote more and more, sometimes in my own writing but often in that of others. I thus turned out quite a few love letters addressed to my wife and which my hand signed André. Mind, I was not jealous of Suzon; I never have been and I am quite sure that she has never had an affair with any other man. But this automatic letter writing, like every action of *the* hand, was quite unrelated to any of my desires, feelings or emotions. Perhaps more agonising than the actual writing of the letters was the fact that, even when I was not under the influence of *the* hand, I was quite unable to destroy them. Yes, I was fully conscious of the danger they represented, and I wanted to get rid of them, but there was a will stronger than mine, a will that had a reason, a plan, which the beastly hand would disclose sooner or later. As time passed and I began to suspect what I was being driven to, I reacted less and less, and the more obvious things became, the less I was able to resist.

The night when the hand made me write to my brother-in-law, explaining that I was going to kill Suzon because she had a lover, I made a desperate effort to break free. First, I tried running away. I left the house all right, but returned shortly after my beastly hand had posted the letter to Ludo. Then, as in a dream, I went to the drawer where my pistol was and, like a spectator watching a film, I watched my hand reloading it and noticed with horror and dismay that my left hand was helping!

Twice I managed to bring the gun up to my own head but, each time, as though made of iron and weighing a thousand kilos, my right hand pulled it down. Desperate, I tried to grasp the pistol in my left hand and I might have succeeded had Suzon not suddenly rushed in and swept the gun off my desk.

"Jean-Claude, *chéri*! What has happened? Tell me, you must!"

"Nothing. Take that gun away. Hide it . . . No, throw it away . . . I never want to see it again!" I sobbed.

"You silly darling. Why did you want to kill yourself when . . ."

"Take it away! Get out of here!" I shouted, as my hand began to sweat and tremble.

"But, Jean-Claude . . ."

"Nom de Dieu! Get out!"

That night, I walked along the quays of the Seine, as far as the Charenton bridge, crossed over to the left bank, and walked all the way back to the Auteuil Viaduct. When at last I crawled home, I was relieved to find that Suzon was not there. I was glad for as long as she was out of my sight she was safe.

My mind was made up. Since I was unable to fight, I would see a psychiatrist; better still, instead of wasting precious time with a doctor who would try to talk me into or out of some non-existent state of mind, I would go straight to the Sainte Anne Hospital and beg to be taken in and kept under observation for a while. From there I would find out where Suzon was and get in touch with her. She would of course come immediately, but everything would be all right, since I myself would ask to be watched closely.

Having made myself a large cup of strong black coffee, I changed, had a cold shower, shaved carefully, dressed and went out.

What happened on the way down? I do not know. I felt quite fit but, instead of going to the garage to get my car and drive to the hospital, I walked out and jumped on a bus going to the Bourse, and it was just nine o'clock when I found myself strolling slowly up the Rue Vivienne towards the Boulevards, vaguely amused at the way people late for their work were rushing around. I gazed at the shops and stopped outside a gunsmith's then, petrified, watched my right hand go up to the door handle, and the next moment I was inside, asking to see pistols.

A .22 competition pistol, a deadly thing at close range but which can still be purchased without a police permit in Paris, was weighing down my coat pocket when I walked out of the shop. I was still thinking of the hospital and still wanting to reach it but, instead, I started walking home. It is surprising that I was not arrested; several

times people turned and watched me, taking me for a drunkard, and little dreaming that I was putting up a desperate fight not to go home. I somehow managed to reach the Bois de Boulogne, where I sat on the grass and slept, I think, for it was almost three o'clock when I got up. I think it was then I decided that the only thing to do was get rid of my right hand, and I remembered that there was a surgeon in my street. But of course, the moment I asked the doctor if he would cut off my hand, I knew that it was hopeless and that I was only wasting my time and his, and mine was especially precious since, for all I know, *the* hand might again, at any moment, take over. I therefore did not insist and left as rapidly as I could.

Out in the street, the whine of a saw made me turn and stop dead. There, at last, was the solution, the radical way out of all my troubles!

I walked into the old-fashioned cabinet-maker's shop, pretended to say something, smiled at the man working at the saw and, before my courage failed me, I quickly grasped my wrist and held it against the spinning blade. It burned but was not otherwise very painful and though I felt sick at the sight of my gushing blood, I quietly picked up my hand and slipped it into my coat pocket before sitting down a little heavily and slowly passing out as, sobbing and swearing, the joiner knotted a piece of rope round my arm.

"Your case is not unique, Monsieur Manoque," said Professor Boucot when the story was finished. "I suppose you know that?"

"I know what you mean, Professor. You think that it was schizophrenia, momentarily or perhaps definitely cured through some form of what I believe you call auto-punishment and that, now that I have lost my right hand, I may well be on the road to recovery?"

"That is roughly what it amounts to, Monsieur Manoque. Don't you think so?"

I certainly did, until the Commissaire again called on me that very evening.

"About Monsieur Manoque, Doctor, are you quite sure it was an accident?"

"Surely, the cabinet-maker who saw the accident can answer that question better than I can, Commissaire?"

"He swears it was no accident."

"And supposing it wasn't, then what?"

"I don't know, I really don't know," said the Commissaire, lighting a cigarette. "Doctor, I haven't the slightest clue, only a coincidence so strange that it seems it ought to be a clue."

"What coincidence, or is that a secret?"

"No. It amounts to this: a good man and a bad man get drawn together and they both get their right hand cut off on the same day, at the same time, though in different ways and in different parts of town. Knowing the bad man as I do, there is, there must be, something fishy about such a coincidence, but what? That is the question."

"I take it that the good man is Jean-Claude Manoque; could the bad man perhaps be his brother-in-law?"

"What do you know about Ludo Billet-Doux, Doctor?"

"Is that his name?"

"Ludovic Couralin got his nickname of Billet-Doux from his speciality of writing highly convincing fake love-letters."

"Fake love-letters!" I gasped.

"Yes, generally for blackmail purposes. That was merely one of the strings to his bow. Now, please tell me what you know about his letter-writing?"

"Just a moment. Was forgery another of his . . . hobbies?"

"Yes, he got five years on one count alone. He's been out almost three years now and is apparently going straight, ever since his sister got him a job in her husband's firm. But you know that he is as crooked as ever, I gather."

"You are right, Commissaire, there is something, but it is something which you will never be able to prove."

"Do you really think so? I am paid to prove things, you know."

"All right, Commissaire, I'll show you that there is something, then I'll prove it, and you will be convinced, but you will never get further than an examining magi-

strate. Can you be here at nine o'clock sharp tomorrow?"

Finding Monsieur Charles Ralingue was easy. Yes, he had lost a cheque-book and had reported his loss to the bank. Yes, indeed, there had been a query about a million franc cheque, but it must have been a mistake for the bank had credited his account with the same amount a few hours later.

At the bank, however, Monsieur Ralingue's eyes nearly popped out of his head when he was shown the cheque for ten thousand new francs.

"*Ca alors*" he exclaimed. "Yes, it is my signature all right. But who is this Monsieur Manoque? I can't understand. I am certain that I never wrote or signed this cheque."

"Don't worry, Monsieur Ralingue, it won't happen again," said the Commissaire.

At the Cochin hospital, where most people injured in street accidents are rushed to, I met Ludovic Couralin, a swarthy, sharp-eyed, beak-nosed, blue-chinned man who flashed a surprisingly pleasant smile at us. He was dressed and waiting for the nurse who had gone to get his discharge certificate signed.

"Ludo, this is a friend of mine," said the Commissaire, offering him a cigarette. "We know everything about your little game."

"You cops are all the same," he said, laughing but examining me closely. "There is no little game. I have a hundred witnesses, I tell you. The Metro station was crowded with people who saw me fall in front of the train."

"What was it made you fall, Ludo?" I asked, trying to make my voice as smooth as that of the Commissaire.

"Someone grabbed my right arm and pushed me, but no one saw who it was. When I knew that I was off-balance and had to fall, I went down as easy as anything and sprawled out on my back but, somehow, I was unable to pull my hand away in time. The wheel got it."

"Suppose I tell you who did that?"

"Who?"

"The man whose hand you had been using, Ludo," I said slowly.

"Come on, out with it!" snapped the Commissaire, as Ludo sat down on the edge of his bed.

"Out with what? I . . . I don't know what you're both talking about," he gasped, wiping his forehead with his bandaged arm.

"Yes, you do, Ludo," I said softly. "If Jean-Claude had killed his wife the way you had planned, they had no children, no other relatives, and you would have come into quite a nice fortune, and what with your brother-in-law ending up with a life sentence for an abominable crime, you would also have found yourself at the head of a prosperous business."

"Poor old Jean-Claude, is that what he thinks?" said Ludo, grinning. "But even if it were true, he can't prove anything because there isn't anything to prove!"

"Don't be too sure. Jean-Claude doesn't know yet. We discovered it all on our own, Ludo."

"Now, Doctor, and for the last time, will you kindly explain," said the Commissaire as he walked out of the hospital.

"Come to my office and you will hear Jean-Claude himself give you all the answers, Commissaire."

Having made him comfortable and mixed him a drink, I brought out the tape-recorder.

For a long time after, he was silent.

"Doctor, it can't be true, can it?" he said at last.

"Is there any other possible explanation, Commissaire? Are you satisfied?"

"Yes and no," he said, finishing his drink. "I feel like the kid the first time he saw a giraffe and didn't believe it. But, supposing that it is true, how could Manoque shove his brother-in-law under the train, Doctor?"

"How did Ludo make him try to shoot his wife, forge a signature to a cheque? There are so many forces in nature and in us which we cannot yet understand, Commissaire. Forces which you perhaps classify as strange or surprising coincidences."

As the Commissaire left my house, a heavy flower pot fell and exploded on the pavement. He was not able to

find out what window it had come from and, though I tried, I was unable to tell him that my left hand had suddenly become very hot and started shaking after his departure and that, like an automaton, I had simply followed my hand to the window and watched it push out a flower pot, the largest it could find.

THE MIRACLE

To Bernadette, this story she knows well.

The railways did things handsomely. Shortly before Monsieur Jadant was due home, workmen came to remove the kitchen steps and build instead an easy slope for his wheelchair which arrived a few days later. The wheelchair was a beautiful silent thing of black lacquered enamel with soft brown leather cushions. The neighbours came round to help Madame Jadant cut strings and unwrap yards of brown paper strips and take turns at reading the booklet of instructions and examine one by one the various attachments and gadgets.

But what had surprised the neighbourhood most of all was the return of Monsieur Jadant; they had not, of course, expected such a luxurious ambulance, but after the wonderful wheelchair, that in itself was not so very surprising. No, what had really astonished everybody was the extraordinary way in which Monsieur Jadant had bounced out of the ambulance and skilfully hopped across the pavement and through the open gate of his little suburban villa with the aid of two brand-new chromium-plated crutches. True that, on reaching the bottom of the front steps, he had had to let the ambulance attendants carry him up like a large bundle.

Monsieur Jadant at last found himself seated in his beautiful wheelchair in the very middle of his new room, the ground floor drawing-room from which Madame

Jadant had extracted a number of gilt chairs, two round tables and a gigantic green plant to make room for a bed.

It was there that Monsieur Jadant, a little like a king on his throne, received his neighbours who were introduced one at a time, or in small groups of twos and threes, as they arrived to congratulate him on his return home and to try to guess how much longer he really had to live.

All of them of course expected to hear a detailed account of the terrible railway accident in which Monsieur Jadant had been involved, of the anguish and the horror which they had all read about in the long illustrated article which most of them had carefully cut out—the very least they could do since they personally knew one of the victims.

To all, he spoke of God, Mercy and Divine Wrath! Most of his visitors shuffled their feet, coughed politely and smiled awkwardly at Madame Jadant; one or two managed to nod wisely and sigh.

"That man is hurt, terribly hurt," said the local wine merchant to his wife who had replaced him behind his counter. "Hurt there!" he added solemnly, tapping his forehead and tying the strings of his long blue apron.

"No," chimed in the butcher, drinking off his second *vin blanc*, "it's worse than that. That man already has one foot in the grave, that's what it is. Did you hear him? Only a priest, or a man about to die, can talk that way!"

"And now, close the shutters and lock the garden gate," said Monsieur Jadant to his wife after the departure of the last visitors; "I have something to show you."

"But... my poor Louis, dinner is already late... and I have such a nice little chicken for your homecoming..."

"Do as you are told, and don't worry about the dinner," snapped Monsieur Jadant.

"What will people think?" asked Madame Jadant, shrugging her bony shoulders.

"It's dark, don't let them see you, that's all... Hurry!"

When she finally closed the shutters and drew the heavy plum coloured curtains, Madame Jadant turned round and saw her husband; she was only able to gasp: "Well!"

Standing erect by his wheelchair, smiling at himself in

the mirror over the mantelpiece, Monsieur Jadant put his hands on his hips; threw up his chin, swelled out his chest, drew in his stomach and stood on tiptoe. Then, as he had learned to do in the army twenty years before, keeping his body erect, he slowly bent his legs.

"There!" he exclaimed, a little red in the face after bobbing slowly up and down twice.

"They have cured you then?"

"My poor girl, what a fool you are. Of course not! And don't go getting such silly ideas into your head! I am incurable, do you hear? Incurable! My... my... something or other—it is all written down in their certificate—is completely, totally, and hopelessly crushed. The great professor who came all the way from Bordeaux to examine me—the one the railways paid for specially—discovered it all alone. None of the other doctors had noticed it, but they of course all agreed afterwards."

"But then, Louis... you have cured yourself alone?"

"Me! Get better just like that? Of course not! I keep telling you that I am incurable! And I intend remaining incurable until they cough up, and they'll have to cough up plenty, I can tell you! Later, if I get better and am one day even able to walk, we shall let God have all the credit and the glory."

"Louis, explain yourself," said Madame Jadant, crossing herself. "What does all this mean? I don't understand . . . I'm afraid. Louis . . . you are going to get us into trouble."

"Allez! Now cry! Women are the limit. Never a tear at learning that your dear husband can no longer walk, and now that you know that I am not paralysed after all, you start crying! Woman, don't you understand? Don't you understand that I have fooled them all! Every one of them, do you hear! Doctors, professors, experts, and all the others who came to look at me, examine me, touch me, pinch me, push me about and ask me silly questions about my ancestors and the amount of wine I have been drinking daily . . . We have won, won, I tell you! We need only be patient enough, and the money is going to pour in; and now that all the experts agree that I can never walk again, it shouldn't be long coming."

Sure enough, the money was soon forthcoming. There had of course been previous offers, offers which Monsieur Jadant had smilingly disdained; he had been careful never to sign anything—he had even refused to sign his hospital discharge sheet. When he started talking about his lawyers, the railways had come down with a final offer of ten million francs. Monsieur Jadant knew then that he had reached the limit of what he could expect; he also knew that if he did go to a lawyer, he might well end by getting a life pension which, for obvious reasons, did not interest him. After due consideration, he had accepted the offer.

"And now what do you propose doing, my poor Louis?" asked Madame Jadant, gazing at the ten million franc cheque which two business-like gentlemen had finally left in exchange for some half-dozen signatures. "We can't use that money, we can't buy anything, because the day they find out you are not paralysed, they'll want it all back."

"So that's what you think, is it? Now, listen; with that money I am first of all going to buy a car."

"A car you won't be able to use, Louis!"

"A car with which I shall go back to work. No more crawling around in trains, though. I am a good travelling salesman and with a car I can easily treble my earnings. I am well known throughout the country, and I can get other goods and other clients. I can . . ."

"You're mad, Louis! I tell you they will take the car away from you! They'll seize and sell all we have, and you will be lucky if they don't send you to prison!" sobbed Madame Jadant.

"Damnation, don't shout and cry like that! Now wipe your nose and see who is at the door," said Monsieur Jadant, hopping into his wheelchair.

"Goodness!" gasped Madame Jadant. "Louis, it is the parish priest, *Monsieur le Curé* in person!"

"Good. Show him in. Wait! Give me my rosary, there in the right hand pocket of my waistcoat. Give it to me! Now run and open the door like a good girl . . . and stop worrying, please."

Monsieur le Curé came back often. They spent quite a few hours together, talking over the various occupations which Monsieur Jadant might eventually take up to earn a little money. There was of course that young paralytic girl who had bought a knitting machine with which she made sweaters, cardigans, vests and scarves; little by little, she had built up quite a reasonable trade through the local shopkeepers who agreed to retail her work. Monsieur Jadant might like to call on her some day, proposed the curate, thinking that Monsieur Jadant's bursts of laughter and contageous good humour might be an excellent thing for Raymonde. No doubt about it, she too, was courageous, but it was more the courage of accepted defeat, without that warmth of heart, that glow of confidence that beamed from Monsieur Jadant's face.

Thus, Monsieur Jadant's first outing proved quite an affair. *Monsieur le Curé* came to fetch him and insisted on pushing his wheelchair whilst Madame Jadant walked by his side in her neat black suit. All along the street, people turned to watch them, and when they passed in front of the *Café de la Mairie*, the *belote* players dropped their cards to peep over the long window curtain. "There you are! There's the proof! Didn't I tell you that poor old Jadant was completely crackers?" said the proprietor, solemnly tapping his forehead with his finger.

"We are almost there," said the priest, a little out of breath after negotiating a gutter. "Ah, and there is Raymonde waiting at her window."

"Where?"

"On the first floor, the first window to the left of the grocer's shop."

Monsieur Jadant saw the childlike, sad little face, and sweeping off his hat he smiled and bowed low in his wheelchair.

The grocer and his boy were mobilized and since the wheelchair was much too cumbersome and heavy for the narrow stairs, Monsieur Jadant was hoisted up on an ordinary wicker chair. Puffing and panting they carried him right into the room of the pale, blonde, timid girl, sitting in a straight-backed armchair and gazing at him in silent wonder out of large blue eyes, a little afraid per-

haps of this great mass of a man whose voice had boomed up through walls and doors and who was all at once laughing at and thanking the grocer, his boy, and the curate who was sweating profusely.

"He doesn't understand; it is as though he does not know what it really is to be like that," said Raymonde to her mother after the departure—just as noisy—of her visitor.

"Are you really going to buy a knitting machine?" asked Madame Jadant later that evening, wondering who her husband thought he was beckoning to as he hopped madly round his wheelchair.

"Yes," he answered at last, lashing out two more uppercuts followed by a series of left-right hooks that were to wind up his two rounds of nightly shadow boxing. "Yes, I am indeed going to buy one, and I am going to learn to use it and make things with it, things which you will take round to the various addresses which that poor girl gave me. Like that, everything will be perfect; and in case of any future trouble, we will be able to prove that we had no hope whatsoever of ever using our legs again," explained Monsieur Jadant with a knowing look.

"Oh, Louis... what do you intend doing, really?" pleaded his wife. "Won't you tell me?"

"Why not, after all? Yes, I think the time has now come for you to know my plans. It might even be a good idea if you were to start talking about them in the neighbourhood."

"Are you completely crazy?"

"No, my beloved and blithering fool of a wife, only daring and brilliant—though of course you wouldn't know. You are nevertheless going to talk about it as though it was your idea, do you hear? Your idea!"

Warmly wrapped up and comfortably tucked in his wheelchair, Monsieur Jadant was basking in the warm spring sun of the Pyrenees. Madame Jadant had gone to buy him his morning paper and his daily box of five *Voltigeurs* cigars. He felt satisfied and quite happy sitting out in the little garden in front of the modest but com-

fortable Lourdes hotel where they had arrived two days ago. His arms hurt a little because, that morning at the famous grotto where Bernadette, the little shepherdess, had first seen the Virgin Mary, he had thought it a good idea to pray with his arms outspread as he had seen others do. Since he could not kneel on the pavement, just praying in his wheelchair was not going to attract much attention, and he wanted to be noticed. Then too, the outspread arms business had, he was sure, attracted a good deal of sympathy.

For the hundredth time perhaps, Monsieur Jadant sat thinking over the events of the past few months, from the moment when he had felt the railway carriage floating silently upwards, the moment for which he had been ready for the past twenty years. No, he could not find the slightest flaw anywhere; everything was really quite perfect. Nothing he had ever said or done could possibly be twisted or interpreted as the slightest indication that he had not been a real paralytic. All things considered, Madame Jadant had gone through with her part exceedingly well; she had talked so cleverly about the possibility of a pilgrimage to Lourdes, that it was *Monsieur le Curé* who had one fine day himself proposed it to him.

They had come very early in the season and there were, so far, very few pilgrims. Monsieur Jadant had decided that a modest little miracle was really wiser than a grand affair during a large pilgrimage, or in the middle of some imposing ceremony where ever-inquisitive journalists and photographers might be swarming around. He had even given up the idea of letting the miracle happen during the first morning mass which was attended by quite a little crowd. Having read all the books that his wife had been able to find about miracles at Lourdes, Monsieur Jadant knew that a large crowd might be dangerous, how the priests sometimes had had to struggle, and even fight, to protect a person suddenly cured of an ailment; he had read how, shouting and raving, the mass of pilgrims would gather round and even trample each other in trying to see and touch the "lucky" pilgrim. No, decidedly everything would have to happen quietly before a few witnesses with, if possible, a priest or two. The best time for that was at

the grotto a little before noon, when most pilgrims or tourists had already left for lunch.

"A really nice day for a miracle, isn't it, my dear?" whispered Monsieur Jadant over his shoulder as his wife pushed his wheelchair out into the street.

"Louis. . . . I'm afraid."

"Ah no! It's too late for that now! Besides, you don't have to do anything but cry, and that you can do naturally. Remember, I am not going to get up and walk off, just like that! No, that would be suspicious. When you see me stand, just give a shout and leave the rest to me; and don't be afraid if you see me fall . . . I shall only walk very little at first."

Trembling like a leaf, Madame Jadant pushed her husband to within a few feet of the iron railing at the entrance of the famous grotto.

"Fine," whispered Monsieur Jadant. "Now leave me alone; go and sit on that bench over there."

There were rather more people than he had expected, a mixed crowd of tourists and pilgrims, but he knew that it would dwindle rapidly towards noon. Many of the pilgrims were praying, one or two of them aloud. Without taking any apparent notice of anyone, Monsieur Jadant recited his rosary, and as people began to move away, shortly before twelve, for a long time he prayed head down, arms outspread.

Everything went off as Monsieur Jadant had said. Though still trembling, Madame Jadant had not been too afraid when she had seen her husband slowly stand up, his arms still outspread. She had been about to shout as he had told her to, when a soldier turning round had gasped: "Look!"

"He walks!" screamed a woman on her knees.

Slowly, his legs very stiff, Monsieur Jadant was walking like an automaton towards the railings.

"Miracle! A miracle!" shouted a man as a priest ran towards Monsieur Jadant, who had fallen to his knees.

"I walk . . . I can walk!" he gasped as the priest and the soldier helped him to his feet. "Let me go! I walk . . . I can walk, I tell you!"

And as they released him, he crumpled up again.

It was only later that the horrid tragedy of it all dawned on Madame Jadant, at the infirmary, when she heard her husband shouting and swearing at the doctor.

"Pray, pray, my son!" the priest who had accompanied him to the infirmary kept repeating. "You walked, I saw you! Pray! The miracle will happen again! Pray!"

Powerless, the doctor shrugged his shoulders and moved away from the bed where Monsieur Jadant was sobbing and raving:

"Do something, blast you! I could walk, I tell you! Doctor, do you hear? I could walk! Damn you, Doctor, I could walk!"

It was this time a human wreck that Monsieur Jadant's neighbours saw being lifted out of an ambulance; no sparkling crutches, no hand-waving, no smiles—just a bundled up old man carried swiftly and silently into his house.

At the very moment when Monsieur Jadant was again being tucked into his wheelchair which seemed suddenly too big for him, *Monsieur le Curé* who thought him still at Lourdes, was knocking at Raymonde's door.

"There is something I must tell you, *Monsieur le Curé*."

"Speak, *mon enfant*," said the priest, drawing up a chair.

"You won't believe me, but please hear me out," said Raymonde, gazing earnestly at him.

"Of course I will hear you out. What is the trouble?"

Clasping her long thin hands together on the old blanket round her legs, hesitatingly, faltering, Raymonde told her strange story.

"It happened two days ago, *Monsieur le Curé*. Mother had gone to market and I was alone here in this room. I had just finished a long scarf on my knitting machine, and I was watching people going by on the other side of the street. I suddenly had the impression that, behind me, the room had gone all dark, and when I looked over my shoulder, I was afraid because, although the sun was shining outside, it is true, the room was all dark. And then, in the corner over there, but higher than the ceiling, in a blue hole that became full of sunlight, I saw the Virgin

Mary! And she said something that doesn't make sense ... but she said it, *Monsieur le Curé,* and you must believe me.... She said: 'Raymonde, I have just collected a pair of perfectly good but useless legs. They are for you.' And, as I looked at her spellbound without saying anything, she smiled again and said: 'Stand up, Raymonde. Stand up and walk!' And when I walked towards her, she disappeared."

"Such dreams are current, my child, and you . . ."

"No, *Monsieur le Curé,* it wasn't a dream. Look, you are the first to see," said Raymonde, throwing the old blanket off her legs and slowly standing up.

She hesitated a moment, then gently pushing aside the priest's hand, she walked slowly, very slowly, step by step, round his chair.

THE DROP OF FORGETFULNESS

To the charming Edna who saved me from this fate the day she married another.

Falling, falling! That terrible nightmare fall! It is only a dream, the same old dream, I know, but it is pure, abstract knowledge which cannot possibly change the dream or alleviate the mental and physical horror of the endless fall. I shall only wake up after the sickening jerk that will leave me panting and lost under my bedclothes where I shall then panic until I can struggle out. Those seconds, no worse but as bad as the dream, are for me seconds of a rebirth, seconds of real agony during which I can remember nothing and where in a total cessation of knowledge, in the grip of a primeval fear, the instinct of survival is so powerful that I once tore my way right through a blanket in which I was entangled.

It is what psychiatrists call a recurrent nightmare. As a child, I had it often. Two or three times a week, my poor mother would have to pull me out of the tangled sheets and blankets, screaming my head off. I know full well what my doctor would say, and after reading Freud, Adler, Jung and some more, I dislike the idea of consulting a psychoanalyst with whom I would be cheating from the very start. My dream may well be the fearful memory of my birth, as some of them would assure me, but it is something more; it is an end of knowledge which, each time, returns after a short while but which may well one night fail me completely. If my heart then goes on beating, I shall be little more than a sort of mobile vegetable.

As I grew up, my dream seemed to fade in intensity and only bothered me at long intervals, and it had completely disappeared by the time I married Edna. Then came war and my first parachute jump. It was simply my old nightmare come true: falling, falling and suffocating in the slipstream, the air wrapped round my head just like my sheets, and I had to scream. The jerk of the harness as the 'chute opened silenced me but for the rest of the descent I was empty of all knowledge, little more than an overgrown, minute-old baby struggling for its first breath of air. I told no one about it, but every jump was the same agony of my dream come true.

But it was only after the war, after our second honeymoon—there is no flop like that of a second honeymoon—that my old nightmare returned. To this day, it is still the same, except that, of late, there is something particular which I have been trying to remember, something that has nothing to do with the dream, really, but which, I am sure, would put a stop to it. It is something to do with Edna's death, I know, although long ago, when I was a little boy, there was always something I could never remember.

What was it that had gone wrong, that I could not remember? Throughout the trial, I had tried so hard to remember. I killed Edna all right, that much I know, but what I cannot remember is how I killed her. It is vital that I should remember, for I know that, somehow, I am

innocent. Two of the jury seemed to sense this, two men who must have had wives like Edna; it was fascinating to watch their faces while they listened to Edna's tape-recording.

They could only hear it, but I had merely to close my eyes to reconstruct the setting, the light, the heat of the fire, every move we made, the light on Edna's pale face as she coldly, deliberately worked on me to make me renew my boast about Florence, the metallic glint of her dark green eyes, the smoke of her cigarette that floated in layers like elongated clouds on a hazy afternoon, layers that swirled and tore each time I snapped back at what I thought was mere nagging. But what was it, what is it that I know and that the jury and the judge and the police and the lawyers will never know unless I remember? And yet, I was asked dozens, hundreds of questions about Edna, about our past, about our tempers! No one asked the question that would have made me remember the one fact that will render them helpless, all of them.

I had sense enough to plead not guilty, although my lawyers did not somehow seem to think it could make much difference. The evidence was, of course, so frightfully damning. I myself had proved my own guilt, explained it in so many words, but words meant for Edna, not for a court of law! That is the great thing, and that is where memory fails me. I kept telling them all that I could not remember but that I would sooner or later. My lawyers had naturally enough tried to suggest that I was insane. I am not, and they did not get away with it. All the doctors agreed that I was both sane and responsible, all except one who said something about my memory having failed over some important detail. He could sense that it was indeed an important detail and he pitied me. But what weight can such statements have against the fearful cold-bloodedness of my angry but so very precise explanations on the tape-recorder? Even with that tape-recording, it is better than a perfect crime for the simple reason that, though I killed Edna, there is no crime—in other words, the *ne plus ultra* of murder.

When the judge passed sentence on me, it made me feel queer, but it did not worry me unduly for I knew that I

would finally remember. I asked to be allowed to hear the tape-recording again, but the judge said no. It does not matter much. I heard it twice in court and think I know it by heart. My lawyers wanted me to object to the tape-recording, but that would have been silly. I had to prepare the ground if only by proving that I am not even afraid of my own evidence, and I know that when I do remember, it will give added strength to the proof of my innocence.

Whereas the majority of men under a death sentence grow nervous and ill and cannot eat or sleep properly, I have a good appetite and sleep soundly, especially when I feel that I am going to have my nightmare. Of course, the guards in the cell—I am never left alone—got frightened at first and shook me roughly out of my sleep. But, having explained to them that that is the only way I shall remember the one detail, the silly little detail that will send them all running like mad to prove my innocence, they now leave me alone.

At first, I used to think Edna was a reincarnated cat, but she was a fake. Her luminous eyes, the way she smiled, her studied litheness, her attitudes—she should have been a ballet dancer—the very way she could slip through a half open door, spring over the back of the couch in front of the fire, the way she curled up, everything was put on. And that was precisely what I had fallen for! Had there been no war, I might have got used to it. It was the second honeymoon that showed her up, because she acted it all over again, as if I did not know what she really was: a rather lazy slut who cultivated nonchalance and *laisser-aller*, who thought herself immensely fascinating and who would have purred had she known how to. She kept up her fake reincarnation business because she one day discovered that it annoyed me and, there perhaps, she was rather like a cat playing with a mouse. She thoroughly enjoyed becoming quieter and cooler as I got madder. And yet, she hated cats; truth be told, she hated all animals and, within a month of our marriage, I had been given the choice between my dog and her. What a cad I was! What a wonderful opportunity I missed! My only excuse is that I was still in love . . .

if not with her, then with her aping, with the role she was playing.

The very first time I had my nightmare, after our second honeymoon, Edna got up, took the eiderdown and finished the night on the drawing-room couch. Next day, when I got home from work, I found twin beds installed. I could have obtained a divorce for that, I suppose, but it would have meant telling all sorts of people about my dream and, worse still, how Edna had decided to put a stop to it. Each time that, lost under the bedclothes, I started screaming and fighting my way out, she pulled a long cane from under her bed and without even taking the trouble to sit up, whacked away at me with all her might.

It all started the day she fixed new curtains in the back room. She loved to run and spring up the step-ladder, fingers and toes hardly touching it. But Edna was not a real cat, not even a reincarnated cat and, that day, she came down with a crash, right across a dresser. She was badly hurt in her pride and sufficiently winded for me to telephone the local doctor. Barnley was a nice young man, really, but he soon fell for the cat business, first the luminous eyes and the triangular smile, then the curling up and, as she got well again, the feline litheness of all her movements. Since she was no longer acting for my benefit, I was in the position of an amused off-stage visitor watching all the tricks, such as that charming way she had of putting her hands flat down in her lap, or of tucking in a curl round the back of her neck and sweeping her hand over her ear and down the side of her face, like a cat washing itself. She made a point of nibbling biscuits and of tasting her tea with quick little jabs of her red, pointed tongue.

The tape recording was not at all typical of Edna's scenes of nagging, bickering, veiled threats and endless arguments. She had a purpose and a part to act. She was sick and tired of me, and young Doctor Barnley had a rather lovely family mansion with only an aged mother living in it. True he had two dogs, but I was sure that, when the time came, he would willingly enough sacrifice them for Edna. She did not tell him about her heart

trouble, or her liver trouble, oh no! She wanted him to think that she was fitness and joy of living personified, beautifully catlike and provokingly cheerful. And in order to lure him round, she had him come to visit me! She had the cheek to tell him about my nightmare. Barnley must have been an honest enough physician, however, for though Edna seemed to think I should have gone to a home, he persisted in finding nothing wrong with me. Truth is, I was happier than I had been in years for I had just discovered how much I hated Edna's guts. Why is it that cat guts seem much easier to hate than any other sort of guts? "Cat guts—hate guts . . . cat guts—hate guts . . . cat guts—hate guts . . ." had become my little hymn of revolt, which I sang to myself every morning and every night in the tube as it rattled along to or from the City.

Oh, that fearful fall! Why is it I can never awake before the final sickening stop, after which, of course, I yell my head off. Let me think, where was I? The trial, perhaps?

Of course, I said nothing about Doctor Barnley at the trial. It was because of him that we had both decided to bring things to an end between us. Edna had had the idea of the tape recording; my ideas were somewhat different, perhaps because I felt a sort of sympathy for young Barnley and wanted to save him from Edna. She must have switched it on when, half way through our argument, she had gone lightly round the room to turn out the lights, leaving only the lamp by the fire, in front of which she had curled up on the carpet.

"You can say what you like, James Faller, I shall ever be patient with you."

Edna used to call me by my full name when she was particularly pleased or proud of me, especially in front of people. It had however gradually become akin to an expression of her coldness. "You can say what you like . . ." these were the first words on the tape. What the jury did not hear was what had come before, the 'say what I liked', as Edna termed it. I could have told them, of course, but it was not nearly so important as what I was trying so hard to remember.

"Patient as a cat!" I had snarled in answer, and from the sudden dignified look on the faces of the jury, I saw that Edna was already scoring against me.

"You hate me, don't you, James?"

"I loathe you, Edna."

"And you would do anything to get rid of me."

"Certainly, darling."

"No! Don't go. We must have this out once and for all!"

"I'm only going to get the tea."

Here, I had had to explain that every evening, I had been in the habit of making a pot of tea. I could have added that having it out once and for all had become an almost nightly habit of Edna's, but that also was unimportant. She had not stopped the recorder and for about three minutes, there had been nothing but the muffled noise of the fire in the grate and the door opening when I had returned with the tray.

"What about this Florence woman? Have you made up your mind about her, James?"

"What do you mean?"

"You keep telling me that you are going to leave me to go away with her. I can't go on like that much longer, you know."

Naturally, they had wanted to know who Florence was. So had the police before them. They had not found Florence, however, and I had refused to say anything about her at the trial. Had I told them the truth, that Florence had simply been an imaginary person to counter Edna's cat-love-affair with Doctor Barnley, they would not have believed me.

"I shall marry her and have a real wife instead of a cat."

"So, you want to divorce me in order to . . . to marry your mistress, is that it?"

"No, Edna."

"How then can she be your wife?"

"Here, take your tea."

Afterwards, when it was too late, I found the microphone tucked under the cushion over which she had been

cat-curling. That is why the noise of the cup and saucer was so perfectly clear on the tape recording.

"Ugh! What a horrid taste! Where's the sugar?"

"Sorry, I forgot. Here, help yourself."

"James, you didn't answer my question."

"Drink your tea and shut up. You make me sick."

"The most disgusting tea I've ever had. What on earth did you brew it in?"

"Good cat. Give me your cup. Here goes mine into the fire."

The sizzling noise of the tea turned to steam came over the tape recording quite distinctly.

"Jim! You frightened me."

"Did I? Good. And now, I can answer your question, hell-cat."

"About your . . . mistress?"

"Funny, you usually call her other names. Well, yes, about Florence. Within a month or two we shall get married."

"You don't really think that you can get a divorce just like that, do you?"

"Won't need a divorce from a cat-wife."

"You're mad! Why don't you leave me and go and live with this . . . this Florence woman of yours?"

"Can't, my puss. It wouldn't look nice right after your funeral."

"My funeral?"

"Yes. And like that, Florence can come to live here. And Florence loves dogs, not at all like you, my puss. Let me see, a cat has nine lives, hasn't it? Well, I put in enough to kill ten people!"

"Do be serious, James Faller. What are you talking about?"

"Poison, Edna. Good old fashioned poison. Yes, I know, you can feel it now, burning a hole in the pit of your stomach. Yes, my love, yes, puss . . . That is why I threw my cup of tea into the fire and why I am going to wash out your cup and the teapot in a few minutes."

"Jim! NO!"

Edna's scream was perfect. Twice it had the same effect

on the jury. Their faces hardened and turned to stone, and as grey as stone.

"Yes, Edna. A beautiful poison that leaves no trace but that kills rapidly, if a little painfully. But cats can stand more pain than any other animal, so you won't suffer half as much as a normal human being, will you?"

Her renewed screams, our scuffle as I threw her on the couch when she tried to make for the door and the telephone in the other room, everything was perfectly audible on the tape recording. And her dying words, as she rolled off the couch, evidently in an attempt to get closer to the microphone, came through with remarkable clarity.

"James Faller, my husband, has . . . poisoned me!" she gasped.

And the long moan that followed and ended in a sort of throaty rattle put the finishing touch to it all. After the court had heard it for the second time, I knew there was no hope whatsoever, unless I remembered why I was innocent.

Doctor Barnley testified, how I had called him late that night, how he had found the patient, his immediate suspicions by the look of agony on Edna's face and, finally, his discovery of the tape-recorder.

Come to think of it, he jolly soon found that tape-recorder hidden away in the little cupboard by the fireplace. He and Edna had probably planned that recording so that she could get enough evidence for a divorce in her favour. But they had not considered the possibility that I might well play first.

Of course they found me guilty—who wouldn't? They did not know that I had not poisoned Edna. I killed the hell cat all right, but legally. I know I am going to wake up tangled in my bedclothes. Oh, if I could only remember before! Awake, I never seem to remember anything.

If I keep my eyes tight shut and keep quite still, the fall will go on a little while longer, before I wake shouting. Just a little longer . . . I can feel my heart pounding and I know, that is a sign that I am soon going to wake up.

My heart . . . Edna's heart! It was I made it stop . . . I never poisoned her . . . I bluffed . . . I fooled her. The

mysterious poison that left no trace was a half teaspoonful of mustard! She thought she was poisoned and died of heart failure. And now, I remember, the Harley Street man who had several times examined her heart and who had never been called at the trial! I would have to see the prison Director first thing in the morning and tell him everything. An autopsy would soon show that Edna had died of heart failure. They had already cut her up and examined her cat guts but had found no trace of anything and they tried so hard to get me to tell them what poison I had used. Some of the doctors even suggested names of poisons. They would never have believed me if I had told them that it was plain mustard and a little persuasion. Now, if they dug her up again—and they would jolly well have to—they would find by examining her heart that fear, fear alone had made it stop, or burst, or whatever a heart does when people die of fright. And I would be free! No man can be accused of killing his wife if she chooses to die of fright!

At last, the dream can end. I must keep on repeating the word "mustard". It would be awful if I did not remember how Edna really died when I do wake up. I'll bet they find a tiny cat heart, all black and as tough as iron.

Oh! That jerk to wakefulness! I'll never get used to it . . .

A crowd had gathered, and some two dozen people who were kneeling on the wet pavement started reciting the Lord's Prayer when the wicket-door opened and a prison guard pinned up the usual note announcing that James Faller had that morning been executed by hanging and that the prison physician, Dr. Anthony Barnley, had certified him dead at 9.12 a.m.

PARKSON'S LAST FLIGHT

To the Lady Ann.

"Lights out already, Anne?" said Donald Parkson, glancing at his wrist-watch and buttoning up his tunic. "Sunday school trippers?"

"No," grinned the hostess, closing the cabin door. "Going home after a congress. It's always the same; some of them were barely able to crawl up the gangway. Half of them are already snoring. Ghastly 'plane trip, didn't get a wink of sleep, they'll explain to their wives tomorrow."

"I'll still take a look round. I may not find time in the morning," said Parkson, tucking his captain's cap under his arm and stepping through into the long cabin of the transatlantic airliner.

It was strange how he had always wanted to visit his passengers before they had settled down for the night and how, somehow, there was always so much to do after take-off that he rarely got around to it in time. He walked along the dimly lit cabin, right through to the rear. Half the seats were empty and all but one of the passengers had put out their individual lights and were already asleep, or at least had their eyes closed.

"Can't see a single light; where are we?" growled a bald-headed little man when he passed with a smile.

"Already out over the ocean. The weather's fine, and we're making a bee-line for Europe."

"Risking our necks so as to save giving us breakfast," snorted the passenger.

"No, you get breakfast in any case," he answered with a laugh, wondering whether the little man was a humorist or not.

"I agree, you should have a pretty quiet night, Anne," he said two minutes later, changing his tunic for a zip-fastening woollen waistcoat.

"Yes," said the hostess, preparing cups and a tray.

"Any coffee, Lady Anne?" asked the navigator, poking his head into the tiny kitchenette.

"In about five minutes, Tom."

"Why do they all call you Lady Anne?"

"Because of the way I handle the passengers, I think. Why do they call you Lucky Parkson?"

"What's your guess?"

"Because you're lucky? Well, why can't I be a lady then?" said the hostess, chuckling as she made the coffee. "You know, Lucky . . . I'm sorry this is your last trip."

"So am I, in a way. I know someone who is not, though."

"Peggy? Yes, I know. I would never have married a pilot."

"No pilot could afford you, Lady Anne," butted in the engineer, emptying a sugar bowl into his shirt pocket. "Apart from the company uniform, the only thing that fits you is a mink coat. This really your last trip, Lucky?"

"Afraid so, Al. The age limit has caught up with me."

"How many times have you crossed, Lucky?"

"On this particular line and flight, this happens to be my one thousand and first crossing."

"And how many close shaves?" asked Anne, pouring out a cup of coffee.

"Believe it or not, never one."

"Commercial flying, yes, but during the war?"

"That's where I got my nickname. I have been flying actively for almost twenty-five years, first in the R.A.F., then commercial in most parts of the world."

There was a long buzz as one of the markers flashed red on Anne's call-board.

"Twenty-one. That's the old boy who was worried because he couldn't see a light. Since I told him we were out over the ocean he is probably worried because now he can see a light. Run along and tell him there are still ships floating around. I'll take care of that," said Parkson, picking up the trayful of coffee cups and taking it forward.

Sitting by his little table, the engineer was reading a detective story. His four engines had been reduced to normal cruising for almost an hour; they were roaring smoothly and belching bluish streaks into the ice-cold

darkness. In about two hours' time, he would switch fuel tanks. Meanwhile, there was nothing to do but listen and throw an occasional glance at his control dials—a mere confirmation, for his ears always warned him of anything unusual before any dial needle so much as trembled away from normal.

In his corner which he could turn into a private office by pulling a black curtain round him, the navigator was drawing a blue pencil line on a chart, a blue line that followed very exactly an ink line that had been drawn in before.

Facing him, the radio operator was scribbling on a pad.

"Weather?" queried Parkson, putting down a cup of coffee.

"Yes. Seems to be thickening a little ahead but nothing to bother about though."

"Thanks," smiled Walker, his co-pilot, when he saw him with the coffee tray.

"All quiet?"

"All quiet, Lucky," he said, stirring his coffee as the automatic pilot very gently moved the stick between his knees. "Aren't you taking your usual nap?"

"Not tonight, John. This is my last trip and I'll have plenty of time to rest after that . . . attending business lunches or dictating rot to a secretary in the downtown office."

"That is the sort of thing my Missus has always dreamed of. . . you know, seeing me off every morning, bowler hat and umbrella and just enough time to miss the eight sixteen."

"Yes, I know. Well, by the time you reach that stage, I shall be at the last but one, retired and taking my daily walk as far as the local. By then, of course, our youngsters will be piloting liners to Mars and Venus."

Lucky finished his cup of coffee, took the tray back to Anne, stretched, clambered into his seat, pulled the belt tight over his hips, drew out an old-fashioned woollen bonnet before pulling the intercom earphones over his head, then settled down comfortably after looking first at the chronometre, then the compass and each of the seventy-one dials above, in front and even below him.

"John, you turn in if you like. I'll have you called if I need you."

"No thank you, Lucky. I'll have a little snooze here if you don't mind though," said Walker, pulling a cashmere scarf up round his ears.

As Captain, Lucky Parkson rarely took much rest when in flight. He had, however, made a habit of turning in for an hour or two once they were well away and out of traffic lanes and, of course, only in good weather. He was always up and in charge at the approach of dawn when crews get really tired. Except for practice runs, he very rarely allowed his co-pilot to bring her in or take off. It was not that he did not trust him; he knew that Walker was as keen and good a pilot as he was himself; but he felt that it was his duty.

Yes, it was indeed strange the way his luck had held throughout four years of war and twenty years of regular flying. It could hardly be called luck, really; in order to be lucky one does at least have to run a certain risk, he supposed. No, it was not luck but rather a total, a colossal absence of any sort of ill-luck. There was never anything —there never had been—to report on any of his flights. Except for the nine times he had gone into action against enemy aircraft, all his war missions had been the same. Even in those nine battles, the enemy fighters had, somehow, never got as close as lining him up in their sights. He and his brother Bert had soon become known as the 'Lucky Brothers'. But Bert's luck had been different, it had been the real sort—at least while it lasted. There was the time when he had come back with practically half his Spitfire shot away and the rest on fire, when, after crashing through a couple of hedges, it had settled in just enough mud to put the fire out but not enough for Bert to get drowned. There was that other time when, after being shot down over the Channel and, as the R.A.F. rescue launches were already racing out of Dover to look for him, he had come down through the smoke and fishing tackle of a Grimsby trawler that had no business being there anyway, and landed with a shout in a hold full of fish!

They preferred to fly together and, on take-off and in

flight, Donald only had to look over his left shoulder to see Bert nod and wink solemnly, a thing they never failed to do if they were about to break formation. In flight, he had several times warned Bert that he was "being followed". "Thank you, dear brother," would answer Bert over his mike and with a solemn wink, he would suddenly dive or swing into evasive action.

It was evident that neither of them would have married Peggy had their luck held. They had been together when they had met Peggy at a local dance. They had both flirted with her and Peggy had never seemed able to make up her mind which she preferred. Although both knew well that the other was really smitten, they had never pushed the matter further than a simple flirtation.

Lucky Parkson often thought of that bright autumn morning when Bert's luck had bowed to Fate and the Angel of Death. Bert's plexiglass canopy had turned a bright yellow as oil flowed over it. "Bert, are you all right?" he had shouted over his microphone. "No, sorry, old boy," Bert had answered quite calmly, pushing back the canopy and with a last wink followed by the usual solemn nod, he had slumped forward and his burning machine had streaked down towards a wood, all rust and gold in the morning haze. For a long time, Donald had flown round the black hole belching a thick column of smoke. The sky was quite empty when he had at last turned west towards England, where he had had to crash land on top of a cliff after running out of petrol.

Later, a good deal later, he had married Peggy. Their life had been a normal happy one and they were both proud of their three children. Of course being the wife of a pilot had been a strain at times and though Peggy had never complained, he was sure that she was very happy at the thought that there would be no more flying.

"Any more coffee, anyone?" asked Anne.

"No, thanks," he said, and grinned as Walker snored slightly.

The shiny black lacquered windscreen turned grey. It could not be dawn and, a moment later, when drops began streaking up it, he knew that they were catching up with the bad weather sooner than expected.

Parkson checked all his instruments and again looked up and his eye caught something white. Cloud, he thought, switching on the powerful windscreen wipers—he hated the idea of not being able to see ahead, even if there was nothing to see, and again, something white flashed ahead. Parkson rubbed his eyes, turned off the cabin light and again carefully examined his instrument board, the dials of which were glowing a soft blue, before slowly raising his eyes to where the windscreen wiper was flicking rapidly. There *was* something white ahead.

He had already slipped his feet into the controls and was about to touch Walker's shoulder, but it could only be a cloud. Leaning forward, his hand groping for his night glasses, he tried to see better. It looked like a great bird and gave the impression that its wings were moving up and down as though it was flying ahead of him in the same direction.

Donald knew that he was being ridiculous but, instead of grabbing his night glasses, his left hand slid up to the searchlight switch. He would see millions of diamonds rushing towards him, as was always the case when the headlight was switched on in rain, and he hesitated because he knew that, for some seconds after, he would have difficulty in seeing through the blackness of the night. Leaning forward, holding the switch between thumb and forefinger, he waited a few seconds then flicked it on. In the shaft of rushing raindrops, straight ahead, he saw a great white bird!

It was impossible, quite impossible! He knew very little about birds, but even if a bird was travelling at that altitude over the Atlantic, he doubted that any bird could fly at such a speed.... The aircraft would have caught up with it and killed it before he would even have had time to see it properly.

Again he looked and there was no possible doubt. A white bird was flying swiftly and strongly straight ahead.

"Walker!" he snapped, grabbing the controls and pressing with his thumb the button that disconnected the automatic pilot.

"What's up?" said Walker, sitting up very straight and

adjusting his earphones as he tried to see what Parkson was looking at.

"That bird, look!"

"Where? . . . Good Lord!" gasped Walker as the bird suddenly swooped down and, rigid as a statue, Lucky Parkson slowly but firmly pushed the stick forward and followed into a dive!

"Hi!" shouted Walker, grasping the controls and pulling. "Lucky! Are you crazy?"

The whole machine lurched sideways as with a tearing crash, something seemed to hit the tail.

Deftly checking a roll that put them over to the right, Lucky now sat back, his hands slowly and firmly pulling at the stick. Things had crashed behind him. Hanging on with both hands to his control board the engineer was watching his four pets, the engines, which were holding out beautifully.

"Shall I get on the air, sir?" asked the radio-operator, scrambling to his feet.

"Yes, but no 'May Day' until I say so."

"Yes, sir."

"Walker. She's flying. Go back and see what happened. Something hit us back there. Tell Anne to prepare for an emergency," he added, switching on the "No smoking—Fix safety belts" panel.

"Captain."

"Yes," snapped Lucky over the intercom.

"I am on the air with cargo flight X-One-One-Three going west. They say that they have just grazed a big airliner that just managed to avoid a head on collision by diving."

"Are they all right?"

"They think so. They want to know if we are."

"Tell them we think so but ask them to make one or two slow turns. I am doing likewise. Give them our altitude . . . six thousand five hundred. Make sure that they are at least five hundred feet above or below that. One close shave is enough for the time being."

A minute later, Lucky was able to catch sight of the lights of the cargo plane.

"At least we won't be quite alone if we do have to ditch

her," he said, pointing as Walker leaned over his shoulder.

"No visible damage, Lucky. Anne has the situation well in hand now. They were jittery until she threatened to beat up a little man who would not take off his shoes."

"Good for her. Anyone get hurt back there?"

"Only Anne who got a cut over her nose."

"Engineer," called Lucky over the intercom. "Are you happy?"

"All fine, sir."

"Navigator. Know where we are?"

"Seven hundred miles west of Shannon."

"Radio. Our cargo friend all right?"

"He thinks so, sir."

"All right. Tell him we are resuming our flight if he agrees. Then report the incident to Shannon and ask them to prepare for an emergency landing in about one hour and three-quarters from now if all goes well."

A very nasty air pocket that caused some minor damage was the only explanation the passengers were able to worm out of Anne. Oh no, they had not hit the tip of a mountain. Yes, they had dived down unexpectedly Yes, they would be going straight on to London after a necessary check-up. Yes, unfortunately, they would be a little late. No, not more than an hour, if that. Yes, breakfast would be coming up shortly.

Instead of dispersing after the usual formalities, the crew gathered round Lucky Parkson and conducted him to one of the company offices where some twenty people were gathered round champagne bottles to celebrate his last flight as Captain and, for the few who knew, to congratulate him once again on his luck.

"Tell me, Lucky?" asked young Walker, lighting his cigarette, "What made you dive just in the nick of time? You woke me up a second before and though I craned my neck I could see nothing but sheets of rain."

"Well, I thought there was a bird . . ."

"Oh come, what else?"

"Luck, I suppose," said Parkson, grinning sheepishly.

Three hours later, Lucky Parkson blew the hooter of his little car as he swung round the corner of a sea-front road at the end of which stood his cottage. He saw his son and

daughter run out to open the double gate and swing on it as he drove straight into the small garage by the kitchen.

It was not till after tea, when the children had gone to a party, and he was sitting in his favourite deck-chair, lighting his pipe and looking out over the sunny white-capped sea, that he said between puffs:

"D'you know, Peggy . . . We very nearly had it last night . . . A real close shave. . . ."

"Oh, Don. . . .What happened? I thought it was the weather had delayed you this morning. That's what they told me on the 'phone."

"Yes, I know. Truth is we collided with a cargo 'plane and my rudder was a little damaged."

"No!"

"Yes, and if I hadn't put the ship into a dive of all things, it would have been a head-on coll . . . Where the devil does that bird come from?"

"Oh, how strange. We hadn't seen it for two whole days. For over a week now it has been coming every evening and the children feed it. It's quite tame. Colonel Brandham says it is an albatross."

"An albatross?"

"Yes. The children call it Bert. Oh . . . you don't mind, do you, dear? Perdaps I shouldn't have let them."

"Don't be silly, Peggy," said Parkson, getting up and walking slowly towards the great white bird that solemnly winked its bright yellow eye and took off in a great flapping of wings.

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"TIME IS FOR ME ONE OF THE BEST ELEMENTS OF HORROR, NOT ONLY BECAUSE WE KNOW SO LITTLE ABOUT IT BUT BECAUSE IT IS NOTHING AND EVERYTHING. WE HAVE, SO FAR, ONLY MEASURED IT IN A MISERABLE SORT OF WAY, CUTTING UP MINUTE FRACTIONS OF IT INTO DAYS AND HOURS, THAT SEEM ENDLESS TO YOUTH AND SO SHORT FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE.

BUT WE ARE BEGINNING TO DISCOVER THAT TIME IS SOMETHING MORE THAN REAL, SOMETHING TANGIBLE AND EVEN SOLID. FOR THE INSECT THAT LIVES A FEW MINUTES WE ARE ETERNAL, BUT FOR A RANGE OF MOUNTAINS, WE FLIT ABOUT SO RAPIDLY THAT WE DO NOT REALLY EXIST.

EVERYTHING THAT HAS EVER HAPPENED AND EVERYTHING THAT WILL HAPPEN IS IN THAT ONE SINGLE BLOB OF **TIME.** THAT IS THE REAL HORROR."

OUT OF TIME

GEORGE LANGELAAN