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B.E.A.S.T.

NO ONE COULD CONTROL THE COMPUTER-CREATED MONSTER.

CHARLES ERIC MAINE

AFTER ALL, no sensible authority would be over concerned about the personality of a man, provided he did his job effectively. Certainly it would be laughable to be worried about the personality of a machine —even a fantastically complex and sensitive computer. Although any Grade-C mechanic could tell you different.

But after all, authorities are notoriously short-sighted. They were only a little bit fearful that some of the valuable time of the computer might possibly be used for unauthorised experiments.

So they sent a quiet, discreet man into the secret biological laboratory to keep his eyes open—not to do anything, of course—just to see if there was anything to find out.

But when he told them, they couldn't believe him....

By the same author

SPACEWAYS
TIMELINER
CRISIS 2000
ESCAPEMENT
THE ISOTOPE MAN
HIGH VACUUM
THE TIDE WENT OUT
COUNT-DOWN
SUBTERFUGE
CALCULATED RISK
THE MAN WHO OWNED THE WORLD
WORLD WITHOUT MEN
THE MIND OF MR. SOAMES
THE DARKEST OF NIGHTS
NEVER LET UP

B. E. A. S. T.

Biological

Evolutionary

Animal

Simulation

Test

Charles Eric Maine

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Chapter One

In the late afternoon Makin called me into his office and handed me a teleprinter slip. The message read: *D.S.S. from R.U.8. Priority immediate. Programmer reports misuse of computer time by R.D. on non-scheduled project. Possible psycho imbalance with consequent security risk but probably negligible at this stage. Suggest infiltration vetting at early date. Have notified Ministry. Bennett.*

I put the teletype on Makin's desk. He seemed in a bland and amiable mood, but his half-smile was merely a twist in the thin line of his lips caused by the weight of his pipe. He was a big, heavily built man, with the air of a family doctor, but he didn't have a bedside manner that you could notice. His green eyes were cool and cynical.

"Isn't R.U.8 the place down near Barnham?" I asked.

He nodded.

"And the R.D.?"

"The Research Director is a man named Gilley—Dr. Charles Howard Gilley. He was transferred to the Research Unit about a year ago, just before they installed the computer. There's a file on him in Central Registry."

I pushed my brain into a quick think. R.U.8 rang

a faint bell in my mind. "Something to do with biological warfare, if I remember rightly," I said.

"Not exactly. The Barnham boys are more subtle. They're playing about with something called genetic warfare."

"That doesn't click."

Makin's half-smile became a sour grin. "I hope it never will, Harland. Genetic warfare is about the nastiest piece of horror ever dreamed up by military scientists. In comparison, the H-bomb is benevolent old hat."

He took the pipe from his mouth and laid it carefully on the beaten-up surface of his old desk, stained with multiple rings, like an Olympiad emblem, from innumerable cups of tea. "All the same," he went on, "it's currently the hottest strategic weapon in the long-term cold war. The Sino-Soviet bloc are on to it in their secret laboratories, and the West has to keep pace in the interests of survival."

"Is that Gilley's line of business?"

"He was one of the first to convince the Ministry that nuclear weapons are now only the penultimate deterrent."

"Big stuff," I remarked. "What exactly *is* genetic warfare?"

"Don't worry about it now," he said in a characteristic fatherly tone of voice which I often found irritating. "You'll get a full briefing before you go."

No point in asking the obvious question—the job had already been assigned to me. In the words of the teletype, *Infiltration vetting at early date.* One of those snide jobs that I needed like I needed a hole in the head. It didn't sound like my line of business.

"What about the Solbakken case?" I asked. After all, that *was* my line at present. A dead man fished from the Thames estuary whose hands had been tied at some point with soluble cord, and who had later been identified as an M.I.6 agent working on a highly complex international currency plot aimed at subsidising subservise organisations in the West—only it wasn't the M.I.6 agent at all, but somebody made to look like him with a little shrewd plastic surgery. That posed a number of interesting questions, and Dr. Gilley and his computer sounded dull in comparison, genetic warfare or not.

"I think Patterson can handle that one," Makin said smoothly. He pushed his pipe back into his mouth and lit it noisily with a match. "It's routine cloak and dagger stuff, and probably an M.I.6 cover-up job, anyway. You know how they like to play at bluff-counter-bluff. In any case, we're only involved on the technical side—confirming the use of soluble cord, and so on. Forget about Solbakken. Gilley is more important, and you know about computers."

"I know something about computers," I admitted. "How soon *must* I go to R.U.8?" But the slight hint of irony was lost on Makin. His round smooth face remained passive and calm.

"In a few days. We have to arrange a plausible infiltration. The security side, for instance. Bennett could be ill—catch mumps, or something."

"Poor Bennett—at his age and married, too."

"Well, perhaps not mumps. An accident might be better. We'll think of something. Meanwhile, check through the files on Gilley and R.U.8. Absorb as much background as you can."

"And genetic warfare?"

He shook his head. "You won't find a single word in writing on *that* odious subject, but I'll fix a session for you with Sir John Sears of the Ministry. He's in charge of all the dirty work that goes on behind wire fences and locked doors. He'll put you in the picture."

"It sounds like the kind of picture one ought to stay out of," I said.

Makin merely looked smug. "Someone's got to run the sewage farms," he remarked.

I went back to my own office. It was a tiny office, with just about enough room for a small desk (with drawers on one side only), a hard uncomfortable chair and a very modern steel fireproof filing cabinet with special security locks. The floor was covered with plain brown linoleum, threadbare in places. The old cream paint on the walls had tarnished to a near sepia colour and the ceiling was very off-white. It was an old fashioned office in an old fashioned building in a narrow street not too far from Whitehall—as unobtrusive as the D.S.S. itself. For every ten people who had ever heard of the Department of Special Services, only one knew where it was located. The D.S.S., as a scientific operational subdivision of M.I.5 within the Ministry of Defence, preferred to remain anonymous.

It was a hot September afternoon—the end of an Indian summer, with temperature and humidity more reminiscent of July. The casement window of the room faced south, and the sun cast a trapezium of light across my desk. Everything else was submerged in shadow. The Busy Lizzie plant in the cracked pot on the window ledge looked

forlorn and unhappy. Perhaps it needed a double whisky, or even water. Busy Lizzie and I had a lot in common. We both felt dehydrated and neglected.

I flopped into the chair behind the desk, lifted the internal phone and asked Central Registry to send up the files on R.U.8 and Dr. Gilley. Then I stared through the window for a while. The glass needed cleaning. Beyond the glass and over the drab rooftops was the Thames. I couldn't see it, but I could imagine it. The river was cool and wet, and I was hot and sweaty. The time was just after four o'clock and it was already a very long afternoon.

This is your life, Mark Harland, I told myself (but I didn't have the right Eammon Andrews accent). You always wanted to be a back-room boy and that's exactly what you've got—a back room. Ambition realised. Still, the money's good, and you need the money. Or, rather, Lynn needs the money. She's got expensive tastes, that girl. Pity she's such an irresistible bird of paradise, otherwise you might be able to save up enough to buy yourself a Premium Bond.

Why not stop complaining? Everyone gets what he deserves, even if he doesn't deserve what he gets. And oddly enough you're near the top of your profession—if you can call it a profession. You're not too old and not too young; tough enough without losing the suave manner when the situation calls for it; experienced enough, going back to the Intelligence Officer phase of the late war years (don't make me laugh!). At any rate, Makin throws you the awkward jobs, and that's a compliment. Praising by faint damns. Maybe one day

you'll get promotion—if Makin should drop dead, for instance.

Let's think about Gilley and R.U.8. Dr. Charles Howard Gilley, Research Director of Research Unit No. 8, engaged in developing genetic warfare techniques under the over-all direction (administration and policy) of the Ministry of Defence. That's all there is to think about because at the moment you have no further information. Come on, Central Registry, hurry up!

Somewhere in the picture there's a computer. *Programmer reports misuse of computer time by R.D. on non-scheduled project.* Naughty Dr. Gilley to misuse computer time—a computer that probably cost the best part of half a million pounds, custom-built to specifications supplied by the Ministry. Probably a British machine rather than American IBM, even though IBM has three-quarters of the world computer market. Very likely ICT—one of the new second-generation range—or English Electric-Leo or Ferranti (but Ferranti is ICT anyway, these days). A fast flexible digital computer, orientated towards the defence programme. Yes, you know something about computers, Harland, but then you're supposed to. It's your job to keep up with contemporary scientific and technological progress. The D.S.S. is alleged to be M.I.5's expert on applied science.

There's a fly on your desk, walking towards the grubby green blotter, watching you with its big red eyes. Live and let live. A fly is a greater miracle than a computer. Clever fly—no transistors, no integrated circuits, no micrologic modules. How the devil do you do it in such a tiny space?

Possibly psycho imbalance with consequent secu-

rity risk. Is there such a word as "imbalance"? Probably only in the Ministry of Defence. All it means is that Bennett, the Security Officer, suspects that Dr. Gilley is a nut case. Who isn't these days? The "psycho imbalance" is relatively unimportant—it's the security risk that matters. Dr. Gilley might talk in his sleep to an enemy spy hiding under his bed. Ah, well—it's a tough life being a spy.

The arrival of the files from the Central Registry put an end to the mental free-wheeling. They were delivered by Dawn (I never did learn her surname), a curving pretty girl with blonde hair and clear blue eyes and a flirtatious manner. (Obviously a bad security risk—send memo to Ministry.)

"Is there anything else you would like, Mr. Harland?" she inquired with a smile.

I gave her an old fashioned look. "Yes, but your husband wouldn't approve."

"I'm not married, Mr. Harland."

"Ah, but you will be one day and he still wouldn't approve. They never do."

She pouted—just a friendly little forward movement of the lips, as if she wanted to be kissed—and we left it at that. She knew just how much provocative banter was permissible within the formal protocol of staff relations. Sooner or later she would encounter an executive wolf who would take her at face value and try to devalue her currency, but he would burn his wings—if wolves have wings.

I put the files in front of me on the desk and stared at them for a while without enthusiasm. Then I loosened my tie and lit a cigarette. Dr. Charles Howard Gilley, here I come.

There was a whole-plate glossy portrait photograph of Gilley in the first file. He was gaunt and lean, with a considerable mop of fair hair, kinked into a well defined wave, brushed straight back from a classic noble brow. Ascetic looking, with dreamy eyes reduced behind concave glasses in thin metal frames, he ought to have been a poet or a 'cello player in a symphony orchestra. A beard would have done much to add virility to the sensitive and somewhat effeminate nature of his appearance. At a guess his age was around forty-five.

The dossier notes on Gilley were concise and fairly comprehensive. For a leading research scientist occupying so responsible a post his academic qualifications were surprisingly few—just a B.Sc. and membership of two rather obscure learned societies. In his post-graduate years he had specialised in molecular biology, first in the research department of a university, then in an industrial laboratory concerned with the physiological testing of advanced pharmaceutical products, and finally with government research units sponsored by the Ministry of Defence. He had been at R.U.8 for just over a year, presumably to take command of the computer programmes. Before that he had spent five years in a subordinate appointment at R.U.3, near Carlisle, on more conventional biological warfare matters.

The genetic warfare flap was of comparatively recent origin; it had built up over the past two years, and it was fairly obvious that Gilley's specialist know-how in the field of genetic DNA coding had been primarily responsible for his transfer to Barnham. I resolved to check up on

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) and its ramifications at a later date. For the moment there was nothing to be gained by wasting time on technicalities.

Gilley was unmarried and, so far as Security had been able to ascertain, without a girl friend, either now or in the past decade. If he had any homosexual tendencies at all they were latent and he was certainly non-practising. He lived in one of the small flats provided by the Ministry for the senior staff of the research unit, close to the centre itself, where reasonable security surveillance could be exercised. The flats were contained in a series of austerely converted cottages about a mile from R.U.8, and near to a small village which boasted one church and four pubs. But Gilley did not drink, nor did he smoke, and he seldom if ever left his flat except to drive to R.U.8 in a black Wolseley saloon car provided as a perk by authority. Although the small flats contained cooking facilities, Gilley took all his meals in the canteen at the research centre, where he would invariably stay until late each evening, sometimes until after midnight. He was clearly a dedicated man, completely immersed in his work to the point of obsession, with no interest in any kind of social life. This seemed to me to be a danger signal in itself, taking the viewpoint of any competent Ministry psychiatrist, but Gilley had pursued his own single-minded way without interference—until now.

The other file gave a detailed run-down on the main research projects which had been undertaken at R.U.8 since the centre was opened four years ago. Some were unclassified, some top secret, but most came under a security blanket of one kind or

another. Initially the centre had specialised in investigating the effect of nuclear radiation on human cells, particularly in terms of genetic mutation. It was logical, therefore, that R.U.8 should eventually undertake the more recondite research called for in the genetic warfare programme. Since that time security had been tightened. A member of the R.U.8 staff could hardly move an unexpected inch without teleprinters clicking in Whitehall.

It was all to pattern, of course—the pattern of Establishment quietly at work behind the scenes, studying and preparing the long term technology of attack and defence for the next two or three hot wars, while politicians tried in the short term to ease the tensions of current cold wars. Dr. Gilley was one of that grey circle of faceless men whose work is so tied up with national security that they practically cease to exist. They live in a kind of fourth dimension—ex-telephone directory, ex-street directory, ex-ratepayers' list and even ex-electoral roll—all of which demands a great deal of non-democratic wire-pulling at a very high level, but it can be (and is) done.

I made no notes—it was not encouraged, anyway—but spent some time committing to memory such details as seemed significant, leaving the blank spots (which were mainly concerned with genetic warfare) for Sir John Sears to fill in. One was not required to become an expert, but on an infiltration job it was necessary to understand what other people were doing—or trying to do. Thus one could fix an arbitrary norm of behaviour within a highly scientific environment, which was not always an easy thing to assess. There is a strong

link between behaviour and security, and a deviation from the norm may indicate a risk.

The sunlight had moved off my desk and was now illuminating a corner of the steel filing cabinet. It didn't excite my sense of aesthetic beauty. I yawned and glanced at my watch. Twenty-five minutes past five—nearly time to call it a day and leave the nation's scientific security to look after itself for a few hours (in fact, it would be taken over by the ghost squad of invisible operators who sleep all day and work all night while the offices housing the machinery of security are, to the ever watching eyes of the ungodly, in darkness and deserted). Time to forget about Gilley, R.U.8, and the niceties of molecular biology and genetic warfare, and to concentrate instead on common or garden human biology by developing the growing entente cordiale of the Lynn-Harland axis.

I called the Central Registry to have the files collected, fixed my collar and tie, lit a cigarette and waited for Dawn to arrive.

"Did you get all you wanted, Mr. Harland?" she asked as she entered the room. It was the usual gambit, offering an opening for some flirtatious cross-talk. This time I didn't rise.

"I never get all I want—but that's life," I said. "Dawn, would you like to do something for me?"

"Something exciting?"

"Like bring me a glass of water."

She stared at me in surprise for an instant and seemed almost on the point of asking some idiotic question (such as how much whisky did I want in it, or was I going to take a bath) when she simply said: "Certainly, Mr. Harland."

She went out of the room and came back a

minute later with a plastic tumbler full of water and put it on the desk. I gave her the files.

"Will that be all, Mr. Harland?"

"Sufficient unto the day," I said.

When she had gone I took the tumbler over to the window ledge and poured the water into the Busy Lizzie pot. The poor wilting thing seemed to brighten up immediately. Nobody could say I wasn't an animal lover.

I said good-bye to the office and the D.S.S. and made my way via a crowded and uncomfortable tube train to my modest flat on the southern fringe of Earls Court.

"I shall be going away for a few weeks," I told Lynn.

"Not again," she groaned, looking at me with a pained expression in her grey-green eyes.

It was just after eleven and we were eating stunning food at a stunning price in a small classy restaurant near Knightsbridge. In the subdued lighting Lynn appeared particularly ravishing—she had the kind of satin skin which looks edible in a mellow glow. Her auburn hair had been set in a new style which she assured me was the latest S.W.3 and unlikely to reach S.W.7 for at least a fortnight. It looked okay to me, like a Mark III Cleopatra, but in burnished bronze. She was wearing a dark green dress which was very Eaton Square and probably cost a month's salary, which (as she was an account executive for an American advertising agency with palatial offices in Park Lane) was hardly peanuts.

So far as Lynn was concerned I was practically the Prime Minister. I had a very important job in

the Board of Trade (i.e. the Government), and had something to do with industrial capital investment and depreciation allowances (i.e. the Economy), so that I needed to travel around quite a lot to cast a vetting inspectorial eye on factories and plant (i.e. a perambulating Minister of Technology). It was a cover commonly used by D.S.S. agents, who were never allowed to admit that the Department existed.

"But I shan't be very far away," I added, "and if all goes well I'll be in town at week-ends."

"Don't put yourself out too much," she said, forking a fragment of steak that was worth its weight in gold. "Where is it this time?"

"Deep in the heart of Sussex. Truly rural and all that."

"But *exactly* where? Sussex is a big place."

"Lynn, my darling," I said, "you know very well I can't talk about internal governmental matters any more than, say, an Inspector of Taxes can chat to his friends about his back-duty cases."

"If it's only Sussex, why can't you commute? Bill Fairchild travels from Winchelsea to London and back every day."

"Hurray for Bill Fairchild! Maybe I can commute, but I shan't know until I get there. Maybe if I work evenings I can cut the length of the job in half—say three weeks away instead of six."

"In that case, commute," she ordered. "I don't want you during the day, anyway, but my hormones demand you in the evenings."

I grinned. "Your hormones need a holiday. You work them too hard."

Later that night, lying in bed together with sleep settling down like a soporific fog, she said: "You

know now why I want you to commute, don't you, Mark." It was a statement, not a question.

"I've known for the best part of a year."

"Perhaps you're growing tired of me."

"I'm growing tired of you like I'm growing tired of my salary cheque."

"Prove it," she whispered.

I did, but the girl certainly had more stamina than me in the small hours of the night. She had a great future as a man-eater.

Chapter Two

Sir John Sears was a little melancholy man who looked as if he might be an ageing Lloyd's underwriter who had underwritten San Francisco just before the earthquake and had never quite recovered from the shock. He was a wizened gnome dressed in best Parliamentary short black jacket and striped pants, with a silver tie and an impeccable white cotton shirt (imported, of course, probably from Switzerland). We met in a private room in the House of Commons, as an important debate was in progress and a division was expected at any moment. We sat at opposite sides of a very old and solid table, surrounded by panelled walls reminiscent of Henekey's Long Bar in High Holborn.

"I had a note from Makin," Sears explained,

patting his coat as if to check that the note was still there in his inside pocket. "About Gilley. Met him once. Funny man, but with it, you know, *with it*—in a quaint sort of way. You *do* see what I'm getting at, don't you, Harland?"

I nodded. Better to let Sears unwind himself in his own way, and try to keep him on the rails when necessary.

"He's an odd pill, to use a popular cliché," Sears went on. It wasn't a cliché that I had ever heard, and he probably meant odd ball, but who was I to act as Fowler? "In the ordinary way we wouldn't be concerned with slight eccentricities. I mean, our research units are knee deep in frustrated geniuses. But R.U.8 is different. It's a Category A establishment. You see what I'm getting at?"

"I know the background," I said, "but I'm not clear about genetic warfare and its precise place in the scheme of things."

Sears glanced quickly round as if looking for bug microphones or concealed television cameras. "Ah, well, Harland—it's a long-term subtle thing. The next phase in the confrontation between East and West, now that an H-bomb war is no longer feasible. You see what I mean?"

"Yes," I said, not really seeing what he meant.

"It's also tied up with the population explosion. Very soon, certainly by the end of the century, there will be too many people in the world. Population is outstripping food and civilized facilities. Survival will revert to the basic process of evolution, natural selection, survival of the fittest. But you have to think in terms of political power groups."

"I see what you're getting at," I said, anticipating him.

"This new kind of war is one of biological undermining. No nuclear weapons—not even conventional weapons. A policy of destroying the enemy from within over a period of several generations."

"How?"

He leaned forward in his chair, propping his elbows on the table and eyeing me intently.

"I'll tell you, Harland. By interfering with the molecular chemistry of the human cell. By introducing and distributing drugs and viruses which modify, mutate and deform the human embryo. A nation could be emasculated in one generation, become a colony of moronic horrors in two, and be wiped out in three."

He spread his skeletal hands expressively in the air. "It can be done as gently and insidiously as radioactive fall-out. Airborne, waterborne. Dispersed protein dust or nucleogenic virus settling down into the air we breathe, on to the reservoirs, the pastures we cultivate and graze. Result—defective genes, preventing the proper formation of adenine, thymine, guanine, cytosine in the embryonic cell . . ."

"What the devil are they?" I asked.

"The four main constituents of DNA."

"And DNA?"

He explained, in his jerky but knowledgeable style. DNA is the abbreviation for deoxyribonucleic acid—a substance which governs the development and operation of every cell and therefore determines the shape, form and function of all living matter. It is the material of genes and the basis of

genetics. It occurs in minute spiral strands in the nucleus of each cell. In a human being each cell contains six feet of these strands, and there are more than ten billion miles of DNA strands in the ten thousand billion cells of the body. From the instant of conception until death DNA controls physical structure and appearance, and influences function, thought and character through the operation of the brain, the nervous system and the ductless glands.

The DNA spiral is made up of four basic nucleic acids (adenine, thymine, guanine and cytosine) arranged in a particular sequence which amounts to a genetic code, and the code differs for every individual. The nucleic acids act as a genetic alphabet which, when formed into words, writes out a recipe for the form and function of every individual. DNA is fundamentally responsible for the production of proteins and enzymes which control the chemical processes of the body—making bones, storing fats, creating pigments, controlling growth and digestion, and determining thinking.

For more than a decade intensive work has been applied to breaking the genetic code, for this could give man ultimate eugenic control over his own species. All the cells in any one human being are equipped with complete and identical sets of DNA—the equivalent of a million building-brick instructions. When faults occur in the coding of the DNA spiral during the embryonic stage, the result can be anything from physical deformity to physiological malfunction, or both together, running the whole gamut of tragic congenital defects.

The DNA chain in a single gamete or ovum, or

in an early embryo, can be damaged in a number of ways—by ambient radiation and cosmic rays, by man-made radiation from nuclear devices, by certain drugs and by particular viruses. The damage, from whatever cause, knocks certain of the DNA building bricks out of action, and so makes nonsense of the encoded information, like a corrupt group in a military cypher message.

The result is mutation, and it is unfortunately true that the vast majority of mutations are bad mutations from a eugenic point of view. They are invariably incapable of reproducing a normal individual (if capable of reproduction at all), unable to survive on their own merits, and in any event handicapped in relation to the norm. What Sears was saying in his clipped pedantic way was that the aim of genetic warfare was to mutate the enemy; that such deliberate mutation might be under way at the present moment; that a full generation might elapse before it became possible to prove statistically that such mutation was taking place on a scale beyond that due to the normal level of environmental radioactivity. It was a sombre thought.

"You can appreciate the problem," Sears said, placing the tips of his fingers together as if praying to a genteel deity. "This kind of invisible atrocity could be happening now. I don't *think* it is, but if it *is* . . . We wouldn't be able to prove it for many years."

"Where does the computer come into it?" I asked.

"To speed up research. Gilley's main task is to crack the genetic code. Until we know exactly what the code is supposed to do we can hardly

know when and how it is being interfered with. But in addition there is the more serious practical chore of carrying out sampling analysis tests. Millions of them."

"Samples of what?"

"Air, water, food, bacteria, pollens, radiation—anything and everything which impinges on human life in this country. We use spectro-analysers to break down the constituents. The data is fed into the computer, which is programmed to recognise factors, or combinations of factors, which could modify the DNA code. Do you see what I'm getting at? This, I assure you, Harland, takes up the greater part of the available computer time."

I considered for a moment, then said: "You know, Sir John, I've worked in the D.S.S. for a long time. I'm familiar with most of what goes on behind the scenes of the Establishment, but it has never occurred to me that the government is engaged in a full scale operation of checking on what you might call mutation by enemy action."

Sears smiled in a narrow secretive way. "One of the more obvious operations, Harland. The government is also experimenting with substances capable of causing mutation—as a kind of deterrent, if I may call it that. Deterrents are the fashionable weapons of today. But there are things that would surprise you even more. Don't give all the credit to the government. There's a Civil Service, too, you know, which doesn't depend on universal suffrage for survival. You see what I mean?"

I saw what he meant. The essential parameters of social organisation were divorced from the political heirarchy. For example, the underground nuclear shelters which had been constructed for

administration in "the event" were non-aligned from a party point of view. Behind the parties was the ultimate authority of the Establishment—the invisible national entity concealed by the government whose sole object was to ensure the survival of those who were fittest (in its view) to survive.

"All this makes a kind of sense," I conceded. "What you imply is that Gilley is working for the Establishment rather than the government."

Sears blew his nose loudly on a big white handkerchief, then wiped the corners of his eyes. In a solemn voice he said: "Gilley appears to be working for himself. I understand he's pursuing some experiment which involves analysis by computer of imaginary DNA changes in a hypothetical animal. But it's not on the order book for R.U.8. We can't spare the computer time to investigate a Gilley whimsy, which he is pursuing at public expense. On the other hand, we don't want him to feel that he is being criticised. A naughty little boy, wasting the taxpayers' money. Also, he's very sensitive about his Beast."

"Beast?" I queried.

"Oh, a staff joke, according to Bennett. It's a sort of code name for his unofficial experiment. Biological Evolutionary Animal Simulation Test—B.E.A.S.T. All very pat and contrived. American style thinking."

"Let me get this straight," I said, tapping the desk with a rigid index finger. "You are telling me that Dr. Gilley is using a Ministry computer for an unauthorised experiment to study simulated DNA changes in an imaginary animal."

Sears nodded. "Give or take an argument or two, Harland, that's about it."

"And that isn't relevant to the work at R.U.8."

"It's completely irrelevant. Gilley, I'm told, is merely trying to check the Darwinian theory of evolution. It's an academic study with no military applications whatever."

I sucked a deep breath through my teeth. It seemed the only sensible thing to do. From my objective and fairly laymanish point of view, any work on DNA was relevant to the overall programme, whether the animal concerned was imaginary or not. The only valid objection might arise if more important defence work was being kept from the computer because of Gilley's concentration on his "academic study," as Sears had termed it. I needed to know more about the study itself.

"Just how does Gilley simulate a non-existent animal?" I asked.

"Applied mathematics. He feeds in basic data for cell structure. Simple DNA coding. Environmental conditions, nutrition, temperature and so on. Then he lets it grow. Mathematically, of course. You see what I mean?"

"What's the point?"

Sears hunched his shoulders fractionally in what might have been an undeveloped shrug. "Exactly, Harland. What's the point? There are more vitally important ways of using valuable computer time. That's why Makin wants you to go down to Barnham."

"To separate Gilley from his Beast?"

"Not primarily. To infiltrate and report back. To find out whether the genetic warfare programme is being obstructed. We would also like to know whether Gilley's Beast programme is a viable project in any sense at all. We think not, but we

don't wish to be too dogmatic about it. More urgently, we want to know whether Gilley's mind is properly balanced."

"Understood," I said. "And you also want to know whether Gilley is a security risk."

He pondered that for a moment. "I don't think that applies, but of course you can never tell. So far as the Ministry is concerned, anything that departs by a mere hair's breadth from the norm is a security risk. But that is not the main consideration in this case, if you see what I mean."

"All right, Sir John. What *is* the main consideration?"

"I'm not sure," he said quietly. "Just a feeling, a suspicion, that something strange is going on. Contrary to Ministry policy. May result in an embarrassing situation at some point."

"I thought we had all the facilities we needed to deal with embarrassing situations," I said.

A cynical smile which seemed to say "Are you kidding?" In fact, he made no comment. Personally, I couldn't see how Gilley and his Beast could possibly be embarrassing in any political sense—but one learns the hard way.

I promised I would do my best, and Sears made grateful noises, and we duly parted company. The division bell never sounded at all.

Makin wanted me to report to R.U.8 on the following day. Bennett had twisted his ankle, and there was a suspected fracture of an obscure and probably useless bone. He would be away from work for at least three weeks. It was all a subterfuge, of course, but the D.S.S. could organise these things well enough. I was to take over his post as

security officer on a temporary basis. They had given me a background to memorise—one that would stand up to internal checks from Gilley himself, if necessary (for he, naturally, was perfectly entitled to vet the security status of all new appointments to R.U.8). I was to be a Ministry liaison officer concerned with security matters and available for "field work" when necessary. A fake Harland dossier was prepared, Rotaprinted, and distributed to the various offices that might receive enquiries.

Bennett was coming up to London in the late afternoon, and calling in at the Ministry en route to his suburban home at Pinner, where he would nurse his imaginary fracture on full salary during the infiltration exercise. I made a point of seeing him. We met in the Ministry building, and as it was already half past five, found a local pub where we could exchange confidences over a quick beer.

Bennett was a small neat man with what I can only describe as a permanently pleading face—as if he desperately wanted to be liked. In fact, his appearance was deceptive. He had a shrewd quick mind, and he didn't really care whether he was loved or hated. We discussed the infiltration manœuvre in general terms for a while—he approved of it, mainly because it meant for him an unexpected vacation—and then I got down to asking more specific and motivated questions.

"What have you actually got on Gilley in terms of hard fact?" I asked.

Bennett seemed vaguely surprised. "Got on him? Nothing like that. I mean, he's not guilty of any particular misdemeanour."

"But this question of computer time?"

"Exactly. There *have* been delays in the routine day-to-day computer programme. The Ministry asked me to investigate. I discovered that Gilley was using the computer for an unauthorised experiment."

"Did you find out about the experiment?"

"I'm not a technical man," he said with a self-effacing grimace. "Miss Rayner—she's the computer programmer—gave me some information. Mathematical test of evolution, and all that."

"Didn't you tackle Gilley himself about it?"

"Well, no. It's a Ministry responsibility. My job is security not programming."

"What's the general attitude of the R.U.8 staff to Gilley's unscheduled experiment?"

He shrugged. "Amused tolerance, I should say. He's an eccentric character, make no mistake. Got a memory like a sieve. Calls me Benson half of the time, and occasionally Bendix, as if I were a washing machine."

"It all sounds harmless enough," I commented. "I can't really see why the D.S.S. should be involved."

"Agreed, not as things are at present. On the other hand, if things continue to develop along the same lines . . ."

"You think maybe Gilley is on the skids, psychologically speaking?"

"I'm not a psychologist, Harland—but Gilley may well be on the skids."

"What about the rest of the staff?"

He frowned. "What can one say? Competent and reasonably dedicated. No security angles. I think most of them have been to bed with Miss Rayner."

"Gilley's programmer . . ."

"She's a Swedish girl. Her true name is Synøve

Olsen. She married a young American profligate in the oil industry named Rayner. She's a beautiful girl, Harland. And on the Q.T., she's a bit of a nympho—so watch your step."

"I'm immune," I lied. "I look at beautiful women through opaque glasses. Does, erm—Synøve cause trouble?"

"Not at all." He shook his head vigorously. "She's just a typical Scandinavian girl—open and uninhibited. I gather the marriage has reached the point of no return—literally. Her husband is somewhere in the Middle East. I'm just trying to put you in the picture."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll keep a beady eye on Synøve. I take it she has no connection with the Gilley problem."

"No connection at all—but she knows more about Gilley's experimental programme than anybody else. Talk to her by all means, but keep her at arm's length."

"If I can."

He smiled. "How long is an arm?"

We drank another beer, at which point I took my leave of Bennett, because I had a date with Lynn later that evening. But before I departed I asked: "Didn't they tell you to act the part?"

He looked puzzled for a moment. "Act what part?"

"You're supposed to have a fractured foot. Don't you have to wear bandages, plaster, crutches and things?"

"Oh, no," he said with a broad smile. "Nobody's going to check up. All I have to do is disappear for a few weeks until I'm sent for."

"Okay," I said. "It's contrary to general wool-

over-the-eyes procedure, but it's not my job to issue instructions on disguise."

"Disguise isn't necessary, Harland. There's no subversive activity at R.U.8."

I accepted that for what it was worth, and a minute or two later Bennett went off in the direction of Pinner while I made my way towards Sloane Square, where Lynn lived in a tiny but extravagant luxury flat.

We went out to dinner in a chi-chi restaurant in Soho. It was a rash move—I couldn't really afford it. The bill would have fed an underdeveloped country for six months. She attempted the first phase of an obvious togetherness gambit.

"Mark," she said quietly, eyeing me solemnly, "I think I'm pregnant."

"I've got news for you," I said. "I am sterile."

"You're a liar," she declared in an angry voice that attracted disapproving glances from the waiters, "and what's more you're a bastard."

"Once more with feeling," I suggested.

She repeated the allegation, but without feeling.

"Okay," I said, "how soon *must* you marry me?"

"I wouldn't marry you even if you asked me, which you haven't. Anyway, what makes you think *you're* the father of my child?"

"Exactly," I agreed.

"Now you're being offensive."

"In a hundred years from now it won't matter," I remarked with a shrug.

"Tell that to your grandchildren," she retorted. "Even if I *were* pregnant you wouldn't care."

"I would if you could make it stick," I conceded.

"Think of the tax relief. But let's face it, darling—you're no more pregnant than I am sterile."

"I could be. I was sick this morning."

"Too much alcohol and too many cigarettes. It has a delayed action effect on the liver, but it's never caused a pregnancy yet so far as I know."

She looked at me in a cunning steady fashion. "What I'm trying to say, Mark, is—why can't we rationalise our position? Or do you want us to continue indefinitely on a casual flirtation basis?"

"It's one of the best flirtations I've ever experienced," I said. "It makes marriage redundant."

"That's exactly my point. It's all very well for you to go jazzing off on Board of Trade business whenever it's convenient to the government, but where does it leave me? I'm not getting any younger."

"You're not getting any older, either," I said chivalrously.

"Oh, darling . . ."

"You've made a very persuasive proposal of marriage—almost a proposal of desperation, not to mention blackmail. Just name the day and tell me what we use for money."

Her attitude changed into immediate hostility. "Hell," she exclaimed, "what makes you think I'd want to marry *you*?" (She was very logical, like most women.)

"It was your idea, not mine."

"It's just that I'm a congenital nympho, and I might not remain faithful without a plain gold ring round my finger."

"Genital nympho," I said unkindly—but it was probably true. I liked the girl in the way one might like an electric food mixer: it was nice to look at

and play with, and held tremendous functional potentialities which one never really got around to exploiting, except in a superficial way. Maybe I was in a sour mood, or maybe I was conscious of the shadow of future events. I wasn't to know that by the time the Gilley case was over Lynn would be living with a wealthy married man, and destined to be cited as co-respondent in a divorce petition. There is really no security in human relationships.

We didn't say good-bye—just "see you." It was affectionate enough, and neither of us realised that it was an epitaph.

Chapter Three

How to site a top secret Ministry research establishment. Choose a quiet spot with access to a road in a developed rural area where drainage, water and electricity facilities are readily available. Woodland is preferable, to screen the proposed building from the casual observer. Erect something that looks like a small clinic of red brick and glass, but sink the main laboratories deep into the ground so that, like an iceberg, the greater part of the establishment is submerged. Then build a twelve-foot wall round the whole thing and install a check point at the main gate. Finally, to attract spies and make absolutely sure that the site is

pin-pointed on the missile target maps of every country engaged in the Cold War, put up a big sign announcing: *Ministry of Defence—Private Property—No Unauthorised Admittance.*

R.U.8 was a text-book example of a Ministry research centre. It lay some three hundred yards back from the winding secondary road that links Yawley with Eastergate, concealed from view by an extended copse through which one could occasionally catch a remote glimpse of the perimeter wall. A wire fence flanked the road along the length of the copse and the fields on either side. It was not the kind of fence that would keep intruders out; its main purpose was to create the impression of private land. Where the trees ended a side road had been built which circled the copse before reaching the main gate of the centre. A metal and wire gate across the entrance to the side road carried a notice: *Private—Tresspassers Will Be Prosecuted.* It might have been the entrance to a modern automated farm, or perhaps a small dispersed factory. The "no unauthorised admittance" sign was mounted on the high wall by the main entrance.

There was no trouble about gaining admission to the site. The guard on the gate was expecting me, and he waved me on after a cursory glance at my authorisation papers. I parked the car on the gravelled forecourt in front of the building, set my face into a half frown that was supposed to make me look more like a security officer, and went in.

The double glass doors of the entrance were set back under a rectangular porch. Above the centre of the door, mounted on the brickwork, was a heraldic insignie (Gilley's coat of arms?), and in

the dead centre light reflected from a tiny circle of convex glass. That would be the eye of the video camera, permanently monitoring arrivals and departures and transmitting pictures over landline to M.I.5. I resisted an urge to doff an invisible hat to it as I passed, and went into the building wearing my dour security-dog expression.

In a small white foyer another security guard sat at a reception desk. He stared at me with unwinking frog-like eyes while I introduced myself and produced various documents. Then, without comment, he pressed a red-tipped button on the desk intercom unit.

"A Mr. Harland for Dr. Gilley," he said in a flat voice.

"I'll be right along, George," the intercom announced in a metallic female voice.

He released the button. "Dr. Gilley's secretary will escort you, Mr. Harland. Would you like to take a seat?"

I gave George a winning smile, but remained standing. About three minutes later a door at the rear of the entrance hall opened, and a vision of unloveliness emerged. If she wasn't exactly fat, she was certainly well turned. Her face wouldn't have launched a dinghy, let alone a thousand ships. She wore a grey tubular costume underpinned by grey woollen stockings which were wrinkled around the ankles. Her brown hair had been cut short in masculine style and brushed straight back; it was secured with two large ornamental butterfly slides of blue plastic. Her eyes seemed small and remote behind heavy black-rimmed butterfly glasses. But her smile was warm and human, which indicated

that somewhere inside her was a woman waiting to get out.

She said: "How d'you do, Mr. Harland. I'm Dr. Gilley's secretary. Would you come this way, please?"

This way was through the door, along a short corridor, and into a large airy office with a wide horizontal window overlooking the forecourt. It was one of those ultra modern offices that look as if they have been twisted through the fourth dimension in some odd fashion, so that the furniture appears spindly and unreal, and light reflects from unexpected surfaces, and the contours follow some alien system of geometry. There were two desks in the office, both of curious black wood with angled edges and tapered legs set obliquely, so that they appeared to be astride. The smaller of the desks supported an intercom unit, a tiny switchboard, an electric typewriter, and a pale blue telephone. The bigger desk, Gilley's, was empty, apart from one green folder and two telephones (pink and white). There was the usual office furniture of filing cabinets, bookcases, chairs and a safe, but they looked as if they had been designed by Paul Klee. The décor was white and pale blue.

I nodded appreciation of the startling scene. "Quite an eyeful," I remarked, "and all out of public funds. Does the Arts Council know about it?"

"The best part is the view from the window," she said.

The view from the window showed cars parked on gravel, a strip of forlorn patchy grass and the brick wall.

"Yes, you could be right," I admitted.

"Please sit down, Mr. Harland," she said. "I'm Mrs. Gaffney."

Somehow I wasn't surprised; I just wondered about Mr. Gaffney.

"I often deputise for Dr. Gilley when he's otherwise engaged. At present he's terribly busy in the EDP room."

"What's the EDP Room?" I knew what it was, but it was the kind of question a new non-technical security dog would be expected to ask.

"I'm sorry—the electronic data processing room, where the computer is installed."

"I see. Well, then, Mrs. Gaffney—here I am to take over Bennett's job for a few weeks. Where do we go from here?"

She sat down at her desk and produced a folder from a drawer. She studied the contents for a moment.

"Mr. Smethers—he's in charge of staff administration—has put you in flat number fourteen. That's in the Savoy block." She smiled apologetically. "The flats are contained in converted cottages, and I'm afraid that the staff gave them names like the Savoy, Dorchester, Grosvenor, Hilton, Carlton, and so on. It's all very pretentious and twee, but it's rather too late to change the system."

"I suppose any resemblance to the Savoy is purely notional."

"Yes, unfortunately. Number fourteen is little more than a bedsitter, but there are modest cooking facilities, if you want to make coffee or fry an egg. Most of the staff use the canteen—but of course it means you have to eat on the premises. There are two pubs in Yawley where they serve cheap hot lunches, but nothing ambitious."

"Like sausage and chips."

"I'm told they do an excellent mushroom omelette at The Old Ship."

"At least we shall survive," I said. "So far as the job is concerned, I propose to familiarise myself with Bennett's paperwork, look through the files, and get to know the staff."

"Yes, I suppose so, Mr. Harland. There are no security problems here, and you'll find there's little enough to do. There's very little coming and going, and anyway it operates like an airline booking system. Mr. Bennett always knew well in advance when visitors were arriving."

"Good. I'm all in favour of maximum relaxation. When can I see Dr. Gilley?"

Behind the concave glasses, her eyes became thoughtful. "That's difficult to say, Mr. Harland. He's very preoccupied with the research programme. You know how it is with scientists."

"I don't know how it is with Dr. Gilley," I pointed out. "After all, he's in charge of R.U.8, and I should have thought it was his responsibility to meet his new Security Officer as soon as possible. Suppose I wasn't me. Suppose the real Harland had been intercepted on the way here, and I was a spy taking his place."

She smiled wrily. "What could Dr. Gilley do about *that*? In any case, you were checked from departure to arrival. *They* are very thorough about these things."

"I'm sure you're right," I conceded. "Why can't I go down to the EDP Room and see Dr. Gilley now?"

She hesitated and bit her lower lip. "That would

be rather irregular, Mr. Harland. Dr. Gilley hates being disturbed when he is working."

"All right—I'll leave Dr. Gilley in peace for the moment." I glanced at my watch; it was nearly noon. "If I were me," I went on, "I'd unload my bags at the Savoy and come back here for a bite to eat. Then perhaps I can spend the afternoon looking around and generally indoctrinating myself."

"That would be an excellent plan," she said, with evident relief. "Meanwhile, I'll let Dr. Gilley know you've arrived. He may well wish to see you after lunch."

"One final thing," I said. "Where do I find the key to my bedsitter?"

"Mr. Smethers in Room three. I'll show you the way."

Mr. Smethers had an ordinary three-dimensional office with conventional furniture, though the décor was still pastel. He turned out to be a wizened elderly man with a prim moustache, sparse grey hair and a shiny double-breasted grey suit which had probably been bespoke in the days when there was a fifty-shilling tailor. He made me sign for the key and wished me luck in a sardonic tone of voice which suggested he viewed life through dark-tinted glasses (possibly upturned). I discovered some time later that he spent most of his spare time making large quantities of excellent rice wine at a cost of roughly eightpence a bottle—in his room there were always about six gallons in varying stages of fermentation. It was all he could afford to drink on his salary.

The bedsitter at the Savoy was much the same

as a bedsitter anywhere in the better parts of West London—not as big as some, perhaps, but better appointed than many. The furniture was modern, and there was even a carpet—mottled green and rubber backed. The cottage conversions had certainly been competently carried out, though in the usual tasteless Ministry way. There were two storeys in each cottage, with two bedsitters on each level, one bathroom and two lavatories. A partitioned corner of the room contained a small triangular washbasin mounted in the angle of the wall, with a small electric heater to provide hot water. Nearby was a tiny electric grill with hotplate, plus an electric kettle. Harland was all set to have himself a ball.

I unpacked, then drove down to Yawley village just for the hell of it. The Old Ship was the first pub I encountered, so I stopped there for a pint of reasonably good local beer. I also bought a bottle of whisky to entertain myself during the long lonely evenings, just in case I failed to win friends and influence people.

"You up at the Ministry place?" asked the landlord, a beefy red-faced man with a huge moustache that needed a haircut.

"No," I said truthfully—I was in the pub. "What do they do up there?"

He eyed me speculatively for a moment, as if assessing my confidence rating, then leaned forward and said in a loud whisper: "Something to do with germ warfare. People who live round here don't like it much, I can tell you. Suppose there was an outbreak of something highly infectious—like, erm . . ."

"Cholera," I suggested.

He brightened immediately. "Worse than that. The Black Death. I read in the papers how they're experimenting with The Black Death in test tubes. Seems all wrong to me. And what's more"—he came even closer to me in a conspiratorial fashion—"it's my income tax and yours what's paying for it, yet we don't have no say, do we?"

I agreed that we didn't have no say, and that those who pay the piper should call the tune, and we decided, with mutual bonhomie, that wars should be fought between prime ministers in a boxing ring, armed with nothing more lethal than wooden swords and cardboard shields. One thing seemed certain enough: security at R.U.8 had been good enough to prevent local rumours of genetic warfare, though not good enough to preclude uninformed speculation about bacteriological warfare. On the other hand, the germ talk may have been spread deliberately by the Ministry as a red herring—for it was standard practice to put out a false image (usually lurid and sensational enough to stimulate off-the-beam gossip) as a mask for the real programme of work.

The landlord and I parted on amiable terms. I drove back to R.U.8 and found my way to the canteen, which was located on the first of the underground levels. It was quite a small canteen, catering for a staff of not more than thirty, and run on a self-service pattern. The menu was unambitious, but the steak which I ordered would have done credit to any Soho restaurant (and some of them could do with credit). Holding my tray, I scanned the room and saw Smethers sitting at a table talking to a pretty blonde girl in a white dress. I decided to join them, partly because I had

already met Smethers, and partly because the blonde girl looked Scandinavian enough to be Synøve Rayner.

"Ah, hello Harland," Smethers said. "How was the luxury flat?"

"A cross between Queen's Gate and Battersea," I said.

"You're preaching to the unconverted," he said in his characteristic sardonic voice. "London I wouldn't live in even if you doubled my salary—not that I could afford it even then. I prefer the bucolic life."

I glanced at the girl. She was more than pretty; she was beautiful in that off-beat way which fascinates rather than attracts. Her eyes were a very clear blue, and the underlying bone structure of her face was firm and regular. Her lips held a barely perceptible twist of humorous cynicism. Her straw-coloured hair, long and smooth, was swept with careful carelessness over one side of her head in a Garbo-like style. There was a personable liveliness about her, even though she sat quietly not saying a word. Although only in her mid-twenties she possessed the subtle qualities of the eternal Eve. It would not be true to admit that I fell in love with her there and then, but I could feel a syndrome forming. There are certain girls who are fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to have this drastic effect on men, and the trouble is they both recognise it. We exchanged glances, and we both knew that we were in communication on the same extra-dimensional wavelength. It was a matter of resonance.

After what seemed to be an interminable interval, as Smethers had not had the good manners to

introduce us, and as the girl had finished her coffee and was on the point of leaving, I said to her: "I'm Harland, the temporary Security Officer standing in for Bennett."

"How nice for you," she remarked. "I'm Rayner, the permanent computer programmer standing in for nobody."

"How nice for you, too," I came back at her. If she wanted to fence, I was willing to oblige. "That's a subject that interests me a great deal," I added.

She raised her beautiful eyebrows a fraction of an inch. "You mean computer programming—or programmers?"

"Both. You can't have one without the other."

Her voice was well modulated and slightly husky and pleasing to listen to. There was virtually no trace of accent, apart from an occasional shortness of vowel sounds which the English tend to drawl or slur.

"Hardly the right line of business for a security officer," she commented.

"Security is my job, but I have hobbies, too."

Smethers put in: "Trouble with people today is they let their hobbies interfere with their job." It was probably an oblique reference to Gilley, I thought, but with Smethers you couldn't be sure. I wished he would gobble up his lunch and go away.

"The point is that the Ministry is making more and more use of computer and data processing techniques," I explained. "It's really part of my job to know about it. That's one reason why I was sent here to replace Bennett. The top brass thought I might find time to learn something about the research programming side."

She looked doubtful for a moment. "You'll find our programmes are very much more complex than those they use in commerce and industry. But if you want tuition . . ."

"I'll present myself for tuition at the earliest possible moment," I affirmed.

"Dr. Gilley permitting," Smethers said. "Don't forget he's running a research centre—not an academy for security officers who want to learn about computers."

I sensed some hostility in Smethers' voice, so I gave him a sweet smile. "Dr. Gilley and I both work for the same boss, Smethers. I feel sure we can reach agreement. After all, it's not Dr. Gilley's computer, is it?"

"I wouldn't bank on that," he said with a sour grin. "I wouldn't bank on it at all." He pushed his chair back from the table, leaving his lunch unfinished. "Well, I must get back to the office. I've got work to do."

He left the table in a great hurry, as if there were a time bomb beneath it. The girl moved her chair back as if to leave, too, then appeared to change her mind.

"Don't pay any attention to Smethers," she said. "He always has a chip on his shoulder, as they say."

"I know," I said. "I'm good at assessing people at first sight."

"Oh. Have you assessed me yet?"

"The moment I saw you something in my mind said 'yes' in a loud voice."

She smiled, and my heart beat a little faster. "What an inarticulate mind you have, Mr. Harland. My reaction to you was far more complex."

"Such as?"

"My brain said to itself—he doesn't look like a security man and he doesn't talk like one. Mostly they tend to be formal and officious, like traffic wardens. So my brain asked itself some questions. If he's not a security man, then what is he, and who is he? And did Bennett really have an accident?"

"And what did your brain answer itself?"

"My brain told me that I have a cousin who is radiographer at Slinbourne hospital, which is the nearest hospital to Yawley and R.U.8. If Bennett had fractured a bone in his foot, Slinbourne is the place where he would go for an X-ray—but he didn't."

"Well, well," I remarked, "fancy M.I.5 slipping up on such a stupid point of detail. I wonder what Bennett's up to. Perhaps he's a spy?"

"Perhaps you're a spy, Mr. Harland?" Her voice was jocular, but her eyes were fixed intently on mine.

I grinned. "If I am, don't worry. I'm not licensed to kill."

"I don't mean *that* kind of spy. Forgive me for being so candid, but I think you may be a Ministry man sent here to check up on Dr. Gilley."

"Whyever should you think that?" I asked, with just the right amount of surprise.

"Because Dr. Gilley has been behaving in an eccentric fashion, and Bennett might have reported it to the Ministry—on the grounds of possible security risk."

"You have a lurid imagination," I said. "You must give up James Bond. People who live with computers may tend to think like computers."

"Yes," she agreed. "In binary language. One plus one equals two."

"True, but one plus one doesn't equal three—not on my kind of computer, anyway. And, incidentally, if you want documentary evidence of my bona-fide status, I can supply it."

"I'm sure you can. The Ministry are very good at paper work."

I shrugged. "You're a cynic, but at least you're an imaginative cynic—not like Smethers. He's a cynic in blinkers." After a pause, I added: "Why is Dr. Gilley bonkers, as you said?"

"I didn't say that. The word I used was eccentric. Anyway, please forget it." She seemed slightly embarrassed now. "What I meant was that occasionally he tends to behave in a strange fashion, but I'm sure it's because he's too immersed in his work. He probably needs a holiday. It just occurred to me that Bennett would have reported back to the Ministry—so I wasn't really surprised when he disappeared with a minor accident and you turned up . . ."

"Like someone from head office on a vetting mission?"

"I'm probably wrong, but that's the way my mind worked."

"Clever stuff," I admitted. "You ought to be in charge of counter-espionage, or something. But you overrate the Ministry, and M.I.5, too. They're not nearly so devious as you imagine—well, not always. But let's get back to Dr. Gilley . . ."

"Sorry, Mr. Harland," she said, standing up. "I've got a computer standing idle and it's costing the earth. Some other time, perhaps."

"Like this evening?"

She eyed me thoughtfully. "All right. Call for me about seven and I may let you buy me a drink at the local."

"Where do I call for you?"

"Room six in the Dorchester block."

"It's a date," I promised.

After she had gone I had some misgivings about deliberately involving myself with the girl. Makin would probably blow his top if he knew, particularly if he had overheard the recent conversation. On the other hand, her thinking was very much on the beam—dangerously so—and it seemed worth while to devote some of my time to undermining her suspicions about my true role in the affairs of R.U.8. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em—but strictly in the line of duty, of course.

It was all rationalisation. The truth was that Synøve Rayner was already on my mind in a big way.

Chapter Four

In the late afternoon I actually met Dr. Gilley, but by accident rather than design. It happened in the washroom, where I went around five o'clock for normal biological reasons, and it was not until I was actually washing my hands at one of a row of six washbasins that I realised the identity of the man two washbasins away. His gaunt face looked

excessively sallow, and the pale green eyes behind the concave glasses seemed dreamy and withdrawn. Although our eyes met, there was no hint of psychic contact—we could have been a hundred miles apart.

I waited until we were drying off on the mechanical towel dispensers before saying anything, and then it was merely a formal question put as a statement.

"Dr. Gilley?" Rather as Stanley might have said "Dr. Livingstone, I presume."

He looked at me in a remote way, as if I were some obscure bacterium under a binocular microscope. For a few seconds his mind was far away, and it required a positive effort of will for him to concentrate on the here and now. Then, abruptly, he smiled thinly and descended a few thousand feet towards earth. His mind changed gear—the increased revs were discernible behind his eyes.

"Yes, I'm Dr. Gilley," he said, "And—erm—you must be Mr. . . ."

"Harland—Mark Harland."

He said: "Yes, of course," but it obviously didn't register at first.

"I'm standing in for Bennett."

Something went click in his brain. "Bennett—ah, yes, Bennett. Unfortunate accident." A pause, then: "How is he?"

"Hobbling, but cheerful."

He traced the outline of his chin with an extended forefinger. "Let me see—was it a broken leg or a broken arm . . . ?"

"A fractured ankle bone."

"Yes, yes—I remember now."

"He should be fit again in a few weeks. Meanwhile . . ."

"Well, I assume you know what to do, Mr. Hartman."

"Harland," I prompted.

"Ah, of course." He touched his forehead. "I've a dreadful memory for names. I leave it to my secretary. A very capable young lady. You must meet her. You'll find her very helpful."

"I've already met her. She explained that you were very busy at the moment. I said I wanted to see you as soon as you were reasonably free. There's no urgency."

"Quite," he agreed. "Why exactly did they send you here, Mr. Harding?"

I let it go by default. Gilley was in a flying saucer. "I'm taking over security while Bennett is away," I explained. "Naturally, I'd like to talk with you some time about security policy."

He looked puzzled for a moment. "Oh, we don't have any security troubles here, you know. It's purely a matter of—erm—protocol. Is that the word?"

"It could be."

"I mean, Bennett looked after things very well. The Ministry orthodoxy. After all, one has to wave the flag—or perhaps wave the blueprint would be more accurate. We've never had security problems. I'm sorry he broke his arm, but I'm sure you'll fit in quite well, Mr. Harlow."

"Thank you," I said. What else could I say? Synøve Rayner was right. Gilley was bonkers. But he was bonkers in a very sincere and well meaning way. He was a living caricature of the absent minded scientist, and yet there was a quality of

austere single-mindedness in his manner. No wonder the Ministry was worried.

"Perhaps we could have a talk some time," I suggested. "I'm told that R.U.8 is engaged on a really top secret project, and I'd like to be sure that I maintain Bennett's high standard of security."

"Have a word with Mrs. Gaffney," he murmured absently. "She's my secretary. You'll find her very helpful. She'll arrange something."

"I'm sure she will."

At that point he seemed to switch his mind off. The conversation, so far as he was concerned, had reached a natural break. With a quick hesitant smile (or was it just a nervous twitch of his lips?) he walked out of the washroom—presumably returning to his beloved computer.

I went back to Bennett's office to do what I had been doing most of the afternoon—going through the files and staff dossiers to put myself in the picture on recent history. There was little that was remarkable from a security point of view. One member of the staff had been transferred about a year ago when it was discovered that his brother-in-law had been a member of the Communist Party about ten years earlier, and that was about as exciting as the security records went. Bennett must have had a relaxing time. The current aberration of Dr. Gilley appeared to be the most sensational event in the R.U.8 security calendar, and poor Bennett had missed out on the climax of that. Perhaps he preferred it that way.

I made some notes about Gilley, just for the record. Intellectual, polite, withdrawn, superficially

rational in manner but suffering from an incoherent memory (probably in things which were not of direct scientific interest to him). A typical boffin, not suited to administrative responsibilities and relying heavily on a competent secretary. A premature judgement, perhaps, but fair comment on observed performance to date.

I put the sheet of paper on which I had just written into a buff folder and wrote "RD" on it, i.e. Research Director. It was the beginning of a dossier on Gilley, and in due course it would grow, page by page, and find its way into the archives of the D.S.S. central registry. One didn't leave material of that kind lying around, so I put the folder into the rather cheap-looking document case that I frequently carried around with me. It wasn't quite as cheap as it looked. The apparent black plastic was nylon over a steel wire mesh, and the zip was of tungsten steel, too, with a neat miniaturised lock which, in the absence of a key, could only be opened by an oxyacetylene cutter. It wasn't one hundred per cent thief proof, but to gain access to the contents was a major engineering job.

The time was coming up to five thirty—almost time to call it a day and leave security to the twenty-four hour watch system of the security guards. I had been warned in advance that one did not necessarily work office hours at R.U.8, and that it was quite common for the more dedicated members of the staff to stay on duty until late evening just for the hell of it. Well, it was a charming thought—but on my first day I decided that domestic organisation took first priority. Dedication could come later.

I glanced through a few of the personnel dossi-

ers, and was about to check up on the life history of Synøve Rayner when the intercom telephone rang. I lifted the receiver.

"Harland," I said.

Mrs. Gaffney's voice came through the loudspeaker grille. "Oh, Mr. Harland, Dr. Gilley wondered if you could spare a minute."

"Why not? Is he in his office?"

"Yes."

"I'll be right over."

"Thank you, Mr. Harland."

I replaced the files and locked the filing cabinet, and made my way to Gilley's office. He was at his desk, reading a typewritten document and stroking his thick fair hair with slender sensitive fingers. Mrs. Gaffney was at her desk, too, sticking what appeared to be typewritten labels on to envelopes; but as I came into the room she stood up, smiled at me, and went out, leaving me alone with Gilley.

He glanced at me and nodded amiably. "Do sit down, Mr. Harvey."

"Harland," I said, but not pushing it too far. He didn't seem to hear.

"Did Smethers fix you up with suitable accommodation?" he asked. His voice was gentle and his expression kindly.

"Excellent."

"One can't expect too much, of course. We are rather in the backwoods, and there isn't much social activity—but on the whole it tends to be an advantage."

"I'm sure it must be," I agreed, playing it by ear.

He stared at me through his concave glasses, put his elbows on the desk and placed the tips of his fingers very carefully together.

"The truth is that R.U.8 is rather *different* from other Ministry research units," he said, still using the same quiet and thoughtful tone of voice. "We enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy. This is because we are engaged in very advanced and forward thinking—tomorrow's thinking, if you like. The staff realise this, of course, and I must say they enter into the spirit of the thing very well—very well indeed."

I didn't know whether to nod, shrug or smile. I said: "How fortunate you are, Dr. Gilley." That seemed to please him. The corners of his sombre lips softened a little.

"It's all a question of teamwork, Mr. Hartley. That, and the delegation of responsibility. I'm a great believer in letting people get on with the job they are paid to do. I find they do it more effectively and efficiently, so that with the resources and facilities available we can undertake additional projects.'

"You mean non-scheduled projects?" I ventured.

He looked pensive and very solemn for a moment, then shook his head slowly. 'I wouldn't say that exactly. It's basically a question of taking up the slack in the organisation. As you know, we have here at R.U.8 a very expensive electronic computer. It cost the Treasury more than half a million pounds. In the interest of economic operation it is *essential* to keep the computer fully employed. The Ministry realise this, of course. After all, they have to account for the cost. So, when the computer is not in use on a scheduled programme, we devise new projects to feed into it."

For a moment it occurred to me that Gilley, in

his own subtle way, was entertaining exactly the same suspicions about me as had Synøve Rayner. His attitude suggested that he thought I was a Ministry man assigned to investigate non-scheduled projects in general and Gilley himself in particular. In self-defence he was presenting his own case in a mild brainwashing act long before I could have time to talk to other members of the staff. But a moment later the theory seemed implausible; Gilley was merely trying to put me in the picture, trying to explain (before I could discover for myself, as Security Officer) that certain activities at R.U.8 did not conform to Ministry specification. He was a man with a faint guilt complex in search of sympathy and support.

"What kind of new projects?" I asked.

"Anything that will help to keep the computer fully occupied, Mr. Harwood. In the intervals between processing routine data. I don't suppose you know what we are trying to do here at R.U.8 . . ."

"Vaguely. Something to do with genetics and DNA, I believe."

"That is the basic donkey work, as it were—but there are other more important concepts which one must—well, pursue."

"I wouldn't know one concept from another," I remarked.

Gilley's lips made a slight movement which implied patronising indulgence. "I think concepts are best left to scientists, Mr. Harding." A brief pause, then: "I suppose you wonder why I am telling you all this?"

I shrugged. "All what?"

"Let me put it this way," he explained, spreading

his fingers spider-like on the desk. "You are here on a temporary basis, and I don't suppose Bennett's broken arm will keep him away for more than a week or two. The Ministry will almost certainly ask you questions about R.U.8 when your tour of duty is over. Naturally they will want to take advantage of your position as—as . . ."

"As a spy?"

He frowned. "Oh, no, no—nothing like that. Part of their documentation, intelligence system, and so on. They always do, as you must know."

"I suppose so," I agreed, "but I can't see that it matters unless you've got something to hide."

He didn't like the remark. His face darkened, and the general atmosphere became several degrees cooler. He said: "It's not a question of hiding anything, but of operating imaginatively within a prescribed budget." He waved his right hand in a disparaging gesture. "Oh, there are some criticisms, I know. That is why I wish to make it perfectly plain that spare computer time is only used for projects which, though non-scheduled, are nevertheless vitally important and significant."

"Such as what, Dr. Gilley?"

The resentment faded. Now he was dreamy and withdrawn again. His mind had obviously returned to the plane of concepts, which was more soothing.

"The creation of *life,* Mr. Harwell. Does that not seem to you to be significant?"

"Could be," I admitted. "It depends on what you mean by life."

"*Intelligent* life," he emphasised, tapping the desk with his forefinger. "Not in any tangible form, of course—but nevertheless an *entity* exhibiting all

the characteristics of life at a high evolutionary level."

"How?"

For the first time since I had met him he actually smiled. It was not a devious or even a smug smile, but rather the smile of a man who is happy to have a captive interested audience. Clearly Gilley was eager to talk about his entity, and I was equally eager to encourage him.

"I'm afraid it would take a long, long time to explain," he said. "It is all a question of *simulation*—in simple terms, of using the computer to test the theory of evolution. The experiment is well advanced, and it could have important military applications."

"In what way?"

"In a most unexpected way." His eyes were now looking through me in a visionary manner, as if he wasn't really seeing anything at all apart from the "concept" gleaming like a fluorescent rainbow in the darker recesses of his brain. "You see, Mr. Harvey, although a computer can work much faster than the human brain, it is still no better than the mind that creates it. It can answer complex questions and solve difficult problems, but it cannot think for itself. On the other hand, it is possible to use a computer to *evolve* a hypothetical living creature which *can* think for itself—and given the correct evolutionary environment can develop a power of thought transcending the human mind." Again the genuine and rather boyish smile, which seemed out of key with Gilley's remote and occasionally mystical personality. "But I suppose all that must sound rather obscure to you."

"Hypothetical entities are not really my line of business," I confessed. "Have you taken the Ministry into your confidence on this experiment?"

"Not at this stage. I want practical and positive results which they *must* accept, and I am very close to achieving them. For the present I feel that is is better to say as little as possible to the Ministry. They think purely in terms of programmes and budgets. They lack imagination."

"They're spending the taxpayer's money," I pointed out. "Perhaps they can't afford to be imaginative. I mean, why should public funds be used to subsidise an experiment which is not even in the official defence programme, as authorised by Parliament through the Ministry."

He looked piqued, so I added: "Wouldn't it be better to put them in the picture with a full progress report?"

"You obviously do not understand the Ministry mind," he said peevishly. "They work strictly to the book of rules, and they do not approve of original thought. You mentioned Parliament—well, I can tell you that they do not approve of projects which might lead to questions in the House. They hate concepts which they cannot understand—which cannot be explained in words of one syllable to the electorate—like ultimate deterrent and unilateral disarmament."

"They're hardly words of one syllable."

"Well, they are *thoughts* of one syllable," he said, with an edge of irritation to his voice. "Words are a matter of language, but thoughts are semantics. It is easy enough to paraphrase monosyllabic thoughts into multisyllabic words, but how does

one present an advanced concept in simple words which even an M.P. can understand?"

"You may be right," I admitted. In fact, I couldn't help feeling that perhaps he was right in his own odd off-beat way.

"I *know* I'm right," he insisted. "My work is continually defined and limited and paralysed by politicians. There are times when a significant line of research cuts across agreed terms of reference—so what is one expected to do? Abandon it?"

"You wouldn't consider it worth while to seek Ministry approval."

He gave me a wry, exasperated look. "Would *you*, Mr. Hartley?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'm not a scientist. But it seems to me that the defence policy of this country does have to be co-ordinated at government level with a specific aim in view. You can't have all the Ministry laboratories pursuing their own independent lines of research without reference to the Ministry . . ."

Gilley sighed. "I'm afraid you've missed the point, Mr. Harding. R.U.8 is doing its assigned task within the framework of Ministry planning. The other matter—my own personal project—is merely a filler." He spread out his hands to indicate its tiny size as a filler. "It simply uses up spare computer time, which is most desirable from a budgetary point of view. But the long term results will be most *significant*. We have to face the fact that the Ministry will accept results, although they might well reject the steps leading up to those results. That is the situation with which I am faced. I do want you to understand the *true* position."

"I think I understand it very well, Dr. Gilley," I

said. "But I still think you're playing politics with the politicians, and I can't help wondering whether it's wise. The Ministry might decide to send someone down here to check up on you and report back. They've been known to do that."

"Oh, I don't think it has reached that stage," he said, after a moment's deliberation. "But they will certainly interrogate you about R.U.8 activities when you leave here, which is why I am trying to explain my research policy in some detail."

"Why tell me and not the Ministry?"

"Because, Mr. Harwell, I am sure that once you know what we are trying to do down here you will be sympathetic, and you will be inclined to present our programme in a favourable light. By the time Bennett returns, I hope to be in a position to let the Ministry have a detailed report on my special project. Indeed, I have already written a document of more than one hundred thousand words. In just a week or two . . ."

"Excellent," I commented, "but I'd appreciate it if you could give me more specific information about the project itself."

He held up a restraining hand. "All in good time, Mr. Harvey. The background comes first, then the fundamentals, and finally the details. One can learn too much too soon."

He stood up and extended a limp hand, which I gripped and shook. There was no need for the handshake, but it was Gilley's naïve way of indicating that the interview was over. I was quite happy to let it rest at that for the moment; whatever I hadn't learned about the B.E.A.S.T. project, at least I knew something of Gilley's attitude towards the Ministry, and that in itself would be enough to

cause Makin to set a large number of anti-Gilley wheels in motion. At the same time I was aware of a vaguely defined sympathy for Gilley, and of a feeling that, in some respects, he was justified in his criticisms of authority. Many of his words had possessed overtones of truth, and it was impossible to doubt his sincerity and self-dedication. A security risk? Hardly that, but a policy risk was another matter. As a fairly senior civil servant, Gilley could not afford to engage in a conflict of policy with the Ministry, because he couldn't win—but he would be the last person to appreciate the fact.

I left his office, collected my nylon and steel document case, and drove back to my pseudo-luxury bedsitter at the Savoy.

Chapter Five

As arranged, I called for Synøve Rayner at Room six in the Dorchester block at seven o'clock. I was two minutes early. She had changed from the white dress into a pale blue creation with a square-cut neckline; the colour matched her eyes, and the style lent her sophistication. No doubt about the intrinsic enchantment of the girl—she was definitely radioactive at psychic level.

Her room was structurally the same as mine, but the décor was different, and there were the inevitable feminine adornments such as frilled pelmets,

flowers, and nylon stockings drip-drying from a string line above the washbasin. The wallpaper was yellow with unlikely blue roses arranged in a drop pattern—quite hideous outside of Chelsea. The carpet was grey and very worn, as if it had been danced on at regular intervals. On the mantelshelf over the mock fireplace with its built-in two-kilowatt electric elements a tiny Japanese transistor radio played quiet unidentifiable music which sounded like Sibelius.

"You're early," she accused.

"Only just."

"You've caught me with my face off. Give me three minutes."

"Your face looks all right to me," I said. She went over to the mirror above the washbasin and applied a thin veneer of make-up. I lit a cigarette and walked aimlessly around the room. There was no privacy in a bedsitter, but Synøve didn't seem sensitive and I couldn't have minded less. In a minute or two she had put her face on. The improvement was marginal—it is difficult to improve on perfection.

She put on a short dark blue jacket cut in duffle coat fashion. "I'm ready, Mr. Harland."

On the way down to the car, I said: "We're off duty now, so let's drop the formal protocol."

"I'm sorry," she said, not understanding.

"Let's try the 'me Tarzan, you Jane' routine."

"Oh. I'm afraid I haven't really thought of you as Tarzan. Anyway, I always thought a security officer was never off duty."

"Every security dog has its non-security night."

"I'm not sure that informality is a good thing, Mr. Harland. Some people regard informality as

familiarity—people like Smethers, for instance. It's also a general policy that one should never become too friendly with the security dog, as you put it."

"Why?"

"Because the nature of his job requires him to keep his distance—or doesn't it?"

"Distance from whom and for how long?"

"That is a very good question."

We got into the car. I drove off in the direction of The Old Ship. For a while we sat in silence, just staring at the grey road as it unwound into the windscreen.

"What do they call you apart from Tarzan?" she asked presently."

"Mark."

"I'm Synøve."

"I know."

"It's a Swedish name."

"I know."

"I'll tell you something you don't know."

"Such as?"

"Well—I don't want you to regard this evening as a date. Not in the ordinary sense. We live a sort of communal life here in Barnham. It is quite usual for the unattached men of R.U.8 to take out the unattached women from time to time, just for a drink or a meal, or sometimes to a local show at Bognor or Chichester. But we don't go in for regular liaisons."

"Who said anything about regular liaisons?"

She glanced quickly at me and smiled. "I'm just trying to put you in the picture. Practically every eligible male on the staff, married or single, has made a pass at me at some time or other. I get tired of saying no."

"Then why not say yes for a change?"

"Ethics," she said enigmatically.

"Are you warning me off or telling me to join the queue?"

"Neither. I'm just image building."

We were coming up to The Old Ship. I swung the car into the small gravelled parking lot, which was already nearly full. As we got out Synøve said: "The R.U.8 boys are here in force tonight. The blue Hillman belongs to Denny of Reagents. The black Jag is Michaelson's—he's the electron microscope man. The old green Anglia is shared by Burke and Wetherby of Analysis."

"In that case, let's go somewhere else," I suggested.

She led the way firmly towards the saloon bar. "This is a good chance to meet some of your colleagues off duty, Mark. You'll learn more about Dr. Gilley in small talk than you would in hours of official interrogation."

I shrugged. She still thought I was a Ministry spy—and of course, she was right. The best way to disarm her was to humour her. I followed her into the pub determined to be a spy in the best cloak and dagger tradition.

There were about fifteen people in the saloon bar (including four women), and seven of them were R.U.8 men. I met them all, one after the other (Denny, Michaelson, Burke, Wetherby, Moone, Anderton and Charlish), and then couldn't remember which was which, though after a while I found myself identifying them by their Christian names which were thrown out in the course of conversation.

I lost Synøve very early in the proceedings. Each member of the group insisted on chatting her up. She was obviously far too popular for comfort or peace of mind, but I began to see what she had meant by "ethics." In a small, tightly knit community such as an isolated research unit, liaisons had to be free and easy and uncommitted. Any hint of something deeper could give rise to speculation and even resentment. The ethics were group ethics in which a woman belonged to all of the men in part and to none of them individually.

We drank half pints of bitter, Synøve included, which made for cheap enough rounds. I was received cordially, but at a slight distance (one should never become too friendly with the security dog). Some talked shop and some talked generalities. Synøve made it clear from the outset that I was a spy sent from the Ministry to keep an eye on Dr. Gilley, and this disclosure was greeted with polite laughter. I said it was supposed to be a top secret and would they please not tell Gilley, or even each other. This was regarded as a joke, and of course they were all quite willing to talk about Gilley. In retrospect it is difficult to recall who said what, but during the course of the evening's random conversation the following were among the remarks made.

"The trouble is that Old Gilley lives in a dream."

"Nightmare, more like it."

"I believe he made some very important contributions to the research programme when it first started, but he's rather outlived his usefulness."

"Frankly, R.U.8 could carry on just as efficiently without Gilley—even better, in fact."

"Don't underestimate the man. He's a near

bloody genius, only his mind's running in the wrong direction."

"Gone off the rails, you mean?"

"Give credit where it's due—he may be on to a big break-through."

"The Ministry doesn't want a breakthrough. All it wants is a regular and systematic checking of ambient DNA modifiers as part of the military defence programme."

Then, after the first off-the-cuff assessments of Gilley (mainly delivered in a jocular manner) came the more serious and considered opinions.

"In my view, Gilley is fundamentally an academic type. He ought to be in a university laboratory, pursuing basic research for its own sake. Put him on military applications and he becomes a liability."

"If you analysed him along Freudian lines you'd probably find he was sublimating his repressed sex instinct like mad. All this business of creating some synthetic form of life—it's just a rarefied substitute for having it off with a real flesh and blood female."

"Hard to say just what form of life this 'beast' thing is supposed to be. It's really no more than a rather complex equation in higher math."

"For Gilley it symbolises creation—I mean creation in the sexual sense. A man who doesn't have it off has got to do *something* about his creative urge."

"I'll bet the Beast takes the form of a big monkey with an enormous ventral weapon."

"Not while Syn is handling the print-out. Gilley wouldn't want to shock his programmer."

"What makes you think she'd be shocked?"

"Stop boasting, Arnold. You may be a monkey, but . . ."

Synøve was out of earshot, talking earnestly to a handsome fair-haired young man whose name (when I was able to attach the correct label) was Guy Anderton.

The sex sublimation angle was interesting. I was never a great believer in the more precious psychological theorising, but it seemed to me to be fairly well established that the creative urge, as it is called, was a matter of ductless glands and frustrated instinct, of biological origin, of channelling basic patterns of human behaviour into higher and more recondite levels of activity. Even that didn't mean very much, but in general terms a family man living what was called a normal life seemed unlikely to develop the single-minded dedicated obsession so characteristic of creative genius; conversely, the single-minded man of obsession was unlikely to be a satisfactory family man. To what extent the sex drive entered into this obscure equation was debatable. Different schools of psychological doctrine supplied different answers, but on the whole this was the pattern into which Gilley seemed to fit. It was just conceivable that the "beast" which he was creating in the computer represented for him, on a subconscious level, a sex symbol—an entity embodying the dynamic creative urge which he himself had never expressed in physical biological terms. Even so, it was a theory which would have as much impact on Makin as a hole in a wall. From a practical point of view, there was no point in pursuing it.

Moone, a lanky, dark haired man of gaunt appearance, said to me: "You're not really a

Ministry spy, of course." It was a question rather than a statement.

I smiled disarmingly. "Miss Rayner thinks I am, and I'd hate to disillusion her. It would make a change from being an ordinary security dog—I mean, so far as one's image is concerned."

"It's a good gimmick, but I imagine the Ministry would act in a more subtle manner. They'd hardly put in a spy as a security officer—it would be a bit obvious."

"Quite," I agreed. "They'd be more likely to appoint a pretty girl programmer on the Mata Hari principle."

He raised a questioning eyebrow. "That's something I hadn't thought of. Frankly, I can't see any need for a spy at all. Old Gilley may be a bit out of this world, but he's running a very efficient research programme just the same. Why should the Ministry worry?"

"Who said they're worried?"

"Oh, it's a general feeling. I think Bennett put up the red flag—you know, misuse of computer time, and so on. But what the hell? Computers work bloody fast, and he's probably just trying to fill in blank time. It's one of those machines that can carry out six operations simultaneously."

"Bully for Gilly," I said. "All the same, I'd like to know precisely what he's trying to do."

"So would most of us. Synthetic life and all that—whatever it means. Synøve probably knows more about it than anybody else, but she has a strong sense of loyalty. I mean, she may think Old Gilley's round the bend, but she doesn't talk about his experiment."

"Maybe there's nothing much to talk about."

Guy Anderson, after he had finished with Synøve and when I got around to conversation with him, took a more positive attitude. Despite his good looks and amiable personality, he seemed to have a chip on his shoulder, and there was no denying the sardonic undertones of his voice.

"It's a very civilised project," he stated. "Strictly for Bradbury fans."

"What the devil's Bradbury—or who?" I asked.

"If you're not a science-fiction addict you wouldn't know."

"I'm not and I don't."

"It doesn't matter. The point is that Gilley has reduced a fantasy concept to a practical mathematical equation—but it works. He's created a form of life. Gilley and God."

"But not really a form of life . . ."

"Depends how you define life," he said in his casual manner. "If you want something that grows, feeds, excretes, reproduces, thinks, communicates, then Gilley's got it. Or if he hasn't quite got it just now, then he'll have it very soon. Instant life!"

"Instant computer tapes, you mean. Like the pictures on a cine film—only they don't become animated until they run through the projector."

Anderton grinned. "For a security officer that's a very advanced thought, but it's not quite so simple. You'd have to imagine a cine film which created itself as it passed through the projector, where the images had not been photographed in advance. You'd give the characters certain characteristics and certain rules of conduct in a certain environment, then leave them to sort it out among themselves. They'd be living and evolving within

your terms of reference, and you wouldn't be able to predict what would happen."

"Mm," I admitted dubiously, "but surely the computer would know."

"Why should it? The computer can't think for itself."

"Nor can the characters."

"Don't be too sure of that," Anderton said in his flat matter-of-fact voice. "If you feed into a computer the basic data of a creature capable of reacting to its environment, then it will react—but the reaction comes from the imaginary creature, and not from the computer."

"That sounds to me like a very debatable point."

He eyed me sceptically. "Suppose your home happened to be on fire—a regular bloody inferno. What would you do?"

"Clear out and call the fire brigade."

"Because your brain told you to do so?"

"Naturally."

"Ah," he said in a jocular manner, "the old grey matter computer ticking over in the interests of personal survival. But"—he pointed an accusing finger at me—"suppose your girl friend or your wife or your child happened to be unconscious in an upstairs room—would you still clear out and call the fire brigade?"

"Not immediately. The survival thing wouldn't work in that case. I suppose, even if it was hopeless, one would attempt a rescue even if it meant suicide."

"And this is the same computer brain at work?"

"Well, yes . . ."

"Then why should it act so differently?"

I considered for a moment. "The circumstances

are different. So far as the computer's concerned it's a different programme."

"The programme is the same, but the input—that is, the information—is different. The brain, as a computer, merely presents all the available information to the entity which is required to make the decision—but the decision itself is made on a much higher level than the brain."

"Any minute now," I said, "we're going to start talking about God and conscience."

"On the contrary—Gilley and the Beast. It's a parallel. The computer is the brain. The Beast is the entity. It uses the computer in order to think and make decisions."

"Isn't that taking the analogy just a little too far?" I asked. "I don't know much about Gilley's Beast, but I understand it's really no more than mathematical information recorded on magnetic tape."

Anderton shrugged. "Isn't that what we all are, in the last analysis? Only with us the data takes the form of nucleic acids coded and stored on strands of molecular protein. Don't underrate the Beast. The mechanism may be purely electronic and the creature may be purely abstract, but the basic principles are the same. Gilley started off with a DNA code for a simple single-celled creature, but right now he's got something intelligent that wants to communicate. The Beast is not the tape, and it's not the computer, but it uses both in the same way as you use your own brain."

"You actually believe it—in the way that Gilley does?"

He laughed tersely. "Of course not. I'm merely presenting the Gilley manifesto as plausibly as I

can. Mind you"—he spread his hands in a non-committal gesture—"there may be something in it. Computer technology is still in its infancy. It's less than ten years old. Gilley has dreamed up a sophisticated concept. We're all as sceptical as hell, of course, but that doesn't mean he's wrong. When you consider that at R.U.3 they're doing serious work on anti-gravity, and at R.U.6 they're experimenting with plug-in artificial limbs operated by nerve impulses. Anything is possible."

I came to the conclusion that Anderton was really quite sympathetic towards Gilley's Beast, and of all those I spoke to he was the only one who seemed to regard the project as capable of producing valid results. Only Gilley himself possessed more confidence in his strange concept.

The "conversazione" began to break up around eight-thirty. I was able to retrieve Synøve just before nine, and we went in search of food. After debating the merits of the R.U.8 canteen for a few minutes, I managed to persuade her that a meal at the Arundel Inn, about seven miles away on the London road, would be a better investment—and so it was.

"Did you find out what you wanted to know about Gilley?" she asked over dinner.

I was growing rather tired of Gilley as a topic of conversation. I said: "I'd rather find out about you."

"Surely you already know about me from the official dossier."

"That would be a very dull way of finding out. In any case, I haven't had time, yet."

"You think it's more fun doing it the hard way?"

"Yes," I agreed readily.

"That's a presumption, Mark. Fun can be a liability, for me if not for you."

"You're trying to put me off," I accused.

She merely smiled. It was a cool Scandinavian smile with a hint of the Arctic Circle in the line of her lips.

"I get the message," I went on. "Fun is a dubious motive. It always is with the Swedes."

"I promise not to commit suicide over dinner," she said sardonically.

I shrugged. "At R.U.8, to make a date, is seldom if ever done. What the hell do all these male and female scientists do in their spare time?"

"Discuss the latest guanine operator mechanism, perhaps."

"And, as a non-scientist, what do *you* do?"

She looked pensive for a moment. "Oh, occasionally I write to my husband."

Perhaps I was supposed to be taken aback—perhaps not. I decided to play it straight. "You've got a husband." (Statement). "Congratulations, Synøve. Somewhere in Saudi Arabia, I believe."

She stared at me for a few seconds, her eyes clear blue and frostbitten, and then the frost melted and she smiled.

"No dossier?"

"No dossier—and I can't reveal my sources of information."

"I'll assume the worst," she said. "You really are a spy and you know all about me."

"Well, not all."

"But what you know is bad enough . . ."

I grinned. "Stop boasting, Synøve."

"Why don't you just call me Syn?" she said solemnly. "It's very appropriate."

"Ah, the traditional Swedish conscience. Ibsen and all that."

"Ibsen was a Norwegian," she pointed out.

"Oh. I apologise. I'm afraid my education has been sadly neglected."

"Obviously," she agreed, smiling again. "You're not well up on your Scandinavian culture."

"I've got a lot to learn," I agreed. "Will you teach me?"

"It would take a long time, and as you're only here until Bennett comes back . . ."

"I learn very quickly, and my cultural requirements are very simple."

"I'll think about it," she promised.

After dinner I drove her back home. It was around eleven-thirty.

"Come in for a coffee," she invited.

"Not tonight," I said. "I'm a new boy around here. I don't know the rules."

She patted my cheek gently. A good meal and a few drinks had made her much more amiable. "Don't be silly, Mark. There aren't any rules, only conventions. Anyway, I make very good coffee."

"You've talked me into it," I said.

In fact, she made very bad coffee—a rather weak solution of an anonymous brown powder from an unlabelled jar. I sat uncomfortably on an upright chair while she sat, half reclining, on the side of her bed, looking dreamy and seductive. When the coffee was finished she lay back languorously, watching me through half closed eyes.

"Tired?" I asked.

She nodded slowly. "I haven't even the energy to put myself to bed."

"Let me be your lady's maid," I volunteered. "I'm very good at removing female garments."

"You've had lots of experience, I suppose."

"I served a long apprenticeship."

I went over to the bed and slipped my arm beneath her. I could feel her tremble suddenly. Then I kissed her quite gently. The tip of her tongue explored my lips.

"The dress unzips down the back," she whispered.

I undressed her in a leisurely fashion and in an appreciative frame of mind. The mere fact of exposure of her body, on a piecemeal strip-tease basis, seemed to excite her enormously. Her breathing quickened and became shallower and I saw that she was digging her fingernails into the smooth palms of her hands. As a female body she was in the Rolls-Royce class. When I had finished I allowed myself the privilege of running my fingers lightly over the warm satin surface of her skin from throat to pelvis, at which she shivered. I then yanked her legs in the air, drew back the bedclothes, shoved her underneath them and tucked her in. "What are you doing?" she demanded. Now there was an edge of anger to her voice.

"Ethics," I said. "Remember?"

"Ethics be damned. We don't have to wear a mask all the time, do we?" She flung the bedclothes back and sat up. "Mark, for God's sake . . ."

The girl was an exhibitionist nympho, of course. In a kind of narcissistic way she was aroused by the vulnerability of her own body. Even the way she was sitting now, uninhibited and unashamed,

merely added to her tenseness and excitement —and, to be honest, to mine also.

I stood up and glanced at my watch. "It's late," I said, "and I must be off. We'll pick this up some other time."

"If you leave now there won't be another time," she threatened.

"You want to bet?"

"Mark, don't be a fool . . ."

"The main course should always come after the hors d'oeuvres, not before. Half the fun is in anticipation."

"When you've finished with the platitudes . . ."

"I've got that kind of mind. I was badly brought up." I went over to the bed and kissed her briefly. She tried to put a Japanese stranglehold round my neck but I shook her off.

"I love you just the same," I said, "and one day I'll prove it."

"You're an arrogant bastard," she shouted, and threw a pillow at me.

I just grinned, threw it back, and returned to my own flat. Pity, really. I felt a definite sense of loss. On the other hand I didn't particularly wish to take my place in the long line of Denny, Michaelson, Burke, Wetherby, Moone, Anderton, Charlish and all the others. Perhaps Gilley, too, for that matter—though it seemed improbable. In any case, it would probably do the girl a power of good to realise that she was not absolutely irresistible. Frustrating for her—and for me, too; but sometimes frustration is a noble ordeal.

All the same, I slept very badly, and felt tired and dispirited in the morning.

Chapter Six

DURING the next few days I familiarised myself with R.U.8—both the place and the people. An image formed, as it always does when one is assessing an organisation. At first the image was a vague blank outline, but each day more detail and colour were added until finally I felt confident enough to make a preliminary report to Makin, even though it was too soon to draw conclusions of any kind. Judgment had to be reserved. Meanwhile, the Gilley-Beast situation was developing at a fast rate; the unexpected could happen at any moment and Makin had to be put in the picture.

The report could not be sent over the R.U.8 teleprinter link with the Ministry for obvious reasons, nor could it be encoded in the usual way by the existing code and cypher staff. In any case, it was inadvisable to put anything into writing or print on what was essentially a D.S.S. undercover operation.

For long reports of a non-immediate nature the procedure was to use a tape recorder. This was a small device no bigger than a cigar box which used tape one sixteenth of an inch wide on spools about the size of a penny. Playing time was fifteen minutes, and speech was recorded on top of a permanent warbling tone built into the tape so that

it was completely unintelligible without a special unwarbling device which was held at D.S.S. headquarters. Delivery, when there was no great urgency, could be by ordinary registered post to an apparently innocent address (a certain bookshop not five minutes away from the D.S.S. offices in London); or, if the situation called for it, a special messenger in a fast car would collect and deliver, but this type of service was avoided where possible as it tended to be ostentatious enough to attract the attention of not-so-casual observers.

So I recorded my report late one evening in my flat, and posted it in Littlehampton the next morning (Barnham post office would have been too close to the research unit, and one always had to act as if enemy agents were watching one's every move). As a report it was innocuous enough. It merely stated my view that R.U.8 appeared to be running efficiently with competent scientific and administrative staff. There was as yet no evidence to show that Dr. Gilley's unauthorised and unorthodox experiment with the computer was seriously interfering with the routine programme of the centre, and so far as could be ascertained it was merely taking up unused computer capacity (though not necessarily at the most convenient times). This would require extended investigation. The Beast project itself, according to Gilley and other members of his staff, might have serious defence implications, but it was still too early to form a final assessment. The experiment seemed to be developing rapidly, and positive results might be available at any time at all. Further reports would follow in due course.

It was not my job at this stage to prejudge any

issues at all, or report on staff behaviour unless security considerations were definitely involved. Synøve Rayner's evident promiscuity was already known to authority (Bennett had reported it almost a year previously). They would need to be reminded, of course, but so far as the job was concerned she was a blue chip and hardly a party to Gilley's technical misdemeanour.

I saw little of her for a few days—just once or twice in the canteen, when she was friendly and formal. There was no indication of resentment or injured pride. I let it go at that, because the moment had not yet arrived for a more detailed investigation on the programming side, and I wanted to give her time to forget the incident.

I checked her dossier as a matter of routine. She had joined R.U.8 about a year and three months earlier, and it was perhaps significant that after a few weeks Bennett had found enough evidence to substantiate a report to the Ministry that she was conferring intimacy (as he phrased it) upon several of the unattached male members of the staff—although there was no question of a steady affair with any one of them. She had been married for some three years to a John Rayner, an American whose job was oil surveying for one of the big petroleum companies, so that he spent most of his time abroad. No doubt his wife could have accompanied him, but she had preferred to pursue her own career, and the marriage seemed to have crystallised out into occasional correspondence, with Synøve (and presumably John Rayner, too) seeking some sort of compensation in casual extra-marital adventures. She was twenty-five, well educated, with rather prosperous parents who lived

near Arlanda in Sweden, but also had a bungalow near Chalfont St. Giles where they would stay for three or four months in each year. Her father was in marine insurance, and her mother wrote books about antique furniture which were sometimes published. No brothers; no sisters. With such an apparently secure background, I found myself wondering why she had chosen to go it alone. She was certainly a honey, but the kind of girl one had to play by ear.

The completion of report number one for Makin produced a sense of relaxation. The first step (what Makin termed "an appreciation of the situation") had been accomplished, and one could now ignore irrelevancies and concentrate in a more leisurely fashion on the significant details—which meant Gilley himself. As he was virtually inaccessible by appointment (Mrs. Gaffney acted very ably as his deputy on nearly all matters) it was necessary to present oneself to him by subterfuge.

One afternoon I went down to the computer room. This was a big room below ground level, about the size of a suburban public library, but with a low ceiling which cleared the top of my head by not more than two feet. This produced an odd claustrophobic effect. Fluorescent lights were recessed into the ceiling at intervals. The computer itself took up rather more space than I had imagined: the grey electronic consoles, tape units and peripheral equipment occupied nearly half of the floor area. It was obviously a custom-built job, designed on a prototype basis to meet exacting Ministry specifications—and no doubt incorporating all the latest gadgets and gimmicks of solid-state circuitry, magnetic memory and digital logic

systems. The control desk was three-sided and looked as if it had been lifted bodily from the control room of some enormous television studio. Coloured lights winked and flashed, while in the tall memory units big drums of magnetic tape whirled, stopped and reversed in random but purposeful motion. The room vibrated to the attenuated whine of distant air conditioners. The walls were lined with bookshelves and steel filing and storage cabinets, creating the impression of a reference library.

There were four people in the room. Two young men whom I had met briefly a few days earlier were going through the contents of a filing cabinet and making notes on thick pads. Synøve and the man I knew as Wetherby from the Analysis Department were standing by one of the print-out machines, reading a long sheet of paper as it emerged from the rollers of what looked like a high speed teleprinter. Of Dr. Gilley there was no sign.

I went over to the print-out. Synøve looked around, caught my eye at a distance, and smiled in a professional "haven't-we-met-before-somewhere?" fashion.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything serious," I said.

"It depends what you call serious," she remarked. "Permutation tests on chromatograph analyses of rainwater—is that serious enough?"

"That in turn depends on the rainwater."

The print-out was mainly in figures, with occasional groups of letters which looked like chemical formulae.

"This is a negative one," she explained. "The particular sample came from the Lancashire area.

It contains nothing sinister that could affect DNA coding."

"Hurray for Lancashire," I said. "Do you do this kind of thing all day long?"

"More or less. We test other things besides rainwater, of course. Atmospheric samples, soil, vegetation, sea-water, tap-water, milk, animal flesh, food generally—what you might call the sum total of human environment in this country."

"Well, I'm sure you know what you're doing, Miss Rayner," I said. "You're probably wondering why I'm here . . ."

"Not particularly, Mr. Harland." There was a slight hint of disparagement in her voice which warned me that she had not entirely forgiven me. Hell hath no fury, and all the rest of it.

I said: "Actually I was wondering if we might have that talk about programming which you mentioned a few days ago."

"Why not?" She glanced apologetically at Wetherby. "If you're through, Bill . . ."

Without moving his eyes from the print-out, he said in a bored voice: "Yes, yes. I was through half an hour ago, really." He sighed and straightened up. "Let me know if you get more than one per cent retrospective deviation in the chromo."

"I'll keep an eye on it," she said.

Wetherby slouched away towards the double door of the room. He looked like a chain smoker who had run out of cigarettes in the middle of the night and hadn't got a half-crown to put into a slot machine.

When he had gone, I said to Synøve: "I haven't been deliberately avoiding you these past few days."

"Would it matter if you had?" she countered.

"I've been deskbound. How about dinner tonight?"

Her blue eyes were cool and appraising. "Just dinner?"

"Just whatever you like, within reason."

"Perhaps we have different ideas about what is reasonable," she said with a sigh. "Well, why not? I'm not being ungracious, Mark, but you know how it is . . ."

"No, I don't. How is it?"

Her lips formed a transient ghost of a smile. "Never mind. What can I do for you here and now?"

"Where's Dr. Gilley?"

"Probably bent over his desk analysing figures. He took a long print-out this morning on the latest generation of whatever he's got in that thing." She hooked a thumb towards the computer.

"Actually," I said, "he's got nothing in that thing at all."

"He thinks he has. It's all on tape."

"It's all in the mind."

"A bit of each, perhaps. I can show you the tapes if you're interested."

"Thanks," I agreed.

She led the way to one of the tall steel cabinets. A typewritten card in a slot on the door announced *Dr. Gilley—Special Project.* Inside the cabinet were about a dozen shelves stacked with big spools of brown tape in transparent plastic cases, all labelled with serial numbers. They looked quite unremarkable.

"And that's the Beast," I said.

"Yes—from point of origin to date."

"Representing how many million years of evolution?"

"Oh, that's hard to say. You have to think in terms of generations rather than years. There's no real correlation between the computer time scale and ours."

"Well, how many generations?"

"Something like ten billion. In the early phase, when the Beast was a simple single-celled animal, the generations came very quickly. The reproductive cycle was the equivalent of, say, a few hours—though only a fraction of a second on the computer. Then as the thing developed and became multi-celled and more complicated in structure, the cycle took longer—months, then years. It's difficult to assess a valid time scale. Perhaps you could average one year for a generation over the whole period of the experiment."

"That would make ten billion years."

"Give or take a few billion years."

"Let's ignore the trivialities," I said. "In principle this Beast should be really rather advanced."

She eyed me solemnly. "Highly advanced."

"But only on tape."

"Yes. There's nothing that actually exists—just a very complex code of magnetic impulses."

"Like the DNA code."

"In a way," she admitted, frowning. "I suppose the principle is similar. Gilley started off with the basic data which would represent the simplest type of cell. He specified its size, biochemical content, structure, DNA pattern, and so on. He also provided a kind of environment in mathematical terms—temperature, light, humidity, incidence of nutrition, ambient radioactivity to provide a

mechanism for mutation. The computer was programmed to set the cell against its environment and run through millions of generations to find out what would happen in terms of evolution."

"What happened?"

"What you'd expect. The cell grew, reproduced—became thousands and millions of cells. It was the typical growth of a simple virus. But it also differentiated."

"How?"

"Because of the random radioactivity. The computer arranged for the DNA code of the cell's nucleus to be damaged from time to time by radioactive particles—not real particles, you understand, but simulated particles representing cosmic rays and natural ground radiation. The damaged cells developed in a different way because they were controlled by a changed DNA code."

"Mutations, in other words."

She nodded. "The original cell multiplied into a large number of variant species. Some could not survive or even reproduce. They died off. Others were tougher, and they thrived. They multiplied even more."

"I thought Darwin demonstrated this long ago," I said. "Why go to the trouble to duplicate what nature has already proved?"

"Darwin didn't demonstrate it. He merely created a theory. Dr. Gilley wanted to put it to a mathematical test, and in my view he has done it most successfully."

"All right, Syn," I conceded, "but where does the military defence application come into it? Proving the theory of evolution by means of a computer is hardly an ultimate deterrent."

"We haven't got as far as defence applications yet," she explained. "We're still talking about the single-celled animal and its variant species. In fact, it very soon evolved into a multi-celled creature. It began to develop a physiological system—became involuted, produced a blastoderm and eventually an endoderm structure."

"What does all that mean?"

"It became a polyp—a creature of tubular shape, with a central gut. Over millions of generations it developed a blood system, and a nervous system, and grew limbs. Ultimately it grew a brain."

"In other words, it followed the normal process of evolution."

"Not exactly. Gilley altered the environment from time to time. He would change temperature, nutrition, the amount of light, oxygen, water, and so on. The computer would work out the effect of these changes on the developing generations of Beast."

I thought about that for a while. "Gilley and God," I said, remembering the discussion with Anderton, a few nights earlier. "I suppose he was able to breed his Beast selectively by controlling the environment—its conditions of survival . . ."

"Yes—over millions of generations."

"So what do we finish up with?"

She gave a wry smile. "Something rather out of this world. Gilley pursued the idea of survival to its limit. As the creatures in the computer developed intelligence and cunning, survival became a matter of mental strength rather than physical strength. The different species fought each other and outwitted each other—and all the time Gilley made the environment more inhospitable, with less food

and less protection. So there were fewer and fewer species, and in the end only one. Even then he wasn't satisfied. The surviving species had to be set against itself under more severe conditions over more millions of generations until one solitary individual remained. That is the position today."

"The poor bloody ultimate Beast," I said. "What sort of a thing is it?"

"I don't know. Gilley is the only one who can interpret his own computer programme in physical terms. But I believe the thing is very highly developed, with an immense capacity for survival."

"But no capacity for reproduction."

She looked surprised for a moment. "Why do you say that?"

"If there's only one Beast left—I mean, does it need a mate or not, or does it propagate by buds or cuttings or what?"

"Oh, I'm not sure. Gilley left me way behind about half a billion generations ago. All I do know is that he's now trying to communicate with the thing. He's feeding a sort of basic English programme into the computer, so that he can put questions to it and receive answers."

"I seem to remember arguing about that with Anderton," I said. "I can understand how a computer can be programmed to answer questions in the way that a hypothetical creature might answer them, but that doesn't make the creature any more real. The answers must already have been put into the computer in one form or another."

"That's true up to a point," she admitted. "You could feed a dictionary into a computer, add the rules of grammar, and it could conceivably produce a work of literary genius."

"Unlikely."

"Only in the statistical sense, Mark. If the computer were programmed on a permutation basis never to repeat any previous combination of words in a complete opus, then sooner or later it must write out the complete works of Shakespeare, and probably a few gratuitous masterpieces that would put Shakespeare in the shade."

"In something like eternity, perhaps—like the monkey and the typewriter."

"Not quite. The monkey hasn't got a programme or a permutation."

"It still doesn't mean that the computer can think and create. It's like playing a fruit machine and waiting for the jackpot to turn up."

She laughed at that. "Gilley's fruit machine," she said, glancing towards the computer processor. "It's more subtle than that, Mark. You'd better talk to Gilley himself about it. He's better informed than I am. All I know is that he is teaching the Beast to communicate through the print-out, and the answers he gets will be genuine Bestial answers, so far as the computer is able to make them so—and it's a very good computer."

"And the defence applications?" I asked.

"I should have thought they were self-evident. The Beast is a very advanced animal indeed. Its hypothetical brain is several billion generations ahead of the ordinary human brain. It can probably work out a simultaneous equation with ten variables in just one second flat—and provide the secrets of anti-gravity, time travel and what have you. It's a very sophisticated Beast."

"It sounds like a perfectly horrid Beast to me," I

said. "A regular Brainy Bert, and probably a sex maniac in the bargain."

"That's something you'll have to take up with Gilley."

I grinned and shrugged. "Well, thanks for the tuition, anyway. I'm not sure whether Gilley will want to confide in me or not."

"That depends on whether he thinks you're sympathetic or hostile. He tends to be sensitive to attitudes."

"Who isn't?" I asked, giving her an old fashioned look.

Her eyes held mine steadily. "We were talking about Gilley."

"Gilley and his monster," I said reflectively. "A bit like Frankenstein. Just between you and me, I'm rather glad that Beast of his is nothing more than a collection of magnetic tapes."

"Famous last words," she said with a cynical smile. "The tapes are just the skeleton. Its mind is buried somewhere deep in Gilley's brain. That's the thing we have to worry about."

"Let's take the jumps as they come," I suggested. "I'll try the Dale Carnegie act on him. If it's really all in the mind then he'll probably want to talk about it to someone. Bottling up a psychological Beast only leads to schizophrenia."

"Wrong, dear Mark," she said quietly. "It usually leads to paranoia—and if you don't know the difference then you shouldn't be a security officer—or whatever you are."

I did know the difference, but it didn't seem to matter very much. The computer room was empty, so I took her by the shoulders and kissed her

lightly on the lips. She responded briefly and electrically.

"Happy Christmas," I said. It was a hot summer's day.

"Jingle bells to you, too," she replied. "Do you still want to take me out to dinner?"

"With all my heart and soul."

"I'll stick with the body," she said cynically. "Hearts and souls are unreliable outside of church."

I left her to get on with her programming job, and went in search of Dr. Gilley.

Chapter Seven

I WENT straight to Gilley's office, knocked on the door, and walked in. Gilley wasn't there—only Mrs. Gaffney, who beamed at me through her heavy butterfly glasses as if she hadn't seen a man around the place for a century or so.

"Can I help you, Mr. Harland?" she asked, in a tone of voice that implied that nothing would give her greater pleasure.

"Do you know where Dr. Gilley is?"

"In the annexe."

"Where's the annexe?"

She pointed to what looked like a cupboard in the opposite wall. "Dr. Gilley goes in there when

he's concentrating. It's what you might call his Thinking Room."

"You're sure you don't mean Drinking Room?" I said. "I'll bet he's got a bottle of Scotch in there, hidden behind the annual report of the Atomic Energy Commission."

She was not noticeably amused. "Dr. Gilley never drinks, Mr. Harland."

"I was kidding," I explained. "Would it be possible to talk to Dr. Gilley either in or out of his Thinking Room?"

"Dr. Gilley doesn't like to be disturbed when he is thinking. However, I'll call him and ask if he would like to see you."

Why should Gilley like to see me? I wondered. Why should Gilley like to see anyone? Like General de Gaulle, Gilley could not be turned on and off as if he were a tap. Gilley was thinking in his Thinking Room, and lesser mortals had to bide their time.

Mrs. Gaffney pressed a switch on the intercom unit. Two or three seconds passed by, then Gilley's metallic voice issued from the speaker grille.

"Yes, what is it?"

"If you can spare a minute, Dr. Gilley, Mr. Harland would like a word with you."

A pause. "Harland? Oh, yes. Erm—ask him to wait a moment, would you?"

"Certainly, Dr. Gilley."

She released the switch. "If you wouldn't mind waiting a moment, Mr. Harland . . ."

"Message received and understood," I said. "Give him time to hide his bottle of whisky."

"Oh, Mr. Harland," she said in a hurt tone of voice, "surely you must be joking."

"You mustn't take me too seriously," I said amiably.

She smiled uncertainly. Obviously loyalty was one of her strong qualities. I resolved to be more circumspect in future. A few seconds later the intercom buzzer sounded. She pressed a switch.

"Yes, Dr. Gilley?"

"Ask Hartman if it's important, would you, Mrs. Gaffney?"

I nodded before she had time to frame the question.

"Apparently it *is* important, Dr. Gilley," she replied.

An interval of silence, then: "Oh, well, send him in to the annexe, would you?"

"Yes, Dr. Gilley."

She switched off and peered speculatively at me. "You can go in, Mr. Harland. I may say that this is something which Dr. Gilley seldom permits."

"The privilege is all mine," I said. I made my way to the cupboard in the wall.

The door opened into a very small austere room. It was not more than six feet square, and had probably been originally intended as a storeroom for files and documents. There was no window, and not even a hint of an air-conditioning system, but the strip lighting on the ceiling was brilliant and daylight hued. The walls had been painted white so that it resembled a private ward in a very small hospital. On the grey carpet stood a small secretarial type desk strewn with papers and documents. On the floor beneath the desk, close to the wall and in shadow, was what looked like a large photograph, but it was impossible to discern

detail. It had obviously fallen down accidentally and had not been noticed.

Gilley was sitting on a chair in front of the desk, writing on a wad of blank paper with a ball pen. By his right elbow was a roll of computer print-out.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Dr. Gilley," I said.

"Do come in, Mr. Harwell," he murmured, without looking up. "Please sit down."

As Gilley was occupying the only chair in the room, I remained standing.

"I gather from Mrs. Gaffney that you have an urgent problem on your hands," he went on. "Naturally, I shall be only too happy to help you in any way I can, from an administrative point of view. Is it staff trouble?"

"Not exactly, Dr. Gilley. In fact, it's not really urgent at all, and if you're terribly busy it can wait."

He turned in his chair and stared at me. His eyes were as dreamy as ever, and his thick wavy hair was slightly awry as if he had been pushing his fingers through it.

"I'm always busy, Mr. Harlow, but I believe in being fully accessible to members of my staff when urgent problems arise. How can I help you?"

How indeed? The interview was already starting off on the wrong foot—but I couldn't see any way out of it, other than to proceed according to plan.

I said: "It's about the special project."

He eyed me blankly, as if he were thinking of something else, which he probably was. "Which special project?"

"The Beast, as it's called."

That visibly annoyed him. Resentment and hurt

briefly clouded his features. "I would prefer it if you did not use that expression, Mr. Harvey," he said in a cold voice. "I find it derogatory. It detracts from the serious significance of the experiment."

I acknowledged the point with a terse nod. "That's precisely why I asked to see you. I've been thinking over what you said the other day, and certain points have occurred to me which may not have occurred to you."

He gave me the stern, questioning look of a man to whom everything always occurred.

"If I may state my case, Dr. Gilley . . ."

"Of course. But please be brief."

"I'll try. Do you mind if I smoke?"

"I'd rather you didn't," he said disapprovingly, "but if you must . . ."

I thanked him and lit a cigarette anyway. "Let me state one or two obvious things from the point of view of security. The first is that every research project, if it has defence applications, operates in its own watertight compartment. It has its own screened staff and its own lines of communication with the Ministry. People working on, say, laser communication have no point of contact with those working on perhaps anti-gravity or molecular biology. This reduces the security risk, as you will appreciate. Without technical segregation, a leakage of information from one sector could involve all sectors, and that might present a dangerous situation."

"I'm fully aware of that, Mr. Harding."

I took two seconds off to phrase my next thoughts. "Now, I understand that your special project, Dr. Gilley, although on the face of it

merely a statistical experiment in simulated evolution, could have military implications. I understand that you have created a kind of synthetic mind which might be capable of supplying the answers to a number of highly interesting questions—the kind of questions which military scientists are asking these days."

"That could be so. It is a little too early to be absolutely certain, but on the evidence . . ."

"Have you communicated with this—*thing*, yet?"

"Yes and no. There is a problem of semantics as well as language. Any word must have the same meaning for both communicating parties if there is to be any intelligent communication at all. This involves precise definition in computer terms, and it takes a considerable time to achieve."

"Granted. But have you established any form of communication?"

"In a simple form—yes. For example . . ."

He turned to the desk and selected one of the sheets of paper on which he had been writing. "This, Mr. Harlow, is a rough translation of print-out symbols which I obtained yesterday. It is a reply to the simple question—*what are you?* The reply is—*plasma must grow solid quick.* Does that mean anything to you?"

"Frankly, no."

He pouted his lips in satisfaction. "The entity in the computer has an extensive vocabulary and some basic grammar, but little in the way of syntax as yet, and no punctuation. Every word, therefore, is a complete semantic idea in itself—what we might call a discrete unit of communication. The order of the words indicates the progressive conti-

nuity of the component ideas—to form an overall concept."

"I'll take your word for it," I said. "But what does *plasma must grow solid quick* mean?"

His eyes gleamed behind his thick glasses. Gilley was in the grip of obsessive enthusiasm again, hot on the trail of the decipherment of unlinear Beast-talk.

"Plasma," he explained, "in its modern scientific context is a force—a source of energy—defined and suspended in a neutral medium. My question was 'what are you?' Plasma happens to be a concise and accurate reply. The entity *is* a source of mental energy defined and suspended, as it were, in the abstract magnetic symbols of the computer tapes."

"And the rest?"

"The rest is even more interesting. It is an elaboration of the basic reply, and a very clear statement of the entity's needs. 'Must' implies necessity—compulsion. 'Grow' signifies development and expansion in a progressive sense. 'Solid' means what it says—physical and tangible material. And 'quick'—without delay, as soon as possible. The whole constitutes a rational and rather urgent communication from the entity. It is saying, in effect: 'I exist in the form of a plasma, but it is essential for my development that I should be given material form as soon as possible.'"

Gilley seemed to be taking some liberties with his semantics of decipherment, but who was I to criticise? The translation he had offered was by no means illogical, just faintly fantastic. I said: "By material form I suppose you mean some kind of physical body."

"Precisely."

"So that the Beast—I'm sorry, I mean the entity—would in fact become a genuine physical living article."

"Creature would be a more accurate word."

"But it's impossible, of course."

Gilley frowned over the word impossible. In his sophisticated realm of thinking only the impossible itself was impossible—by definition—and everything else had a probability factor. He seemed to be debating whether a Beast with a body was probable enough to merit serious consideration.

"I would put it this way, Mr. Harwell," he said pensively. "So far as we, with our humble techniques, are concerned it would indeed appear to be impossible. But to the entity it may well be a perfectly simple operation—only it cannot perform the operation itself. It would need to communicate instructions which I could carry out—to specification, as it were."

"You mean that once you've taught it how to speak it will tell you how to plan the computer programmes for its own benefit . . ."

"Is it not self-evident?" he said in a Q.E.D. voice. "Already within the limitations of its basic English the entity has defined itself and asked for a physical body. If it were to issue the necessary instructions . . ." His eyes had taken on that dreamy look again, and he seemed to be staring right through me. "It would represent a new breakthrough in the plane of computer concepts."

"On the other hand, you hold the whip hand," I stated. "You don't have to take orders from the entity, and you can keep it boxed up forever in its computer if you so choose."

The dreaminess dissolved into perplexity. "I'm afraid I don't quite follow you, Mr.—er . . ."

"Harland," I prompted, knowing it wouldn't register. "The point is that *you're* the one who should be in control of the situation—not the thing in the computer. If it's half as smart as you think, then you may find yourself in the position of—well, a servant, arranging things at its bidding . . ."

"I should interpret that as proof of a very high order of intelligence and sagacity," he said in a tone of reproof. "If you have nothing more constructive to suggest . . ."

"It's not my job to be constructive, but to make sure that security policy is being observed. I'm concerned that the special project is being operated as a by-product of the genetic warfare operation. By all Ministry regulations it should be independently staffed and organised—and budgeted, too."

He stood up, suddenly and threateningly. His eyes, always the most responsive part of his face, were narrow and bitter. "They would kill the project first," he said. "I have been honest with you, Mr. Harwood, because I hoped you would appreciate my true motives for what is, on the surface, an irregular experiment lacking Ministry authorisation. I hoped you would realise the importance of what I am on the verge of achieving." He waved a hand at the papers strewn on the desk. "My work is almost finished. A few weeks more—perhaps a few days—and I shall achieve adequate communication. At that point I shall be able to convince the Ministry. All I want is time and some

sympathetic understanding from those around me, and, by God, I shall have it!"

He stood in a slightly stooped posture, with one fist clenched, glaring at me with eyes which if not exactly ablaze at least radiated heat and unexpected animation. For the first time I thought I perceived an indication of a violent streak in gentle, dreamy Dr. Gilley—the latent violence of the dedicated fanatic in the face of imminent frustration.

"Don't worry, Dr. Gilley," I said, "you've got co-operation, but you must remember that R.U.8 isn't a one-man band—that it's doing an essential job of work in another field. And, when it comes to the point, every member of your staff is working for the government and is paid by the government out of public funds. Apart from those considerations, I think you've got loyalty—though it can never be one hundred per cent."

He regarded me solemnly for a moment, running his fingers hesitantly through his long wavy hair. "I suppose, Mr. Harwell, that you feel it your duty to report to the Ministry on—on special project security."

"Not immediately—but it's a point which will have to be raised sooner or later. Perhaps when the experiment is in a more advanced stage . . ."

His lips formed a shy, phantom smile. "I am very grateful, Mr. Harvey. I'm sorry if I seemed a little impatient. I had rather overlooked the question of security policy, and I'm glad you mentioned it to me."

"It's all part of the service," I said genially, moving towards the door and taking out another cigarette. "In any case, I do have a genuine

interest in the project, quite apart from security aspects. If you can spare the time occasionally I'd like to be able to follow its progress."

"That can be arranged. Have a word with Mrs. Gaffney."

Gilley moved to open the door for me. I lit my cigarette and allowed the lighter to slip from my fingers, catching it with my shoe as it fell so that it slid under the desk. Quickly I bent down to pick it up and in the same movement took a closer look at the photograph lying on the floor near the wall. Gilley hardly noticed the incident; his back was half turned towards me as he held open the door to the main office.

I thanked him for his courtesy and went out. My mind was in a sudden whirl, for in a fraction of a second the whole situation at R.U.8 had changed, and Gilley's apparently harmless aberration had acquired an ugly overtone. My parameters and terms of reference were quite wrong—and had been wrong from the start. I had to go back to square one and start again. The photograph had been as clear and detailed as any good whole-plate photograph in black and white could be. It was a picture of a nude woman—not the so-called artistic, teasing pin-up variety, but an unashamedly pornographic pose complete in its clinical detail. It was a highly intimate study in stark focus of the female anatomy, and the woman in the photograph was Synøve Rayner.

Mrs. Gaffney was beaming at me as if I'd just been short-listed for an executive job. I found it difficult to talk to her, and almost impossible to think coherently, but I had to pursue Gilley's suggestion as if nothing had happened.

"How much do you know about day-to-day work on the special project?" I asked. At that particular moment I couldn't have cared less about the Beast—I was weaving a new web of speculative intrigue which involved Gilley and Synøve.

"I know nothing, Mr. Harland," Mrs. Gaffney said. "That is to say, I understand nothing, and the nothing is confidential, anyway."

"But you type up Dr. Gilley's notes for him."

"Oh, yes."

"He's agreed to keep me up-dated on progress, and suggested I should have a word with you about it."

She looked uneasy for a moment. "Without special authorisation . . ."

"Well, you can check with him if you wish. I can't expect him to take time out each day to give me a run-down on what he's been doing, so probably the simplest thing would be for me to read through his log book, or whatever it is he writes."

"All right, Mr. Harland, provided Dr. Gilley is agreeable. I doubt whether you will be able to make much sense of his notes, anyway."

I picked up a sheet of typewritten paper from her desk, at which she bristled in a disapproving manner. The page bore the number 147, and the text began in the middle of a sentence.

> . . . phase of cybernetic control, the arrangement forming a self-modifying feedback loop of the kind which should, but does not, exist in homo sapiens. In the formula stated above, the quantity $y_3/c\text{-}m$ becomes $(y\text{-}m)^3/c\text{-}m^2$, which illustrates the extent to which m, a var-

iable, exercises what might be termed "executive" control over normal synaptic response in terms of binary code. Any increase in m will reduce the influence of the y factor on cybernetic programming initiated by E, unless m happens to be a negative quantity, in which case the reverse is true. The m parameter, since it tends normally to fluctuate between positive and negative values, can be regarded as the ultimate decision making datum so far as programme modification is concerned . . .

I put the paper back on the desk. "I see what you mean, Mrs. Gaffney. Is it all like this?"

"Yes—apart from an occasional touch of human interest, if you can call it that." She riffled through a batch of typewritten papers on the desk and selected one particular sheet, which she handed to me.

"Near the bottom, Mr. Harland."

I scanned the lower half of the page for the touch of human interest. I read:

In attempting to interpret the psychology of E, it is necessary to convert mathematical symbols and concepts into human values, and this introduces problems of communication. For instance, if E is given an ambient temperature of 20°c, does he consider it hot or cold, or just warm? What does E hold to be normal gravitation when, throughout his evolution, gravity has been varied from 0.1G to 10G? What does E accept as an optimum amount of light in lumens per square foot? It is possible, of course, to answer these questions in terms

of actual survival over many generations. When conditions are right, then survival increases, but this still gives no real clue to E's subjective reactions to his environment. As semantic communication increases, however, it should be possible to define E's environment in his own terms, as he personally experiences and responds to it.

That was about as human as Gilley could get in cold print. I found myself wondering if he had viewed the picture of Syn in the ultra-nude in the same dispassionate, objective fashion. One or two points were of interest, however: E was obviously an abbreviation for "entity," alias Beast, and Gilley had already attributed to it a masculine sex; and although the report was written in a formal and academic way, it seemed to ascribe to E a certain reality which was far out from the truth. How could E—a synthesis of magnetic impulses on plastic tape—recognise heat or cold in any subjective sense, anyway? Temperature, perhaps, as degrees recorded by a thermometer, but surely not any kind of subjective sensation which required the presence of nerves and cells specially adapted to differentiate between, say, the feel of ice and the scald of boiling water (quite apart from any question of size or form).

"Thanks," I said. "I'm afraid it doesn't really mean a lot to me, but I may be able to detect a general progressive trend over a period of time without having to worry Dr. Gilley personally."

"I'll enquire," she promised, then added in a quiet, confidential voice: "You've obviously missed the point about human interest."

"In what way?"

"Simply that Dr. Gilley identifies himself more and more with E as each day goes by. All those little points about E's comfort, whether he feels warm or cold, or whether his food is too sweet or too bitter, or the light too bright or too dull. He's trying to get under the skin of E in a strange psychological way."

"E hasn't got a skin," I pointed out.

She smiled in a shrewd remote manner, but said nothing. I saluted her and left the office. The significance of her final remark was fairly obvious. E *had* got a skin—Dr. Gilley's skin. It was a sick pleasantry, and perhaps there was a kind of twisted truth in it. I pigeon-holed the notion for future reference and turned my thoughts towards the satin-smooth skin of Synøve.

Chapter Eight

THE second time one dates a girl, a pattern is established. It is, in mathematical parlance, the second term of a series. The first term (or date) establishes nothing, but the second term defines a relationship. The third term consolidates the relationship, and from that point on the subsequent terms of the relationship are predictable. Three dates, and you're all set for infinity (provided you've got your terms right). I had only reached

the second term, and the nature of the series (if there was to be a series) was not fully apparent, though certain attitudes had been crystallised and certain things had yet to be done.

Synøve Rayner, for all her flawless beauty and cool poise, needed a man like most people need their salary. She was living on an emotional overdraft. But during dinner she displayed a morose cynicism, which was probably due to a conflict between frustration and anticipation. She still hadn't forgiven me for my cavalier attitude on the previous occasion. On the surface one could detect an apparent puritanical veneer, but promiscuity smouldered beneath like an all-night fire burning smokeless fuel.

After dinner I took her back to my flat where, instead of ersatz coffee out of a tin, we drank brandy. She was getting rather high, but that was how I wanted her—high and irresponsible. The time was around midnight. We talked a mixture of shop, gossip and slander in the way that incipient drunks do, and we fell into a number of amorous clinches which improved in gaiety while never approaching consummation, although the invitation and opportunity were always there.

Eventually I said: "Syn, darling, you're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen in my life, and I adore you." (One says this kind of thing as a matter of protocol, of course, but I probably meant it at the time, in my fashion.)

She smiled and wriggled. We were lying quite respectably and amiably on the bed. She was playing easy to get.

"You're very photogenic," I added. "How about some pictures?"

She raised her eyebrows quizzically.

"By sheer coincidence I happen to have a thirty-five millimetre camera with a built-in flash. It produces impeccable enlargements."

"What kind of pictures?" she asked in a husky voice.

"You—for the Harland archives."

"Archives? You're boasting, Mark."

"Well, I'm about to start an archive, commencing with you."

"Show me your camera, first."

I got up, opened a drawer and produced a neat Japanese miniature camera of conventional pattern. My other camera, about the size of a cigarette lighter and taking one hundred and twenty frames on four millimetre film through a very fast lens, was strictly for the line of duty, and carefully hidden away. She hardly seemed to notice the camera; her mind was already looking ahead to an exciting orgy of exhibitionism.

"I suppose you want what they call pin-up pictures," she said.

"That's an interesting thought."

"I'm too tired to undress. You'll have to take my clothes off for me."

I did as she suggested. She seemed to enjoy the process as much as I did, but any minute now I had to be unpleasant, though my inbuilt Hyde was already telling my Jekyll what a fool he was. When I had stripped her to nudity she just lay there on the bed, staring at me dreamily, while I retrieved the camera and toyed with it for a few moments.

"How about a pose?" I said.

"What kind of pose, Mark?"

"The same as you did for Dr. Gilley."

The reaction was slow, very slow, like rigor mortis creeping over a corpse. Her eyes became expressionless coloured marbles. Presently she sat up on the bed and stroked her lips gently with a slender forefinger.

"What exactly do you mean by that?" she asked in a cool, detached tone of voice.

"You know perfectly well what I mean. Who took the photograph—Gilley himself?"

No reply—just a cold stare.

"Cecil Beaton, maybe?"

"You're being ridiculous," she said angrily. She bounced off the bed, found my dressing gown on the back of the door and put it on. "Why can't you leave well alone?"

"It depends on your definition of well."

"Oh, damn you. It's late and I'm tired. I'm going home."

"About Gilley's taste for erotica," I prompted.

"Nothing of the kind. The whole thing was part of the experiment. Gilley wanted some parameters for the computer—that's all."

"And you were obliging enough to supply them?"

"I'm always obliging, and it's not really any of your business. Why don't you ask Gilley himself about it if you're so concerned?"

"What kind of parameters?"

"Use your common-sense, Mark. If Gilley's Beast is to live among humans then it has to know about humans—what they look like, how they function, how they reproduce. Gilley wanted data, and a permanent record which he could analyse in mathematical terms. I gave him all the help I could."

"I'll bet you did," I said. "But do you honestly

think it *is* helping Gilley in his unbalanced and obsessive state of mind to encourage the more perverse aspects of this rather sinister and nasty experiment? How do you know he wasn't simply working off some of his frustrated sex instinct in a devious way?"

"His manner was correct and professional—like a doctor. There was not the slightest hint that he wanted anything more."

"But if he had, you'd have been just as obliging, no doubt."

She slapped my face hard. I grabbed her wrists and pulled her towards me. "That's what you should have done to Gilley when he asked you to pose for him," I said.

"I volunteered," she retorted.

I kissed her lightly, but it did nothing to soften her anger. There was no warmth in her now, only hostility and defiance. I decided to call it a day.

"Get dressed," I said, "and I'll take you home."

"I can take myself home."

I released her wrists. She slipped the dressing gown off and started to dress, ignoring me as if I had ceased to exist. I replaced the camera in the drawer and lit a cigarette. Then I poured some more brandy.

"One for the road?" I asked.

"No, thank you." She was pulling her stockings on now. A moment later she changed her mind. "Well, perhaps I will. I need something."

Sipping the brandy after she had finished dressing, and now more composed and even reflective, she said: "I don't think I like you very much, Mr. Harland. You're the most disappointing man any healthy woman ever tried to go to bed with."

"You try too hard," I commented.

"With you I won't try again, ever."

"Don't bank on that," I said. "You're entitled to a return bout."

In the event I escorted her to the door of her flat, but declined to go in. By now she was friendly again and in the mood for further manœuvres. She even offered to describe the Gilley incident in full detail, which tempted me for a moment, until I realised that the offer was probably motivated by her innate exhibitionist urge—the desire for self-exposure, or in this case self-over-exposure. In any case, I thought I knew enough to draft a suitable plan of action.

I kissed her goodnight and went home. Before going to bed I set the alarm clock for five a.m., which left me just four hours for sleep, but I needed to make an early start in the morning.

At six a.m., after a coffee and a quick nibble at a biscuit, I drove up to London to see Makin and collect one or two items of special equipment which I now needed to facilitate the Gilley investigation. Makin seemed dissatisfied with my previous preliminary report on Gilley and the R.U.8 set-up; he clearly wanted to pursue a tougher line.

"I gather," he said in a tired but firm voice, "that this egg-head devotes most of his time to this science-fiction project of his. I'm not talking about computer time, but Gilley himself. Does he do *anything* useful at all during a working day?"

I didn't want to say too much about Gilley's eccentricities at the present time because there was nothing to be gained by precipitating official action, which would inevitably result in Gilley's

withdrawal from R.U.8—and leave most of the interesting questions unanswered.

"Let me put it this way," I said. "Every time I try to contact Gilley he seems to be working on his special project, but I don't try to contact him all the time—not even every day—so I can't produce firm evidence one way or the other."

"Then find out. That's one of the reasons we sent you down there, Harland."

"Okay, but I can't rush it. I'm supposed to be the security officer, not a time and motion study expert."

Makin stuck his pipe in his mouth and attempted to light it with a match, but unsuccessfully. He kept it dangling from his teeth.

"How's Gilley's sanity?" he asked.

I thought about that for a moment. "Well, he's not insane. Eccentric would be a better word. I'd say his mind is finely balanced, and in that condition he is capable of some of his most brilliantly imaginative work."

"Possibly—but it has nothing whatever to do with the official R.U.8 programme."

"Agreed. That's the trouble."

"Trouble enough at that," Makin said sourly. "Tell me more about this so-called Beast project. What have you found out?"

I outlined the essentials of Gilley's experiment. The sceptical twist of Makin's lips merely hardened. I restated my view that Gilley should be allowed to continue in his present groove for a few weeks more, but under increasing supervision.

"It's contrary to Ministry policy," Makin stated flatly.

"What *is* Ministry policy, when it comes to the

point?" I said. "If you suspend Gilley, what do you achieve? The Beast experiment will be through very soon, and that's the end of the road. You can't drive a train past a terminus."

"You can—and it makes a horrible mess."

"I'll admit that I'm not happy about Gilley. There are indications of something like schizo-paranoia, and it's inter-related with the imaginary Beast in the computer. I want to do a full check-out on the man in the next day or two. I want keys to his office, desks, filing cabinets and the flat where he lives . . ."

"There should be duplicates at R.U.8."

"I prefer not to use the duplicates, just in case somebody notices."

"All right. I'll get you a set of spare keys."

"Also a spring-loaded skeleton master in case I find a lock which the spares don't fit."

Makin nodded.

"Also a Shanghai unit available at short notice."

"Expecting *that* kind of trouble?" Makin said with a grimace. "We prefer not to if it can be avoided. The police don't like it."

"Just a precaution—in case Gilley loses his grip."

"He's not a violent type, surely?"

"Not so far, but I think I saw a straw in the wind."

"Right," said Makin decisively. "I'll have Schuster and Briggs stand by with a fast utility van. If you need medical aid, don't call in a local doctor. Schuster is a qualified medico. Use him."

"I thought he was struck off."

"He was and is. Got involved in an M.I.5 assassination job, and had to play guilty and incompetent because the truth couldn't be revealed

in court. He's a good man, though, and he gets all the drugs he needs from us. Make use of him at the drop of a hat."

"Or the drop of a Gilley," I said. "Thanks, anyway. That will just about set me up."

"Anything else to report?" Makin asked.

"Not at this stage. I'll have a clearer picture of people and things in a few days. I'll keep you informed."

"Telephone if anything breaks. Use a jammed line."

"Okay."

"Come back in two hours and I'll have the keys waiting."

"I'll do that," I said.

I returned to my own deserted office, flopped into the familiar chair, yawned and stretched. Not enough sleep, too much alcohol and over-indulgence in fair maidens—well, up to a point. I yawned and stretched again. There's a theory that yawning and stretching squeeze stale blood out of the muscles of the body and pump fresh arterial blood in. It could be true. Animals invariably do it on awaking. I do it myself, and so does Lynn. I can't speak for Synøve.

It was still early by office-hour standards—not yet ten o'clock. I decided to telephone Lynn at her advertising agency.

"Surprise, surprise," she said when she recognised my voice. "The intrepid explorer returns to civilisation."

"Only for two hours, honey. Can you get away?"

"To do what?"

"Swap the latest syndromes—and do something about those dreadful withdrawal symptoms."

A momentary pause. "Sorry to disappoint you, Mark, but I haven't got any syndromes or withdrawal symptoms at the moment."

I recognised a certain oddly impersonal quality in her voice. I had heard it once before, when she had had a brief and futile affair with another man while she was having an affair with me. The memory never forgets danger signs.

"I thought we might have a drink and a cosy chat at the flat," I said.

"What's wrong with a pub? They open at eleven."

"What's wrong with the flat? It's open now—and it has certain amenities which you won't find in a pub."

"You mean like a bed. Mark, I only got out of bed an hour and a half ago. Anyway, I couldn't make it if I tried because I've got to see an important client at eleven-thirty and there wouldn't be time for anything worth while."

"I can be very quick."

"You think that would interest me? Mark, why don't you be a good boy and ring me *again* sometime when you've got a couple of hours on the loose. You know how I love being rushed off my feet to relieve your withdrawal symptoms. Must go now—the other phone's ringing. 'Bye."

She hung up. I did too. The other phone wasn't ringing, or if it was, then I didn't hear it over the line, and it was a good line. Well, that seemed to be that. Easy come, easy go. The writing on the wall. The future casting its shadow. All the other clichés. Not exactly a traumatic experience, but slightly depressing. There had been a time when a few drinks and a quick romp at the flat at any time

of the day had been Lynn's idea of fun. It probably still was—at somebody else's flat. I found myself trying to visualise her new boy friend, but abandoned the effort, and thought about Synøve instead. Perhaps I had been unkind to Synøve—unnecessarily cavalier and even hostile. If it came to the point she was probably no worse than Lynn, and perhaps considerably less selfish. I'd have to change my attitude towards her and let her know that despite the carping and criticism she was genuinely admired and appreciated—not that she would really give a damn anyway. Poor ageing Harland, I thought—unloved, unhonoured and unsung.

I mooned away in the office for an hour. Then I went to the washroom to get a glass of water to revive the Busy Lizzie plant which was drooping again—that creature had the thirst of an alcoholic. Then I went out of the building to the nearest pub to drown my sorrows. I drank two double whiskies and a pint of beer, read the *Financial Times*, which somebody had left on the bar counter, and began to feel more cheerful. After an early snack to stabilise me, I went back to D.S.S. and collected the keys from Makin.

"Tell me, Harland," he said, as I was about to go, "what's the situation with this Rayner woman that Bennett mentioned in his report?"

I thought about that one for about a thousandth of a second. "Hard to say. She's young, separated from her husband, greatly outnumbered by R.U.8 Adonises with both eyes on the main chance. I think there may be some promiscuity but nothing like a serious affair."

"Think we ought to have her transferred?"

"To where? A transfer isn't going to change her character."

"Well, have her fired."

"Certainly, if you want to lose a competent programmer. Fire half the staff of R.U.8 at the same time—those she might have had relations with. There is no security risk."

"Keep an eye on it," he instructed.

I promised I would. Keeping an eye on Synøve was the least painful of my chores.

I left Makin, went down to my car, and started off on the two hour run back to Barnham and its cast of mixed-up adults—well, some of them.

Chapter Nine

I REACHED R.U.8. soon after two-thirty in the afternoon and spent half an hour in my office making notes which I put in my security document case. Then I studied a map of the building. The photographic department was on the second sub-ground level, almost directly beneath the computer room. I went down there on a reconnaissance sortie.

At the far side of a small ante-room was a door labelled *Dark Room*, and above it was a red light which was on. An urbane young man sat at a desk. Behind him was a wall covered from ceiling to floor with oblong pigeon-holes, in some of which

large buff envelopes reclined at an angle. Another wall was buttressed by steel lockers. The door of one was open, and I could see that it contained cameras and auxiliary lenses, and cardboard cartons of film.

I introduced myself. The urbane young man's name was Howell. He outlined briefly the overall function of the photographic department within the organisation of R.U.8. The main facility available was microfilming of documents and reports, but a wide range of still and cine cameras was held in store for research applications and microphotography. Colour and monochrome processing was carried out in the well equipped dark room, which was staffed by two girls working under one male supervisor.

Whittaker, the supervisor at present in the dark room, usually took the scientific photographs required by the various laboratories. He was an expert on colour. Howell took over himself at times, particularly where microphotography was involved. Sometimes the scientists took their own pictures, where they had a certain degree of know-how.

Were cameras ever lent to members of the staff? I enquired And was the dark room ever used by individuals for private purposes?

Howell pulled at his lower lip in embarrassment. "Officially no," he said uneasily, "but you know how it is."

"How is it?"

"Well, one has to be a bit flexible. Someone wants to borrow a Leica for a weekend, and then do a bit of processing and enlarging afterwards—so we prefer to turn a blind eye. I mean, so far as we

are concerned it is simply a question of one of the boffins preferring to take his own pictures and develop them himself if he happens to be working on some particularly tricky and secret project. If the pictures happen to be of his girl friend or his kids, then we prefer not to know—and, generally speaking, we don't know."

He grinned hesitantly at me, and went on. "I know it's a bit irregular, Mr. Harland, but there's no harm done, I can assure you."

"It depends on who's doing the borrowing," I said. "In the case of Dr. Gilley I imagine it would be all right."

Howell brightened up a little. "Dr. Gilley has one of our best cameras at this moment, Mr. Harland. And he does his own processing and enlarging, too—but not colour. He doesn't understand colour, but I believe he's very competent in black and white."

"Any idea why Gilley wants the camera?"

"I didn't ask," he said with a shrug. "Hardly to take pictures of his girl friend. Some scientific work in connection with this special project, perhaps."

"Could I borrow a camera if I wanted to?" I asked.

"I don't see why not. It depends on the programme of work. Sometimes there isn't a spare camera available. But in the ordinary way . . ."

"It's nice to know," I said. "The need will probably never arise, but if it does . . ."

"If it does we've got the best photographic equipment in the world."

I thanked him in a vague way and returned to my office. The pattern was still uncertain. Why shouldn't Gilley borrow a camera and use the

R.U.8 dark room facilities for personal work connected with his special project? The answer was, of course, that he would have to do his own processing and enlarging, because the pictures were of such a nature that no outside firm would have handled them, and would probably have referred them to the police.

Gradually I became aware that I was thinking in the plural—of photographs rather than a single photograph (the one I had actually seen). And yet, logically, Gilley would almost certainly have taken a series of photographs, although nothing Synøve had said when challenged even hinted at this; on the other hand, she had not asked how I had come across the particular photograph I had mentioned. She had played the situation entirely by ear and instinct, leaving me to do the talking and adding nothing to what I had said.

Around four o'clock I decided to stop thinking and experiment with something resembling action, so I called Mrs. Gaffney on the intercom. Was Dr. Gilley in his office? He was in the annexe and did not wish to be disturbed. Never mind—it wasn't important. At least, if Gilley was locked in his annexe, then he could not simultaneously be at home.

Next I made a brief visit to the computer room to see Synøve. She was in good enough humour, but tended to regard me with a degree of suspicion, which was perhaps justifiable.

"Syn," I said, "could you do me a very big personal favour?"

"I've been trying to do that for days," she said, giving me a cool resentful look.

"You're trying too hard. Why not try the soft sell for a change?"

"I'll bear it in mind. What's the favour?"

"Can you rig one of Gilley's latest Beast programmes to give crazy results?"

She stared at me in surprise. "You want me to lose my job?"

"I don't mean sabotage," I explained. "I just want Gilley to be so baffled by the print-out that he'll come roaring down to the computer room to spend a couple of hours checking through the programmes for errors."

"But why?"

"As a kind of red herring while I'm busy doing something else."

"But, Mark," she protested, "I can't involve myself in this way . . ."

"You're already involved in a much more ominous way."

"Dr. Gilley has always had my co-operation. I can't now start putting deliberate errors into his programmes. In any case he would be certain to find out, and what possible reason could I give?"

"Human failing. Anybody can make a mistake—a wrong symbol or two, or an incorrect instruction to the computer, or a decimal point out of place."

"The computer would recognise that something was wrong. It would check against its memory store, confirm that the results were spurious, and raise a query on the print-out."

I sighed. The computer was far too clever for my liking, but she was right, of course. It isn't easy to pull a fast one on a computer.

"Why not change the memory store?" I sug-

gested. "Use one belonging to a different programme. That ought to produce some weird results."

"That plus errors might work," she said thoughtfully. "But it's a fairly obvious one, and it wouldn't fool Dr. Gilley for long—and, of course, it shouldn't fool him at all because it's the kind of mistake I'd notice myself immediately."

"This time you don't notice. You're preoccupied. You assume the print-out is okay and you deliver it to Gilley. Then you come back here, put the correct memory store in circuit and get rid of the programme errors. That ought to hold Gilley for a time while he tries to sort out what could have happened."

"I don't like it, Mark. It's too much a cat and mouse subterfuge. Gilley would lose faith in me."

"The way things are going, Gilley's faith won't be worth much any time at all. You can blame me. Say I waved the big security stick at you and ordered you to do it—Ministry authority, and all that."

She shrugged. "I still don't like it, but I'll think of something in the next few days."

"You'd better think of something *now*," I insisted, "because I want Gilley pursuing his red herring this evening—*within three hours of now* —and that doesn't give you much time."

"Three hours?" There was an incredulous look in her eyes. "That's impossible, Mark! Anyway, why so urgent?"

"Because there is a possibility that Gilley may be recalled by the Ministry for psychological tests. They're not happy about his mental state. I've tried to reassure them, but there's a limit to my influence

in the higher echelons of security. So, to strengthen my own hand, there are certain things I want to do without delay—and one of them is to pin Gilley down in the computer room checking programme faults. I want him there this evening by not later than seven o'clock."

"Well, all right," she agreed reluctantly. "I wish I knew what you were really up to."

"So do I," I grinned. "Maybe one day we'll both know."

You couldn't reasonably claim that Synøve was one hundred per cent reliable, or that her allegiances were anything but divided, but I imagined that she would probably pull the rabbit out of the hat. She liked her bread buttered on both sides, and on the edges as well. She was loyal to all, even if it meant being disloyal to all at the same time. The only trouble was that I couldn't be sure as to what extent she was on Gilley's side, but the next few hours would help to determine that.

I returned briefly to my office, then left the building and drove to Gilley's flat. There was no difficulty about breaking and entering—Makin had supplied the right keys. Naturally enough, Gilley's apartment was more ambitious than those of the lesser staff: into what appeared to be about the same area of total floor space they had managed to squeeze an extra room, which Gilley had converted into a study, with a table desk boasting a red leather top, and a large glass-fronted antique bookcase. The titles of the books formed an interesting assortment covering a wider field of interest (if it was interest, and not just space filling) than one might have expected. An ancient copy of Fowler's *Modern English Usage* leaned against a

paper-backed version of the official police driving manual, and next to that was a very wide and tatty volume entitled *Outline of Forensic Pathology.* There was little fiction; I noticed a copy of Graham Greene's *England Made Me*, something by Aldous Huxley (*Eyeless in Gaza*, I think) and, oddly enough, *The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler. There was also a copy of Dunne's *Experiment with Time.* Gilley seemed to have a fairly catholic taste, though whether he actually read the books he collected or collected the books he didn't read was a matter of opinion. Presumably he relaxed occasionally, and on the evidence Dunne and Fowler were equally relaxing (which could be so).

I found the camera in a drawer in the bedsitter part of the flat. It was one of the more expensive Leica's with interchangeable lenses, plus accessories such as a light meter, tripod, rangefinder, filters, and so on. No flashgun, however, but two ordinary photoflood lamps, without reflectors or stands—but then they could be used in ordinary table lamps (of which there were two in Gilley's study alone) and suitably positioned for optimum lighting. The photography had obviously been carried out in the bed-cum-sitting room, where long plain grey curtains across the window would form an effective backdrop for standing poses, with the bed conveniently situated for horizontal erotica.

There was a film still in the camera; twenty-two frames out of the thirty-six had been exposed. I wound it off, removed the cassette and put it in my pocket. Then I hunted around for a replacement film, but couldn't find one. Never mind—Gilley probably wouldn't notice the difference. The frame

indicator would still move with the action of the lever-wind, so I set it back at twenty-two and hoped for the best. He wouldn't discover the theft until he opened the camera to remove the film.

There was nothing else of relevant interest in the drawers—just articles of clothing, handkerchiefs, cardboard folders containing sundry letters and documents of no particular significance. On top of the chest of drawers (which was, in effect, a kind of utility dressing table) were a number of small glass animals, ranging from a duck to an elephant, and a small white woolly teddy bear, which seemed both out of key and in character at the same time.

I went back to the small study and examined the desk. The drawers were locked, so I experimented with the automatic master key. This device was a multiple key of complex design with moving parts and spring-loaded wards. With a certain amount of informed manipulation it could be made to simulate most small keys of the type used for doors, drawers and cupboards—and some of the older designs of safe. After three minutes and a dozen or more attempts I managed to open the first of the drawers in Gilley's desk. It contained a batch of miscellaneous papers, handwritten and typewritten, and an empty vodka bottle. Some of the papers bore obscure notes on the Beast experiment, but most seemed to be concerned with administrative matters of no immediate interest. The empty vodka bottle posed a problem, however, but I didn't pursue it. Maybe Gilley liked a drink after all, but why lock the empty away in his desk?

The second drawer contained a slide rule, some

loose drawing instruments, a bottle of India ink, and two pairs of socks.

The third and final drawer was empty except for a long plain envelope. It was unsealed, so I opened it and removed the contents. I found myself holding strips of thirty-five millimetre film—sections cut from a roll which had been exposed and developed. One by one I held them up against the fading light of the window.

They were as expected, though difficult to recognise in the negative form and in such small dimensions. Clearly a series of nudes and detailed portions of nudes—all female, and undoubtedly all Synøve. There were thirty-four frames altogether—not quite the full complement of a film cassette. I removed one of the strips of film showing the features of the model so that she would be identifiable when the negative was printed and enlarged, and slipped it in my pocket. The remainder I replaced in the envelope which I put back in the drawer, and then, using the skeleton key, I locked all three drawers.

No point in staying any longer, I decided. I had merely confirmed what I had already suspected, and at least I had collected some tangible evidence, not forgetting the partly exposed cassette of film which I had removed from the camera, whatever it might portray when developed. That was a task which could conveniently fill in the time until seven o'clock, when (if Synøve was truly on my side) Gilley would be flapping away in the computer room looking for errors in his programme.

I took a last look at Gilley's glass animals and teddy bear. They seemed lonely and pathetic

against the background of Gilley's newly acquired taste for scientific pornography. As a gesture I saluted the teddy bear and left the flat. I went back to R.U.8.

"I'd like to use the dark room for about an hour," I said to urbane young Howell. The red light over the dark room door was out, and the staff were already preparing to call it a day and go home.

Howell glanced at his wrist-watch. "That's all right, Mr. Harland, but we'll probably be gone before you're through. Would you ask the night security guard to lock up as you leave?"

I said I would. Howell took me into the dark room. It was quite a big dark room as dark rooms go and adequately equipped for virtually any kind of photographic operation. He spent a few minutes showing me where the processing chemicals were stored, and left out a supply of bromide paper for enlarging—if I got around to it. I knew enough about tank processing to deal with a roll of thirty-five millimetre film, but as I didn't know the film speed, it would have to be somewhat hit or miss. Bearing in mind that Gilley had probably used the two photoflood lamps, and would need fine grain for enlargement, it was safe to assume that the film in the cassette was of medium speed. When Howell had gone, I locked the dark room door, prepared the tank and the developing and fixing solutions, switched on the green safelight and turned out the main light.

Within twenty minutes the film had been converted into a strip of wet negative. There was no need to proceed further. It was another series of nudes, in long shot and close-up—the parallel of

the previous film. But there was one important difference: the nudes in the new film were all of Gilley himself. Even in the reversed tones of the negative the identity was unmistakable.

I turned on the light and hung the film in the quick dryer. I lit a cigarette and did some aimless thinking. The pictures had obviously been taken only recently, perhaps the previous night, and they had probably been taken by Gilley himself, for the camera had a "run-like-hell" delayed-action device for self-portraiture. No point in asking why. Gilley was clearly determined to provide his Beast with a full sex education, embracing (if that is the word) both male and female. Logical enough, of course, but I couldn't help wondering if the computer would accept the information being fed into it in the generalised way in which it was offered, or whether it would, in fact, regard the male sex as consisting exclusively of Dr. Gilley and the female sex of Synøve Rayner. That could pose a problem for any Beast.

When the film was dry I cut it into strips of half a dozen frames each and put them in an envelope, adding the strip of Synøve poses which I had removed from Gilley's drawer. I placed the envelope in my inside pocket. As there was time to kill, I turned off the lights in the photographic department and went in search of a beer at the nearest pub, not forgetting to arrange for the guard at the main entrance to lock up, as Howell had requested.

The Old Ship was deserted, apart from one or two of the local village regulars. It was too early yet for the R.U.8 drinkers, which was just as well, as I wasn't in the mood for shop talk or even small

talk. Thinking was out, too. It was the moment to relax over a cold pint of bitter and gather energy to cope with the quickening pace of events. I had a vital decision to make, and I was quite sure that before many more hours had elapsed it would have to be made. The Beast was no longer the problem —as an experiment it seemed to possess a certain merit, and there were, or had been, very good reasons (albeit unofficial) to allow it to proceed. The trouble was rapidly centring itself around the Beast's creator, Dr. Charles Howard Gilley, and it was beginning to look as if Gilley himself could not be allowed to continue. Makin in his arbitrary way was right—you can drive a train past a terminus and make a horrible mess. It seemed to me that Gilley was fast approaching his terminus, and it was my job to prevent a horrible mess.

There was one more operation to be carried out, but not just yet. Time enough still for a second pint of beer and another cigarette before taking up the final pursuit of Gilley's perverted inner man.

Chapter Ten

By seven o'clock R.U.8 was largely in darkness and deserted. Certain laboratories would occasionally work a night shift when under pressure, but this was not a season of priorities—with the exception of Gilley, who seemed to work a permanent night

and day shift combined on his unofficial business. It was simple enough to discover whether Synøve's subterfuge, if attempted, had succeeded. A brief reconnaissance along the corridors confirmed that Gilley's office was in darkness, while the lights of the computer room were on, and through the glass-panelled doors it was possible to see Gilley, head bowed and hands clasped behind his back, peering intently at paper rolling from the print-out machine. Synøve was there, too, surprisingly; perhaps she thought it wiser to be available for soothing explanations when Gilley finally pinned down whatever errors she had introduced into his programme. From my point of view it was an advantage, for detailed explanations could only delay him longer, provided she did not actively assist in tracing the faults.

I went back to Gilley's office and switched on the light. Both desks were clear and tidy, but my focus of interest was in the small annexe, the door of which was locked, as expected. I selected the key from Makin's duplicate set and let myself in.

The desk in the tiny room was even more chaotic than on my previous visit, literally inches deep in long rolls of computer print-out, typewritten sheets, handwritten notes and other documents. I went straight for the drawers, which were locked, of course, but the skeleton master unlocked them in just a few minutes.

Practically the first thing I came across, in the big bottom drawer, was a bottle of vodka about two thirds full. A moment later, behind a pile of cardboard folders in the same drawer, I discovered two empty vodka bottles. In an upper drawer was a small tumbler, the interior still moist, with a few

drops of clear fluid resting in the bottom. I tipped the liquid on to the back of my hand and tasted it. Neat vodka, naturally, and it was evident that Gilley must have been drinking it only a few minutes earlier, or the glass would have dried out.

With this ominous introduction to Gilley's secret lair, and the rather astonishing realisation that he was a secret drinker (but as vodka had neither odour nor taste, who would have suspected?) I began to go through the drawers systematically in search of photographs. Very soon I hit the jackpot. A buff cardboard wallet contained a complete set of enlargements of the film strip featuring Synøve, including the one which had fallen on the floor beneath the desk the previous day. But there was more besides: a series of tracings of the photographs on thin draughtman's vellum, executed with a fine pen in India ink, with geometrical lines and curves overdrawn in pencil, as if to analyse and measure the salient features of Synøve's fundamental anatomy; and around the edges of the tracings were innumerable mathematical and algebraic symbols which were no doubt carefully calculated to reduce Synøve's physical assets to a formula which the Beast could understand. Synøve reduced to computer language. Well, she must have known what Gilley had in mind, though whether she fully realised the embarrassing detail of the analytical operation was another matter. However, no offence had been committed in law; it was perfectly legal to take photographs of this type provided they weren't "published"—i.e. shown to anybody else. Presumably the same mathematical processing would have been applied to the series of photographs of Gilley himself—if I hadn't removed them

from the camera. Gilley would find out about that very quickly, perhaps this same evening, for I was sure that this new development was recent, within the last day or two, and that the final phase of the Beast experiment was being rushed against the possibility of Ministry intervention.

I replaced the photographs and tracings in the folder, closed the drawers (without locking them, as yet), and started examining the material on top of the desk. Long mathematical screeds, algebraic matrix formulae and equations, and incomprehensible question and answer dialogue, in plain language, which had presumably taken place between Gilley and the Beast. Items such as: "How could you modify the guanine linkage during gestative mitosis?"—and the reply: "Wrong premise genetic mutation apply not mental mutation cerebrosomes valid." "Identify cerebrosomes." "Undiscovered root minus one mental plane evolution." "Do you refer to fourth dimension"? "Dimension irrelevant root minus one mental physical differentiation in unnumbered dimensions."

That was strictly for long-haired boffins. It probably meant something to Gilley. It could mean that from the point of view of the Beast mental evolution was something that took place in a different dimension from physical evolution, provided one accepted the assumption that dimensions are separated in orientation by the square root of minus one—an imaginary quantity, but something which I vaguely remembered meeting before. Even so, the true significance of the dialogue escaped me. I was definitely a square when it came to the square root of minus one.

Further down the print-out another section of

dialogue seemed to take on a more practical and topical (in terms of Gilley) slant. It ran: "Subject host—what degree of instinctive and emotional involvement?" "No degree, simply control psycho-physio mechanism." "But host out of control?" "No personal control deployment psycho level instruction required." "What kind of instruction?" "Motor reflex syndrome recognition sex objective procedure detail geometric temporal."

The Beast was clearly limited by its lack of semantic knowhow (i.e. it couldn't even speak basic English), but taking the words as they occurred with the kind of meaning Gilley might have attributed to them it rather looked as if "E" was asking Gilley for positive sex instruction. Geometric temporal would be computer terms for where and when—meaning what physical actions to perform in what sequence. The word host left me blank.

In general terms, it all tied up with the photographs. The entity in the computer had persuaded Gilley to provide it with an illustrated correspondence course on human sex and procreation. Even so it wasn't enough to account for the bottles of vodka.

I went through the drawers of the desk again in the hope of finding some kind of personal notebook setting out, in diary form, perhaps, Gilley's own record of events. He was the kind of man who loved to put everything in writing, at great length and in great detail. Mrs. Gaffney had already shown me part of the official log of the experiment, so that the complete document and possibly informal notes ought to be somewhere about.

I was half-way through the contents of drawer number three for the second time when the door of

the annexe opened suddenly. I swung round to find myself face to face with an angry Gilley. Behind his heavy glasses his eyes were balls of ice—but they contained a new quality, a sense of power coupled with arrogant contempt. Gilley in this schizophrenic phase, I warned myself, standing up.

"Have you found what you are looking for, Mr. Hartman?" he asked in a deep-freeze voice.

I played it Code B—the soft-shoe shuffle. "You've got woodworm in your desk, Dr. Gilley. I was about to call Rentokil."

"The only woodworm in my desk is you," he said, which I thought was one up to him. There was a certain slurred quality in his speech which could have been the vodka, but he was standing erect and very steadily on his feet, like an officer taking a parade.

He went on: "Kindly explain what you imagine you are doing with my confidential papers."

Code B was out. It had to be Code A—the direct challenge based on evidence, provided you've got it. I opened drawer two and produced the nude photographs and tracings.

"How confidential are these?" I enquired.

He advanced a pace towards me, but there was no change in his expression or manner, only a continuing cold contempt.

"They happen to be extremely confidential, Mr. Harlow, and they are none of your business. Perhaps you are not familiar with the law?"

"It's not a question of law," I said. "But surely you can appreciate that from an official viewpoint this kind of activity is odd, to say the least."

"It seems to me to be a perfectly rational

activity. There is a full and valid explanation which I prefer to keep to myself."

"And the vodka?"

For an instant I thought he was going to say, "What vodka?" but he was too shrewd to bluff. For a fractional moment a flicker of hate glittered in his eyes; it was a fleeting glimpse of something almost animal and primitive—yes, even bestial—but it vanished as quickly as it came.

"The vodka," he replied, "is *my* business. I require it for specific clinical purposes."

"Like drinking it."

He looked at me with distaste, but at the same time his stubborn and hostile attitude seemed to weaken. He rubbed his hand slowly down one side of his face, and grimaced.

"Yes, Mr. Harlow—like drinking it. The computer programme calls for it as part of the experiment."

"The same as it calls for pornographic pictures?"

"Precisely."

"Quite a programme," I commented. "What *are* you up to, Dr. Gilley?"

At this point I was fully prepared to be understanding, to try to gain his confidence. His now tired and pained demeanour, shorn of the temporary arrogance, seemed to suggest that he needed to confide in somebody, to relieve some of the tension and discard part of the burden of delinquent responsibility that he was carrying.

"I am not prepared to go into a long explanation at this stage," he said. "The experimental programme has reached the point where the entity needs detailed information about the anatomical structure of the human body. After all, it doesn't

possess a body—yet. But when it *does* acquire control of a body, it must know how to make use of it—rather like learning how to drive a car."

"You don't need alcohol for that," I pointed out.

"Oh, the alcohol has quite a different function," he said in a quick, quiet voice, as if the subject were too ridiculous for words. "It's not essential, in fact. Certain drugs would be much better, but they are difficult to obtain. The alcohol, in the form of vodka, is readily available. It serves its purpose."

"What purpose?"

"To anaesthetise the higher centres of the brain, the critical faculties, the seat of inhibitions . . ."

"Why?"

He paused and licked his dry lips. Maybe he was thirsty for more vodka. I didn't make the offer, but let him pursue his tortuous explanation.

"I'll be frank with you, Mr. Harvey. As a temporary experiment I am proposing to act as host to the entity. It is a logical and inevitable step."

"What exactly do you mean by host?"

"Precisely what I say. I shall offer the entity accommodation in my own body for a limited period in order to gain intimate knowledge of its mode of thinking. It will be a unique and valuable experience. Unfortunately, I have discovered that my own brain sets up a natural psychic barrier—a kind of mental antibody to an alien inoculation. It is necessary, therefore, to reduce the level of the brain's activity so that the entity may have a reasonable chance of taking temporary control. It will benefit by obtaining practical experience of manipulating a human body—then, at a later date,

we can go more deeply into the question of providing a permanent physical body for it."

I made a grunting sound. I didn't like it at all. Already a valid psychological theory was crystallising in my mind which would account very well for this new departure in Gilley's eccentric (but rationalised) behaviour—but it wasn't something I could reasonably discuss with Gilley himself.

"Couldn't this be dangerous?" I asked. "I mean —the detailed sex know-how . . ."

He smiled faintly—a mere sour twist of his lips. "That is an academic matter. There will be no question of complete possession of the host, you understand. The entity will merely act as observer—to experience the internal sensations of the human body kinaesthetically. It will get to know something about human relationships—the formulae of social intercourse. Any actual sex experience in the physical sense would come much later—and with a different host, I might add." His voice sounded a little smug, as if he were lecturing an adolescent on the facts of ife.

His mood was now such that I felt I could probe a little deeper without offending him. "You've never married, have you, Dr. Gilley?" I asked, although I knew the answer.

"I do not regard myself as a family type of man."

"Without being impertinent, may I ask if you have ever had relations with a woman?"

"You mean socially?"

"I mean sexually."

"I'm afraid you *are* being impertinent, Mr. Harwell. You must not judge me by those"—he waved a hand towards the desk—"photographs."

"I'm not judging you at all," I said. "I'm just trying to fill in what you might call your behaviour pattern. The more you tell me, the more logical it becomes."

That seemed to please him—but the kind of logic I was thinking of wasn't the kind which he had in mind. He considered the point for a few moments, putting his head on one side like a bird, and staring at me with remote thoughtful eyes.

"Let me put it this way," he said. "I don't recognise the need for the kind of relations you refer to. Or, rather, when I do, I devote my energies all the more to my work, which to me is far more important than involvement in a purposeless and self-indulgent amusement." Having made this somewhat pontifical pronouncement, he added, as an afterthought: "I am not suggesting that sex is purposeless in itself—but its purpose is procreation and not pleasure. That is a fact of biology which has been abused by man in his own selfish interests."

Well, it added up. If Gilley had lived a cloistered life, then pictures of nudes were about the only way he could obtain anatomical data to pass on to his Beast.

"Can't you appreciate," he went on in a voice of appeal, "that I am a responsible scientist, and that I know *exactly* what I am doing. I am *not* unbalanced, psychotic or insane. If I tend to concentrate deeply on a particular experiment to the exclusion of all else, my attitude still remains objective. You talk about nude photographs as if I were a secret pervert—but would you like to see the mathematical equations which translate a human nude into computer language?"

Without waiting for a reply he crossed to the desk, opened a drawer and produced a manilla folder. It was one which I had already inspected and discarded as being incomprehensible. From it he selected a sheet of paper slightly larger than foolscap size and handed it to me. Apart from the block-lettered heading at the top which announced *Matrix 14—Asymmetric Ventral Presentation,* the paper was covered with algebraic symbols, formulae and equations, written with a fine-nibbed pen in tiny spidery handwriting, but the thing was meticulous in its neat detail. While I was studying it (without understanding a single symbol) he thrust one of the more revealing Synøve nude pictures at me.

"The original—and the functional analysis," he stated.

Well, how functional can you get? I was tempted to ask which particular symbol or equation represented which particular anatomical feature, but it wouldn't have meant anything to me, anyway. As if anticipating my trend of thought, Gilley said:

"It's basically a Fourier analysis in three dimensions, but presented in matrix form because it is easier for the computer to assimilate."

"I took a final look at the equations and the nude, then handed them back to Gilley.

"It is original research which has never been attempted before," he stated.

I nodded. "A more complicated version of thirty-six, twenty-four, thirty-six—but I get the point."

He pouted a little, as if I had bowdlerised the Theory of Relativity, and regarded me solemnly. "Perhaps you now begin to appreciate, Mr. Harvey, that beneath this apparently erotic trivia is a

serious motivation. When this particular line of research is finally published, it will create a sensation throughout the civilised world."

"I'm sure it will," I remarked, unable to suppress a certain sardonic edge to my voice. "The uncivilised world, too, I imagine. Even so, Dr. Gilley, I'm afraid, in all fairness, I must warn you that it is my duty to report back to higher authority. Your experiment really does involve certain factors that must be brought to the attention of the Ministry."

He opened his mouth to speak, but I waved a hand at him and carried on regardless.

"I don't for a moment doubt your sincerity or sense of dedication. The experiment may well be worth while in the long term—but it is quite irrelevant to the commissioned work of this research unit. Even that might not matter so much, but, frankly, the alcohol and the pornography are unacceptable."

"They are part of the programme," he insisted, white-faced.

"But it's not the Ministry's programme—and, let's face it, all the evidence is damning in a personal sense. You're supposed to be a responsible executive in charge of genetic warfare research. If the Ministry were to send an investigation team down here to make a thorough objective report, what do you imagine they would say? You're putting yourself out on a big limb, Dr. Gilley."

He looked at me through narrowed eyes. "You talk like a Ministry man yourself, Harlow."

"We're all Ministry men. The Ministry pays my salary as well as yours."

"Then what do you suggest?" He shrugged his shoulders in a helpless fashion.

Nothing that would be acceptable, I thought. Stop the experiment. Put in a detailed report to the Ministry (via D.S.S.). Request permission to proceed further, under strict supervision. No good. It wouldn't work. Dr. Gilley wasn't the type to accept supervision, which meant that he was not basically the type to run R.U.8.

Nevertheless, I said: "Why don't you put your cards on the table to the Ministry at this point? Tell them what you're doing, and what you hope to do. Set a time limit for the completion of the experiment—a few days or a few weeks—but at least take the Ministry into your confidence and get official permission to continue."

"You *know* that's impossible," he said quietly, and, of course, I knew it was. Gilley had already gone too far. The alcohol and the nude photographs, though fitting with apparent logic into Gilley's programme of research, would be interpreted as obvious signs of mental unbalance and imminent breakdown. He would be regarded as a nut case, with sinister sexual overtones, and the psychiatrists would use words like schizophrenia and paranoia —and they might well be right. For myself—well, I needed time to assess the situation in its broadest aspects. As always, meeting Gilley face to face was a disconcerting experience because the image he presented—without even trying—was one of noble self-dedication, honesty, and sincerity. One was almost impelled to accept as truth the fact that he drank vodka and studied nude photographs in a disinterested academic way simply because it happened to be part of the required computer programme.

In fact, I was convinced that it was not so. I was

convinced that no real Beast existed outside of Gilley's own mind—that what was essentially a mathematical exercise in biological statistics had been seized on by part of Gilley's subconscious as a sound excuse to break out and establish dominance. The "entity" which he kept referring to was not the computer entity at all, but a part of himself, buried deep in his brain at instinctive level, seeking release in a devious but superficially plausible way. Gilley was a man divided, and now the repressed portion of him, embodying the physical and animal urges, had discovered a channel through which it could manifest itself. The sad thing was that Gilley, the scientist, was efficiently aiding and abetting his "Bestial" other self by justifying its every action in logical scientific terms, and attributing it all to the computer—indeed, to a number of spools of inanimate magnetic tape.

"You're against me, aren't you?" Gilley asked.

"No, I'm not exactly against you," I replied, after due consideration. "On the other hand, I'm not exactly for you. The present stage of the experiment seems to me to be no longer scientific, and it could even be dangerous."

"In that case, what do you propose to do?"

"What would you like me to do?"

A wan smile twisted the shape of his dry lips for a brief moment.

"Drop dead, for instance?" I suggested.

He contemplated the idea for a second or two. "There's no hostile feeling as far as I am concerned, Mr. Harwood. Obviously you have your job to do, and if you have no faith in my experiment then I can hardly expect you to put *yourself* out on

a limb, to use your own words. On the other hand . . ."

"Well?"

"It's really all a question of time. Neither you nor I can assess the full significance of this experiment as yet, but very soon the answers will become clear. Don't you feel that positive results would be worth waiting for?"

"You mean the results of this host takeover business?"

"That would be the next step."

I grimaced. "Tell you what, Dr. Gilley—you carry on with what you have to do and I'll carry on with what I have to do. We'll let fate decide the issue."

He hesitated, his anxious eyes looking beyond me. "Is that the limit of your concession?"

"It's not a concession," I said, "but it's the best I can offer."

That was the end of the interview. I left Gilley in his small annexe with his vodka and pretty pictures, and returned to the world of sanity.

The computer room was in darkness, which meant that Synøve had gone home. I decided to look in on her, if only to say thank you for her efforts in keeping Gilley away from his annexe long enough for me to check the contents of his desk. That he had returned too soon and had caught me red-handed, as it were, was probably no fault of hers. I was also curious to know whether Gilley, having isolated the programme errors, had suspected her of sabotage and conspiracy.

When she answered the door she was wearing her green dressing-gown. She looked pale and

tired, and her blonde hair was awry. There was no discernible light of welcome in her eyes, but she stood back and said: "I suppose you'd better come in, Mark."

I went in and lit a cigarette. She flopped back on the bed as if exhausted.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Oh, everything. That bright idea of yours . . ."

"What happened?"

"I introduced two errors and used an early-generation memory store. It took Gilley fifteen minutes to sort it out. He accused me of deliberate deception, and I had to admit it. I said what you told me to say—that I'd done it under your instruction, on Ministry orders."

That was interesting, because Gilley hadn't even mentioned the matter to me during the conversation in the annexe. Despite his apparent integrity, he was also playing his own subtle game. He had probably rushed back to the annexe expecting to find me there, and had composed his image to further his own obscure purposes.

"Fair enough," I commented. "It was bad luck, but no harm done. It merely precipitates matters."

"That's not all," she said tonelessly. "He tried to rape me."

"He *what*?"

"He became angry—and something very primitive appeared in his face, like . . . I don't know, some kind of animal. He said didn't I realise that I had a vital part to play in the programme, and that if I wasn't aware of it, then it was about time he demonstrated it so that I could acquire a sense of responsibility. That's what he said—a sense of

responsibility. Then he . . ." She broke off, staring silently at the ceiling.

"Then he what?"

"He grabbed me and assaulted me—but there was something horribly brutal in the way he did it. I'm sure he—that for a few moments—he was insane. I managed to get away. He tore my skirt. I came straight back here."

I bit my lip and thought. Schizophrenia—by all standards. The Jekyll and Hyde complex. Or, in terms of the experiment, the Beast gradually taking possession of Gilley's mind and body in flashes of uncharacteristic behaviour.

"What did he actually do?" I asked.

She told me what he did. It was nasty enough, though with a girl like Synøve it hadn't a hope of succeeding without the use of brute force. Promiscuous women can also put up the strongest barriers; they like to pick and choose.

I sighed. "The Gilley thing seems to be reaching its climax," I said. "Don't check in tomorrow. It will be better if you're not around."

"I *have* to check in, Mark," she said. "I've got a job to do—not necessarily for Gilley, but for the Ministry. You see, I know it was my fault. I shouldn't have posed for those pictures. But he was so scientific about it that I didn't foresee that there might be a delayed action effect. Somehow I can't help feeling that it wasn't really Gilley . . ."

"Then who was it?"

She looked at me for the first time. Her eyes were stark, and rather frightened.

"Do you know, I had a strange impression that it was the thing in the computer—and not Gilley."

"I think there's a more rational explanation than

that." I was trying to reassure her. "The thing in the computer doesn't really exist, but Gilley believes it does, and he's identified part of his mind with it. It's the suppressed section of his mind which is frustrated in human sexual terms—but this gives it an excuse and a motive to express itself and come out into the open. I doubt if the other normal Gilley even knows what is going on, or remembers what happened. He's breaking down into a split personality. I think his animal side is focused on you, probably because of the photographs—and that's why I think you ought to stay away from R.U.8 tomorrow."

"But he might come here to find me—and that would be even worse."

"He won't be able to, because I shall be keeping a beady eye on him."

She shook her head. "I'd rather be among people. I'd rather forget it and do my work as usual. And I'd rather you kept a beady eye on me instead of Gilley—I'd feel more secure."

"You're insured as of now," I said. "I'll collect the premium some other time."

I said goodnight and went back to my flat and dialled Makin, using a special number which would provide a security tone-jammed line. Makin himself answered the telephone; he always did on that particular number, which terminated at half a dozen different places where he was likely to be at any time of the day or night, and which only he personally was authorised to answer. Over the line half a million warbling voices jabbered away like a noise from outer space, but the jabber would fade behind the voice at either end of the line.

"Harland," I said. "It looks as if G is on the point of break-out. It could be overnight."

"How serious?" Makin asked in his terse way.

"Secret drinking, pornographic pictures, a sexual assault on a female member of the staff—is that serious enough?"

"Oh, God—how long has this been going on?" He sounded annoyed.

"Recent origin. It's a schizophrenic breakdown, I think. Can you send the Shanghai unit down here?"

"All right. Schuster and Briggs will be down within three hours in the utility. Fix accommodation for them at the nearest hotel. Use Cat. A priority if necessary."

"I think I can get them into the local Railway Tavern," I said. "It's about five miles from here, and at this time of year they're bound to have rooms."

"Good. They'll stand by until wanted. Keep me informed and play it carefully. We don't want questions asked in the House."

"Don't worry. I'm playing it like I play chess, if I could play chess."

I hung up and immediately dialled the Railway Tavern in Barnham. Yes, they could provide two rooms at short notice. Visitors expected before midnight. Okay—would be arranged. No need to wave Ministry authorisations.

That was that. There's one consoling thing about working for the D.S.S., despite its adherence to soul destroying routine and donkey work (which is mostly futile), that when the occasional breakthrough occurs, then things begin to happen at lightning speed. Whether in Barnham, Algiers,

Moscow or Tokyo, a red light flashed to the London HQ produces results with all the dramatic speed of an H-bomb blast wave, but with far greater range. The secret lies in a complex network of security communication, and in fact D.S.S. shares with C.I.A. of America secret orbital satellite communication links which encompass the globe on a twenty-four hour basis. If it isn't used a great deal at present (apart from routine political intelligence, which is not D.S.S.'s line of business), at least it is always available if needed.

I decided to let it ride for a few hours. Gilley would no doubt remain at R.U.8 until midnight, and there was little I could do until Schuster and Briggs reported for duty. I debated whether to go down to The Old Ship for a beer or not, but decided against it. There was time for two or three hours' sleep—which might be very welcome indeed before morning. It could be a long night.

Chapter Eleven

Around eleven o'clock I awoke and washed briefly in cold water to sweep the cobwebs out of my brain. Then I telephoned the Railway Tavern. Yes, said the landlord, my colleagues had arrived some twenty minutes earlier. Did I wish to speak to them on the phone. I said I'd rather join them for a talk and a drink—if that was okay after licensing

hours. Be my guest, said the landlord amiably. You can drink all night and I'll add it to your colleagues' bill. I said fine, and hung up.

I put my coat on and went down to the car. As the road to Barnham went by R.U.8 I decided on impulse to look in to check on Gilley without necessarily intruding or even making my presence known to him. In fact, it didn't work out that way. His office was in darkness. As I might have expected, he was in the computer room, alone, manipulating equipment in a mood of furious concentration. Looking through the glass door, I could see him running a spool of tape through the input reading machine. He was hunched over the equipment in a way that suggested fatigue and despondency. Then, suddenly, on some instinctive impulse, he swung round and stared straight at me with blank expressionless eyes.

There was nothing else for it—I had to go in. As I walked towards him his demeanour changed; the drawn fatigue tensed into a lean strength, and again in his face appeared the sharp, cunning, wolf-like expression that I had noticed earlier. When I was just a few feet away from him I had the strange impression that he had actually grown bigger in physical stature, and that every muscle in his body was a coiled spring under tension. Something cold quivered at the back of my neck and trembled down my spine.

In a quite, gentle voice I said: "Dr. Gilley, don't you think it would be a good idea to forget about the project for a while—to rest and relax? You're working too hard."

"Who are you?" he demanded. There was no recognition in his pale eyes.

"Harland—the Security Officer."

"Get out, Harland. You're interfering with my work." It was a flat, toneless voice, stating a fact rather than issuing an ultimatum.

"I'm trying to help you," I said. "I think you're building up for a nervous breakdown, and you ought to stop work—this instant."

He turned to the input machine and switched it off, and for an irrational moment I thought he had decided to take my advice. In fact, the tape spool had reached its end and he was merely carrying out a routine operation. He turned to face me again and came closer.

"Get out," he repeated.

I didn't move. He waited for not more than two seconds, then lunged forward. Fingers of steel gripped my shoulder, lifted me bodily in the air and hurled me across the room towards the door. Although I was airborne for only a fraction of a second, I experienced many degrees of astonishment. It was patently impossible—and yet it had happened. Gilley, in that brief instant of violence, had exhibited the concentrated strength of ten men. With one hand, and with effortless ease, he had thrown me as if I were a hollow, papier-mâché artifact.

He remained where he stood, transfixed and leaning forward, his right arm outstretched, like a discus thrower, as I picked myself up off the floor. His eyes were frozen and trance-like. This was the point of no return, and I knew exactly what had to be done.

I grinned amiably at him, at a distance. I said: "You're right, Dr. Gilley. I'll get out. Sorry to have disturbed you. Goodnight."

I left the computer room, got into my car and drove off to the Railway Tavern to mobilise Schuster and Briggs. I found them in the private bar, talking to the landlord and drinking what looked like whisky. Schuster, a squat little man with a bald head and wearing rimless glasses, was squatting on a high stool, listening to Briggs, tall and gangling with lank black hair, who was leaning on the counter, propped on one elbow, and talking about (of all things) income tax. The landlord was a white-haired teddy bear of a man who looked as if he had never lost his temper in his life.

As I came in, Schuster and Briggs turned round and stared at me as if I were an alarm clock that had gone off too early.

"Bang goes a peaceful night," said Briggs, tilting his glass into his mouth.

"Maybe he's come to buy us a drink?" Schuster suggested.

"Hello, you two," I said. "I'm afraid we've got work to do."

Schuster finished his drink and slid off his stool. Briggs detached himself reluctantly from the bar counter.

"Hey, what's this?" the landlord asked. "Aren't you going to have a drink first?"

"Thank you," I said. "A quick bracer all round, I think."

"Scotch?"

"Excellent."

While the landlord was pouring large whiskies, I said quietly to Schuster. "You'll need a straitjacket."

"Like that, eh? No got straitjacket, but plenty of adhesive tape. Much easier. Violent?"

"Sort of. He threw me halfway across the computer room with one hand. He's acquired strength with a capital 'S':

"Drugs, maybe?"

"I don't think so. Alcohol plus some kind of psychic hypertension."

"What's the form, then?" Briggs enquired in a casual voice.

The landlord was pushing the glasses across the counter.

"The form is to drink a toast to mine host and get down to business," I said. We did just that.

After we had left the tavern (without satisfying the landlord's curiosity as to what was going on behind the scenes) I said to Briggs: "Gilley's reached the point where he will have to be restrained by force and removed to a D.S.S. clinic."

"You're quite sure?"

"Yes."

"Likely to make trouble?"

"That could be the understatement of the year."

"Let's go, then."

We walked round to the car park at the rear of the tavern. The vehicle was a shooting brake with dark glass in the rear and side windows. In the back would be a narrow mattress with straps to secure and hold down a reluctant passenger—not that Gilley would be conscious after a jab from Schuster. They got into the van, while I acted as pathfinder and led the way back to R.U.8 in my own car. We parked in the forecourt and met for a final briefing.

"I'll go first," I said. "You'd better try to get on either side of him. Tape his wrists and ankles as

quickly as you can if there's the slightest show of violence."

"Don't worry," Schuster said, holding up a thin glass capsule. I recognised it as a pre-loaded hypodermic phial, easy and quick to use. "This will put him out for ten hours."

"If you get near him," I warned.

"I'll get near him."

We went inside the building, watched speculatively by the security guard, and straight down to the computer room. Gilley was still there, standing in front of the main computer console—the central processor, as it was known—with the input and print-out machines idle. In an odd way he seemed to be straighter and taller than ever.

As we advanced across the room he turned to face us—and in some fantastic way it wasn't Gilley at all. It was something in the image of Gilley, but bigger and stronger—something possessing infinite cunning behind eyes that burned with frost. I knew then that the worst had happened. The schizophrenic breakthrough had finally occurred. The Beast was in command.

We approached him cautiously, Schuster and Briggs flanking to either side as planned. Gilley's expression did not change. He looked supremely self-assured, with a sly and arrogant confidence in his own powers.

I said: "Dr. Gilley, the Ministry would be glad if you would have a word with one of their doctors. They've sent an escort. I'd be grateful if you would accompany us. There's a car waiting."

No reply. Gilley might have been a statue.

"It would be better if you came willingly, but we have instructions, if necessary . . ."

I didn't complete the sentence. Even Gilley could get the message, if he was listening. Apart from his fixed eyes he gave no indication of being aware of us at all. At the fringe of vision I could see Briggs peeling a roll of adhesive tape, while Schuster held the hypo capsule ready in his hand.

I gave him about a quarter of a minute. "Are you coming?"

Silence. I nodded to Schuster and Briggs.

They moved forward, quietly, swiftly, to seize Gilley's arms. What happened next was not quite clear. Gilley seemed to spin round at incredible speed, his arms flailing about. I saw Schuster, his mouth open in alarmed surprise, arching through the air above the print-out machine to crash heavily on the brown linoleum of the floor. Briggs seemed acrobatically to turn upside down, bounce on his head and slither across the floor to collide heavily with one of the tape memory consoles against the wall. And then Gilley came for me.

I took a deep breath and held my ground. Come back Judo, I thought, trying to recall my basic training. He advanced quite slowly and reached out with his right hand. I snatched his wrist, spun about, levered his arm over my shoulder and heaved. By all the laws of dynamics and gravity Gilley should have somersaulted over me and hit the floor very hard indeed, but it didn't happen that way. The arm I was holding simply bent at the elbow as if powered by muscles of steel and nylon. For an instant I was raised up off the ground, then the other arm came up beneath my back and a second later I was suspended high above Gilley's head. He flung me into space. I flew

in a neat parabola over the central processor and hit the floor head first.

The black-out probably lasted five seconds. When I recovered it was to see Schuster, flat on the ground, holding Gilley by the legs, while Briggs had his arms wrapped round Gilley's throat in what should have been a stranglehold. They were trying very hard. The sticky tape and the hypo capsule seemed to have been lost in the scuffle.

I staggered to my feet and attempted to lend a hand, but the effort was wasted. Gilley appeared to fall backwards, only to sit heavily on Schuster, at the same time pulling Briggs bodily above his head. In a flash he was on his feet again, now holding both men upside down by one leg each, and he began to turn round and round with increasing speed until the two men were pulled almost horizontal by centrifugal force—and then he released them. They went off in opposite directions as if shot from a cannon, crashing into furniture and equipment.

While Gilley was still apparently dizzy from spinning I went for his knees in a flying tackle in an attempt to ground him. I had him exactly where he wanted me. His arms interlocked beneath my stomach and I went into orbit again, over his shoulder, to hit the wall with sickening impact. I sat on the floor for a few seconds, recovering my wits.

Schuster had given up. He was a middle-aged flabby man with neither the inclination nor the stamina for a violent rough-house. He was leaning on a desk at the far side of the room, staring at Gilley with unconcealed fear. Briggs, made of

tougher material, was already rushing in to engage the enemy again. For a moment it looked as if the sheer impetus of his attack might carry Gilley off balance—but the Beast was truly in command of the situation. Somehow Briggs became inverted and held by his ankles, and then Gilley was swinging him high in the air and beating him to the floor, head first—three times, four times. Suddenly it was over. There was blood on the brown lino, and Gilley, hardly a hair of his head out of place, was making off in a leisurely fashion towards the door of the computer room. Schuster made no attempt to stop him as he went by.

I staggered over to the inert bundle that was Briggs. Schuster joined me a moment later. Briggs was in a mess. The side of his head had been torn and split by impact, and his face was awash with blood. He was clearly unconscious. A minute later, as I tried to make him comfortable, I discovered that he was dead. I looked at Schuster and he looked at me. His face was white and his lips were trembling uncontrollably.

"Gilley's got to be stopped," I said quietly. It was just a statement of fact.

"Yes," Schuster breathed—but he made no attempt to move.

I rushed to the door and out of the building as quickly as my wobbly legs would carry me. As I reached the main entrance Gilley's black Wolseley took off from the gravel forecourt in a surge of high acceleration. He seemed to go through all the gears in about three seconds flat. I ran to my own car and got in. As I started the engine with clutch down and first gear engaged I saw Schuster emerge from the main door of the building, puffing

as he limped in a painful jog-trot towards me. I flashed the headlamps at him in an attempt to ginger him up while I waited for him in mounting irritation and frustration, counting off the precious seconds that were giving Gilley and his Beast a valuable lead. Schuster seemed almost in a state of collapse when he finally arrived. I practically dragged him into the car, slammed the door, let the clutch out with a jerk that nearly stalled the engine, but sent us leaping abruptly across the gravel towards the road that led to the perimeter gate.

"My God," Schuster kept saying to himself in a dazed voice. "My God, Harland—I don't understand . . ."

"Gilley's mind has broken down," I said. "He's dangerous. He's got to be stopped."

I swung the car round a tight bend. Schuster said, as if talking to himself: "Such strength—I never imagined . . ."

"The strength won't last. It's all insulin and pituitrin squirting into the blood. He'll burn himself out, but meanwhile he can do a lot of damage."

The security guard was just closing the main gate as I reached it. I flashed my headlamps. He paused lethargically, putting his hand to his eyes to study the car against the glare of the headlamp beam, and then decided that perhaps he ought to take some action. He ambled over.

"Open the gate," I shouted.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Harland," he said affably. "Didn't recognise your car."

"Hurry up," I yelled.

He looked rather hurt, but managed to run

half-heartedly. In not more than half an hour (by my agitated mental stop-watch) the gates swung open and I was able to urge the car forward. I stopped as we came alongside the guard.

"Which way did Dr. Gilley go?" I asked.

"Oh," he said, thumbing his chin thoughtfully. "I think he turned left, sir—in fact, I'm pretty sure it was left."

"Call the police," I instructed. "Give them the number of Gilley's car and a description. It's a black Wolseley. He's got to be stopped. He just killed a man. The body's in the computer room. Can you remember that?"

The guard made an inarticulate grunting sound. He would probably remember it until his dying day.

"Don't waste time," I added. "It's *urgent*."

He ran off towards his hut as I drove on and turned left at the main road. This was the route to the R.U.8 staff quarters. I pushed my foot down on the accelerator and the road began to leap into the headlamps. There was no sign of a car ahead, not even the distant glow of a remote headlamp beam.

"He could have gone back to his quarters," I said, thinking aloud, "but it's unlikely. We'd better check anyway."

"Do as you must," Schuster said in a whisper of utter confusion. "I don't understand. This—this is not my line of business."

Schuster obviously was not going to be very helpful. He seemed to be in a state of shock; he needed sedation and rest. I resolved to ditch him at the earliest convenient opportunity. I drove on at high speed, concentrating on the road and not bothering to think. Presently we came to the row

of houses that symbolised home for the staff of R.U.8. No sign of Gilley's car—but I stopped outside his flat and went in just to make sure. The lights were out and the place was deserted.

Schuster had stayed in the car, still bewildered by the whole fantastic business. By this time my plan of action was changing. I could see no point in making a blind pursuit of Gilley across the Sussex countryside, not knowing his destination or which way he had turned at every road junction. His car was faster than mine, and he was probably taking full advantage of its speed under the sure and precise control of his highly evolved Beast.

"Look," I said to Schuster, "there's no future in continuing this chase. The police can handle it better. I think I'd better report to Makin, so let's go to my place and have a drink while I telephone D.S.S."

Schuster showed slight signs of animation. "That sounds like a good idea, Harland."

I drove on to my own apartment, about twenty-five yards further down the road. I poured generous quantities of neat whisky for both of us. Then I attached myself to the telephone while Schuster sat sipping his drink and staring blankly at the opposite wall.

First I called the police to make sure that the security guard had done as instructed. He had, and the police were already at R.U.8. Patrol cars were watching for the Wolseley, but so far hadn't made contact. The police wanted to talk to me—I said I'd be available subject to Ministry priorities. They said to hell with the Ministry—the law was the law. I didn't stop to argue. They would have to learn the hard way.

Next I telephoned Makin on the jabber circuit. He answered the phone almost immediately.

"Expecting you," he said, when I announced myself. "One gets the smell of trouble."

"G's on the loose. The Beast in in control."

"So soon?"

"I think he expected interference, or a complete veto, and tried to rush the experiment. The breakdown came suddenly, about an hour ago. He became violent."

"Have you got him under control?"

"No. Schuster, Briggs and I tried to tackle him. Gilley won. He's developed the strength of a herd of elephants. Briggs is dead. Gilley escaped in his car. I had to alert the police. Murder is public domain."

"Oh, my God," Makin said in a pained, depressed voice. "What's the matter with you, Harland? How could you let a simple situation like that get out of control?"

"It was quite easy, Chief, Wait until *you* meet the Beast. Gilley has become a lethal bulldozer and combine harvester rolled into one."

"Where are you now?"

"In my flat. I figure the police will pick Gilley up fairly soon. We want him handed over to D.S.S. with no questions asked. Can you fix it?"

"Yes, I can fix it. Where's Schuster?"

"He's with me. Rather shaken."

"He'd better come back to London right away. Keep the police away from him. There might be awkward questions asked."

"Okay. He'd better go back by train. He's not in a fit state to drive."

Schuster's voice came from across the room. "I'll

stay here. No good to go back. I'll help with Gilley if they find him soon."

"Schuster wants to stay," I told Makin.

"Schuster will damn well do as he's told. Get him on the next train. Keep me posted. I'll be within snatching distance of a telephone."

"Wilco," I agreed, and hung up.

I drank some whisky and went over to Schuster. "Makin wants you back on the next train."

He made an obscene reference to Makin.

"I think he's right," I said. "You're pretty shaken up. There's nothing you can usefully do down here."

"Harland," he said gravely, "I have just seen my best friend killed. I cannot go back and forget about it. I want to stay and do what I can to help."

"Well, you can't. Makin's orders."

I telephoned the station. The next train to London was not until after five o'clock in the morning, and it was now just past midnight. So that was that. I was stuck with Schuster anyway throughout the night.

"You've got a reprieve," I said, putting the phone down. I poured some more whisky for both of us and lit a cigarette. "We ought to go back to R.U.8 to assist the police in their enquiries, as they say. Keep your mouth shut and let me do the talking. You were merely instructed to come down to Barnham and take orders from me. You know nothing about the Gilley set-up."

He nodded vaguely, his mind far away.

"What the devil would Gilley—or rather the Beast—have in mind?" I mused aloud, not expecting any intelligent reply from Schuster. "I mean, playing it according to the book of rules—Gilley's

programme—what would the Beast do once it had gained its liberty? If it's as clever as Gilley makes out, then it must know that it will be screwed into the ground within a few hours. Even the Beast can't fight the police *and* the Establishment."

Schuster's blank expression indicated that he hadn't the faintest idea as to what I was talking about.

"So," I went on, "what is the Beast trying to achieve? It has its freedom, so what is it most likely to do?"

The answer hit me like a shaft of lightning. For an instant I was paralysed at my stupidity in not having thought of it from the first moment. An icy shock wave swept my body. I downed my drink.

"Wait here," I shouted at Schuster, who merely looked even more bewildered.

I reached her flat within two minutes. The door was open, so I went straight in. The lights were on, but the place was silent and empty. At first glance the room seemed normal enough, but turning round in the centre of the room and looking back towards the door I observed one disconcerting thing. A tiny walnut table near the door had been overturned, and a glass ash-tray lay upside down on the carpet, with half a dozen cigarette stubs scattered around.

I rubbed my eyes wearily and inspected the floor near the door in greater detail. The marks and depressions on the carpet were not necessarily significant; they could have been caused by the ordinary scuffing wear and tear of everyday use. Lodged in the gap between the carpet and the skirting board was a grey button with some grey thread attached to it—about the colour of Gilley's

formal suit. I picked it up and inspected it. Not positive evidence—at least until one found the suit with the missing button.

I went back to my own flat. Schuster had helped himself to another drink. The hand holding the glass was trembling slightly.

"What happened?" he asked nervously.

"Nothing much," I said, "but it looks as if Gilley is two strikes up. I think he's found himself a mate."

"A mate? What do you mean?"

I couldn't find the will to answer. My stomach was already turning over inside me.

"Let's get back to the centre," I suggested. "There's nothing we can do here."

We went out to the car.

Chapter Twelve

Detective Sergeant Winton was a thin man of about thirty-five. His sharp face was bisected by a long narrow nose poised over a tiny tuft of mouse-coloured moustache. His straight hair was a rich dark brown, and I suspected that it had been dyed to alleviate premature greying. He had the perpetually worried look of a man whose hair would naturally turn grey in self-defence. He had arrived at R.U.8 in record time from Littlehampton, and a detective inspector was on his way with

a regular homicide squad, photographers, fingerprint experts, the lot. Briggs was still lying where he had fallen in the computer room, but Winton had spread sheets of newspaper over him.

I gave him a bald outline of events, omitting any reference to the Beast experiment. Dr. Gilley, I explained, had been overworking and showing signs of psychological strain. He had refused to co-operate with the Ministry who wanted him to undergo a medical examination, accept treatment if necessary, and take a vacation. In the end it had been decided to remove him from his work by force, which was why Schuster and Briggs had been sent down from London. Schuster, standing by my side, confirmed all I said with abrupt nods of his head and occasional acquiescent sounds.

"Unfortunately the mental breakdown came first—sooner than we had expected," I concluded.

Winton frowned and chewed the end of a pencil. "Where does the girl—Mrs. Rayner—fit into this picture of scientific dedication?" he asked in a cynical tone of voice.

I didn't know whether the police had as yet been through the desk in Gilley's locked annexe. Once the security establishment got a grip on the situation, they probably wouldn't be allowed to, but at the moment it was simply a murder investigation in the middle of the night, and the police had a relatively free hand. The less said the better, from my point of view.

"That's difficult to say," I replied. "They always had a very close professional liaison, but there's no reason to suspect anything resembling an intimate relationship. On the other hand, Mrs. Rayner is an extremely attractive young woman, and Dr. Gilley

a faintly neurotic individual who has been suppressing any healthy sex interest for the whole of his adult life, so far as I know. Given a mental breakdown, this kind of reversal could happen."

Winton pouted. "You mean that the beast in him would be set free?"

I restrained a cynical smile. Winton had hit the nail smack on the head without knowing it. "Something like that," I agreed.

He shook his head doubtfully. "To be frank, Harland, it all sounds like a lot of vague psychiatric cod's wallop to me. You're not telling the whole story. There's a big cover up going on. Just before you arrived I had a telephone call from divisional headquarters pulling the Official Secrets Act. A directive from the Ministry of Defence. So we're allowed to find Gilley and to question eyewitnesses and then full stop. Any further investigation will be undertaken by the Department of Special Services, if you like. It's bloody high-handed if you ask me."

"What can you expect? Gilley is a boffin engaged on top secret work. You can't have coppers swarming all over R.U.8 looking for clues among classified documents and equipment."

"All you Ministry people are the same," he said with a scowl. "Arrogant—like a load of fascists."

"I'm sorry," I said with a shrug, "but the government runs this country—not the Sussex police. Gilley is a V.I.P., and he gets V.I.P. treatment. You find him and we'll deal with him."

Winton and I were clearly not destined to be inseparable friends, though apart from the verbal in-fighting we had a certain mutual respect for each other. Detective Inspector Murray arrived in

due course—a plump man with a florid good-natured face, wearing a traditional shabby grey raincoat and a battered felt hat. The photographers got to work, and the fingerprint man, largely redundant, dusted his powders over the computer with an air of stubborn resolution. Murray had been briefed by higher authority. When I introduced myself to him, he said:

"Harland—ah, yes. D.S.S. and all that."

"For what it's worth."

"Don't be so modest, old son. Off the record, what's the truth behind this Gilley crisis?"

"Truth? Gilley's been taken over by an alien hypothetical entity. Didn't they tell you?"

He grinned wryly. "Ask a stupid question and you get a stupid answer. All the same, it's big stuff. The thing has reached Cabinet level. This Gilley character must be important."

"Could be," I admitted. "How's the chase progressing?"

"Nil return so far. We've sealed every road within a radius of forty miles, and there's a secondary ring of road blocks at sixty miles. We've got twenty-six patrol cars cruising the inner circle—that's an area of about five thousand square miles."

"A lot of territory."

"We'll get him—don't worry."

"It's the girl I'm worried about," I said.

"Well, aren't we all? We're doing all we can. If you've got any bright ideas . . ."

"No—only a feeling that Gilley may not be in the car any more. He may not even be far away. You've got to allow for a high degree of cunning."

"We're allowing for everything, Mr. Harland.

The patrols are already checking on farmhouses and outbuildings. Don't forget there's two of them. That shortens the odds—assuming the girl is still alive, of course."

"She's still alive," I stated. "She has a high destiny to fulfil."

Murray gave me a hard quizzical look, as if he thought I, too, had gone mad. I didn't elaborate and Murray didn't ask any more questions, so I went in search of Schuster. He was in the canteen, which had been opened for the benefit of the police and others, drinking coffee and looking very fatigued.

"How about coming back to my place and snatching a few hours' sleep?" I suggested. "I'll get you to the station in time for the first train. Makin will want to see you as soon as you reach town."

"I'm not tired," he murmured, shaking his head.

I got myself a coffee and joined him at the table. There were only two other people in the canteen—one of the security guards who was talking to a member of the police team. I lit a cigarette from habit rather than need. My mouth was dry and the smoke tasted acrid.

"You're a doctor," I said to Schuster. "How long do you think Gilley can keep up this newly acquired superhuman strength?"

He shrugged. "Stress metabolism. It sometimes happens in situations of desperate urgency—for instance, when survival is at stake."

"Mind over matter."

"Well, in a way. Normally it wouldn't last long. Exhaustion would set in. Like short-circuiting a battery. You get a high current for a short time and then the energy is gone and it is dead."

I thought about that for a while. It wasn't strictly a question of survival, if one considered the Beast as a separate controlling entity and not just a repressed part of Gilley's subconscious mind. The Beast's survival would depend on Gilley's survival, and it would surely have the wit to stay out of trouble, to keep its host safe, free and alive. The present phase of desperate, high-energy violence was anti-survival, and therefore apparently irrational, unless one looked for a deeper motive, and, of course, the motive was plain enough. Survival for the Beast meant survival of its species rather than any kind of personal immortality. After all, if one destroyed the programme tapes stored in the computer room, the Beast and its entire evolutionary background would cease to exist. As the last remaining representative of its long evolutionary tree, the Beast would logically and instinctively seek to reproduce its kind, given the chance. Well, here was the chance—progressively to "brainwash" Gilley into acting as host, then, having taken control of his mind and body, to imbue him with the strength of a Samson—even if only for an hour or two—in order to perpetuate its species by brute force. And what more obvious mate for this purpose than the one which had been photographed, analysed and programmed into the computer?

All this assumed, in the first place, that fertilisation would be effected without difficulty (which depended on the oestral cycle of the mate rather than the virility of the Beast), and secondly, that the characteristics of the Beast would in some way be impressed upon an embryo, otherwise genetic survival would be meaningless. It seemed a fanciful, if not fantastic theory. And, of course, if one

took the more down-to-earth explanation of schizophrenia, so that the Beast became Gilley's suppressed other self, then the question of genetic survival did not arise, and one had to think in terms of insanity.

The whole complex argument was interesting, but on the whole unhelpful. It merely indicated that Synøve had probably by now suffered the fate which she had rather invited, and there was nothing to be done other than to track down Gilley by methodical police routine.

"What will happen to Gilley when they find him?" Schuster asked.

"You ought to know the answer to that," I said. "He'll be found unfit to stand trial—if it ever gets to a trial. The coroner may find that Briggs died accidentally during a fight to restrain Gilley at the moment of his breakdown. Gilley will disappear for a while into a secret Ministry clinic while the psychiatrists get to work on his mind. And in due course—who knows—he may well be back in boffinland, though no doubt they'll keep him away from computers."

Schuster uttered a dubious grunt. "Yes, it has the ring of truth. The law must be pretty flexible to allow it."

"The law is always flexible in the national interest," I said.

Just before four a.m., when dawn was a pale grey aura in the eastern sky, Detective Inspector Murray received a priority telephone call. They had found Gilley's car, abandoned near the tiny village of Rapton some eight miles to the north. It was thought that Gilley and the girl must be in the

vicinity, within a radius of two or three miles. There were several farms and smallholdings, and the police were converging on the area.

Murray and Winton put on their coats. There was a businesslike tension in the air. I was back in the computer room, having left Schuster dozing in a chair in the canteen, his head resting on elbows propped on the table. Briggs's body had been taken away to the mortuary pending the inquest. I was still smoking, and could have used a drink or two.

I intercepted Murray and Winton on their way out. "Can I tag along?" I asked.

"This is police business," Winton put in quickly, like a closed-shop unionist. Murray, after a moment's reflection, said: "It's security business, too. You're welcome, but don't get under our feet."

I travelled in one of the patrol cars, surrounded by tough, dour-faced uniformed policemen with tired eyes. It had been a long, inactive night, and the fact that something was happening at last was vaguely cheering. As the dawn grew brighter, the countryside materialised phantomlike around us in colourless monochrome. Above the quiet purr of the car engine I could hear birds singing.

The rendezvous was a dirt track leading off the main road into a fallow field. Eight patrol cars were parked in the field, and more were arriving at intervals. I obeyed my terms of reference—not to get under their feet—but kept close to Murray in the hope of picking up some information.

Still no sign of Gilley and the girl, but checking the farm buildings was a long and laborious task. Because of the threat of violence from Gilley it was strictly a police operation. Assistance from civilians

was discouraged, particularly as there was always a danger that a truculent farmer might decide to use a shot-gun. Gilley was wanted alive—he was an important scientist.

An hour went by. The dawn brightened into sallow overcast daylight, with a threat of early rain. The patrol cars went away, one by one, to screen specific areas of country, but Murray and Winton stayed in the field, using their car as headquarters and a base for radio communication.

And then, just before half past five, the first positive lead came through, not from a farm or open country, but from the village of Rapton itself, some two miles away, which had been considered the most unlikely place for Gilley to attempt to hide out. Even so, the police had carried out a routine house-to-house check. A constable had come across a broken window at the rear of a small detached house on the outer fringe of the village, not far from the church, occupied by an elderly couple. Immediately suspicious, and playing it cautiously, he entered the house via the broken window and quietly inspected the rooms by torch-light. In a coal cellar built under the stairs he had found the occupiers, Mr. and Mrs. Pearson, bound back to back with strips of tablecloth and gagged. Both were conscious, but in a condition of severe shock and hardly able to talk when released. Mr. Pearson had a broken arm. Both wore night attire.

From their incoherent narrative the constable was able to piece together an incomplete story of attack and assault at some unspecified time in the night. Everything happened in darkness, so that they saw little, but nevertheless gained the impression that their assailant was a big, immensely

powerful man who could see well in the dark. They were wakened by being roughly thrown from their bed, and were immediately manhandled, bound and gagged on the floor of the room. During the struggle Pearson's arm was broken, which put him out of the fight. Then they were carried bodily down the stairs and dumped in the coal cellar. They knew nothing of the intruder's movements after that, nor of the presence of a second person. The constable had escorted them to a nearby house to await an ambulance, and he had also telephoned for reinforcements.

Two patrol cars soon arrived, but before they came the constable returned to the house to inspect the upstairs rooms single-handed. It was a mistake. He was intercepted in the semi-darkness of the landing by a half dressed Gilley who picked him up and flung him bodily over the banisters and down the stairs. Then leaping after him he had scooped him up as if he were a sack of feathers, opened the front door, and hurled him well out into the road, slamming and bolting the door after him. The constable sustained concussion and had been taken to hospital.

The two patrol cars were standing by in front of the house, with policemen at the rear keeping watch. A fire tender with an escape ladder was expected, to provide access to the upstairs windows. A state of siege against the Beast was under way.

"What about the girl?" I asked Murray as he got into the car, looking rather pleased with himself.

"No word about her so far. We'll soon find out if she's in the house."

He slammed the car door and drove off. I

followed in a second patrol car. In just a few minutes we were joining a line of police cars—there were now six of them—parked outside the house. A semicircle of policemen held back small groups of curious sightseers.

It was a small box of a house, with some ivy on the walls. There were four windows at the front—two up and two down—with a central doorway. The front garden was tiny, so that the house stood near to the road, but at the rear the garden swept back a long way, to disappear among fruit trees and shrubs. The house was encircled by police who were standing by, presumably waiting for instructions from Murray.

I got out of the car and made my way to where Murray and Winton were engaged in earnest discussion with a group of plain-clothed and uniformed men. Winton gave me a nasty look as I stood nearby, listening to the gist of the talk, but Murray merely ignored me. He was a more civilised copper than Winton.

Murray was saying: "He'll try to hold the upper floor, so he can defend the stairs quite easily. On the other hand, he can't defend the stairs and the front and rear windows simultaneously. So we'll use a long ladder at the back of the house, the fire escape at the front—when and if the blasted brigade arrives—and make a ground floor attack from both back and front to gain access to the stairs. If the doors prove difficult then we'll go through the windows."

"Sounds reasonable," somebody remarked. "He can't fight in two rooms and on the stairs at the same time."

"Don't bank on it," I said. "You haven't seen

wonder boy in action. He makes Superman look like a zombie."

Murray scowled at me. "When I want your opinion I'll ask for it, Harland. Anyway, you yourself said wonder boy can't keep this up indefinitely without burning himself out."

"He's doing it in short bursts, with plenty of rest between. He may keep it up for hours."

"We'll smoke him out within the hour," Murray said curtly.

"And the girl, too?"

"We don't know if she's there, but we'll take a look when we get the ladders up. Now, if you'd be kind enough to wait in the car and keep out of the way . . ."

I went back to the car but remained outside, leaning against it with an elbow propped on the roof. The fire engine arrived a minute later, and soon afterwards a truck drew up from which the police off-loaded a metal extending ladder. They carried it round to the back of the house. Meanwhile the escape ladder was run up from the tender, with a policeman positioned at the top, and swung around towards the front upper windows. The policeman peered through the glass from a respectable distance and gave a thumbs down sign. The ladder descended again. It looked as if Gilley was in one of the rear rooms.

Nothing more happened for about five minutes. Suddenly, from the back of the house, came the sound of breaking glass followed by a shout of alarm—and a moment later by a loud metallic crash. Police moved towards the back garden. Presently two of them came out to the front supporting between them one of their own men

who was dragging one leg and limping badly. I figured he'd been pushed off the ladder by Gilley who had hurled something at him through the window.

Murray, whom I'd lost sight of for a while, came hurrying over to me. He looked rather worried and he needed a shave.

"She's in there," he said, hooking a thumb back towards the house. "Wilson went up the ladder and saw her in the back bedroom. She was naked. He thought she was either dead or unconscious. Then Gilley saw him, threw a chair through the window, knocked Wilson off, then pushed the ladder away."

"I heard the rumpus," I said. "Wilson hurt?"

"Twisted his foot. I'm sorry about the girl, but we've got to get Gilley out. We'll use tear gas if necessary."

"But only if necessary, I hope."

"Leave it to us."

"How about if I talked to Gilley?" I suggested. "He knows me. I might be able to get through to him."

"Leave it to us," he repeated brusquely, and went back towards the house.

The operation got under way, slowly and methodically. Police were assigned to assault positions at the front of the house (three of them were now waiting near the top of the fire escape). I couldn't see what was happening round the back, but no doubt a similar line up of assault forces was taking place, to force an entry either upstairs or down. It was rather like using a sledgehammer to crack a peanut, except that this particular peanut was highly case-hardened. He had already killed a man, injured two others and presumably raped a

woman—or even killed her, too, but that didn't fit in with the genetic survival theory. Not so long ago he would have been diagnosed as "possessed by devils." Well, maybe he was, but in terms of modern electronic technology. The devils were contained in spools of magnetic tape back at R.U.8—the billions and billions of magnetic impulses in binary code which added up to a simulated evolutionary programme.

That rang a bell, but at first I wasn't sure why. A similar thought had occurred to me earlier, but at that time it had not possessed any particular significance. Then I remembered my reflective thinking in the R.U.8 canteen while having a coffee with Schuster, first analysing Gilley in terms of the Beast, and then in terms of his own schizophrenic self. Suddenly the original train of thought quivered in my mind like a half-focused flashback. Something about survival, and the Beast having the wit to stay out of trouble—and then the term "anti-survival"—and then "if one destroyed the programme tapes stored in the computer room the Beast and its entire evolutionary background would cease to exist."

For a moment I thought I had found the answer, but I was wrong. Because in truth the Beast was merely a Gilley neurosis—a rationalisation of mental instability. Destroying the tapes would not restore the balance of his mind—at least, not unless he himself knew they were being destroyed. That offered a possibility. If Gilley really believed that the Beast was in possession of him, and that the Beast was an alien entity created by a magnetic tape programme, then the threat of destruction must surely bring him to heel. And the actual

destruction of the tapes would, psychologically, to him, symbolise the death of the Beast. Or would it?

It was a possibility worth a try. I would need to talk to Gilley under a flag of truce, as it were, and with Murray's consent. There lay the snag. The trouble was that I couldn't explain too much about the Beast to Murray, for obvious security reasons, and my earlier (less motivated) request to be allowed to talk to Gilley, who after all was a colleague, had met with a curt refusal. But it was still worth a try.

I looked around for Murray, but couldn't see him among the milling mass of policemen. It was already too late. The assault had begun.

Chapter Thirteen

One would have supposed that a dozen policemen breaking into a house on two floor levels would have carried all before them and triumphantly brought out their victim trussed up like a Christmas turkey. Somehow it didn't quite happen that way. I could see only the front of the house, but the pattern of events round the back must have been similar. Certainly the extending ladder at the rear of the house must have been very vulnerable, and, in fact, proved to be so. The front and back ground floor assaults were both aimed at the staircase. I learned later that Gilley defended the

stairs quite easily by hurling a heavy chest of drawers into the ascending invaders. The fire escape provided the best means of entry, though probably because Gilley was otherwise engaged towards the back of the house. At all events the three policemen, followed by a fireman complete with axe, successfully climbed into the front bedroom. A minute went by, then they came out of the window, crashing through the panes, one after the other, arching towards the ground. At that point the first assault wave was over. The police retired and licked their wounds.

I lit a cigarette and waited. Murray eventually sought me out, as I thought he would. He looked sheepish and worried.

"You're right, Harland," he admitted. "Wonder boy is tough—and fast."

"He won't keep it up for much longer," I predicted.

Murray shook his head. "We can't afford to play a waiting game. On the other hand we can't afford a high casualty rate—which is what we're getting right now. Seven men injured—three seriously."

"I thought you were going to use tear gas."

He shifted uncomfortably on his feet. "We're not happy about the girl. It occurred to me . . ." He hesitated, and fixed me with stern eyes. "You remember you suggested that it might help if you could talk to Gilley?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, we thought it might distract his attention. If we put you up the fire ladder so that you can talk to him through the broken window, and try to hold his interest . . . I mean, it would give our men a chance to get in from the rear."

I sighed and thought. "I don't want to be snide," I said. "I've a serious proposition to put to Gilley which could make all the difference. I want to be honest about it. I want to talk to him under a flag of truce—provided he can be talked to. I don't want to be used as a subterfuge."

"Whose side are you on?" Murray demanded icily.

"I'm on the side of the Ministry," I said. "Gilley is still a V.I.P., bonkers or not. It's a long shot, but I think I know how to handle him."

"What do you propose, then?"

I interlaced my fingers and twisted them very hard. It helped to take my mind off the proposition. But it had to be done.

"I want to go into the house alone," I said. "No interference. No back door infiltration. I want to talk to Gilley in terms he'll understand. If it works, I want authority to remove him to a Ministry clinic and not a prison."

"That's asking a lot," Murray said sourly.

"Give me a telephone and I'll get the authority."

"You can't chop the law, Harland."

"You reckon?"

"Who the hell do you think you are?" Murray demanded in a sudden surge of anger.

I shrugged. "Why don't you ask the Minister of Defence?"

"God," he said in resignation, "you can't win! All right, then, what do you propose to say to that bloody sex maniac in there?"

"That," I said, "is a matter between me and Dr. Charles Howard Gilley, Research Director of the Ministry and Defence Research Unit number eight."

"My bleeding Aunt Fanny!" he exploded. A moment later he calmed down. "All right, I suppose we'd better try it."

"I don't particularly want to," I admitted, "but I have to."

Gilley seemed to be using the bedroom at the rear of the house as his castle, so I went in via the broken front ground-floor window. I didn't feel very happy about it. Given a suit of carbon steel armour and installed in a Crusader tank I wouldn't have minded so much. As it was I felt out on a very rotten limb.

I don't know why I held my breath. I suppose the idea was to make as little sound as possible. I also found myself walking instinctively on tip-toe. Funny the way nerves get you.

I crept up the stairs two at a time. That way it made half as much noise. The landing at the top was long and narrow, with three doors opening from it, but I hadn't even reached the top stair when the centre door swung open with a slight creak of dry hinges, and Gilley stood framed in the architrave.

Gilley the giant, looking bigger than ever, stripped to the waist, brown hair mottling his chest. But still Gilley with his concave glasses in thin metal frames, and his fair wavy hair brushed straight back but slightly awry. In the relative gloom of the stair well I could not discern his expression, nor could I detect whether there was any recognition of me as an individual in his eyes.

"Dr. Gilley," I said, in as reassuring a voice as possible. "I'm Harland from R.U.8. I'd like to talk to you very briefly."

No reply, which was ominous enough. I had never heard Gilley utter a word when the Beast was in possession. Maybe it could only speak in binary language through a computer print-out. He stood quite motionless, like a Tussaud's wax dummy.

"You're finished," I went on. "I can destroy you. I'm probably the only person who can destroy you. You know how, don't you?"

Silence. Not even the sound of breathing.

"The tapes, Dr. Gilley. The biological evolutionary animal simulation test tapes. Your precious project—your programme. I can destroy them and the thing in possession of you at the same instant. You understand me, don't you?"

He took a step forward on to the landing. His face seemed narrower and more cunning.

"I propose to do just that," I continued, "unless you surrender here and now. The police shan't have you. You'll be taken to a Ministry clinic for specialist treatment and you'll be well looked after. You're an important scientist—perhaps even more important after this experience. Come with me now, and I guarantee that all will be well."

He began to walk slowly along the landing towards the head of the stairs. It was a hopeful movement, but too purposeful, and I didn't trust him. But I couldn't retreat, and the ultimatum had to be completed.

"If you come with me now, the police will withdraw," I promised. It was hardly the truth, although the principle was correct—once Makin had had words with the Home Secretary. "If you insist on staying here and fighting, they will get you in the end. You can't escape. There are too

many of them. They will use tear gas to drive you into the open. If you come with me now there will be no trouble."

He was standing on the top stair, supremely arrogant and self assured, probably not even listening to me. I began to feel depressed and slightly apprehensive. The man was in a dimension of his own—at right angles to ordinary time and space, like the programme in the computer.

"If you do not come with me now," I added, "I shall telephone R.U.8 and have the project tapes destroyed by fire, the same as any other secret document. I am going to walk down the stairs. I expect you to follow me. We shall go back to R.U.8 where a doctor is waiting to take you to a Ministry clinic." I didn't bother to mention that the doctor in question had missed his scheduled train back to London, and that Makin would probably be very angry.

Having said what I had said, I turned my back on Gilley and began to walk slowly down the stairs, blandly assuming that he might choose to follow me like an obedient dog. I had either overestimated my powers of persuasion or underestimated my Beast. Before I was halfway down his feet crashed into my back in what I imagine was a flying leap. I plunged down the stairs head first and probably dented the parquet flooring of the hall. An instant later Gilley landed heavily on top of me, his hands circling my throat. It came to me suddenly that as I was the one who had threatened to destroy him (i.e., the Beast), he would logically attempt to destroy me. Who else would think of destroying the programme tapes?

I spent one second assessing the situation. I was

winded, full of pain and feeble. I couldn't possibly cope with Gilley's superior phrenetic strength. All that was left were the gimmicks. As he was securing his stranglehold, I knocked off his glasses and poked my thumbs into his eyes. He made a noise for the first time—he screamed. Then I took a great handful of his thick hair, jerked his head back and punched him hard in the angle of the throat and chin. This can be a very effective move. It causes vomiting. He didn't actually vomit, but he tried to. It gave me an instant of time to squirm from underneath him, rolling over twice towards the door of the front room. I got up on my feet and promptly fell over because my injured back folded like a jack-knife. I crawled on hands and knees to the broken window, but couldn't lift myself through—and then Gilley was behind me again, now breathing heavily. But there were willing hands on the other side of the window which seized my shoulders and arms and dragged me through. Broken edges of glass cut my face and slashed my clothes, but it didn't really matter. I was back in the land of the anti-Beast.

"You did a grand job, Harland," Murray was saying in a sardonic voice. "We'll get you an ambulance."

"Pick me up," I said. "Get me to a telephone." And then, for some odd reason, I flaked out.

When I recovered I was lying on a canvas stretcher and a handsome young man in a dark blue uniform was tucking a blanket around me. I tried to push myself into a sitting position, but failed. My back felt as if it were broken in six places.

"Take it easy," the young man said soothingly. "Relax. You'll be all right."

"Put me down," I shouted. "I've got work to do. Help me up."

"Make up your mind, chum. Down or up?"

"Up."

"You may have a fractured spine."

"I've got a fractured everything. Just get me to my feet."

Murray's face appeared against the grey sky. "Give up, Harland. You look like you need immediate surgery. Leave it to us. We know what we're doing."

"I know what I'm doing, too. I just need some help to do it. Get me to a telephone."

"You figure it will help?"

"It's worth trying."

"What's worth trying?"

"It's a long story. Do me a favour. Fix me a very large brandy and take me to the nearest house which has a phone."

He shrugged. "What's the point? We're going in there with tear gas and hosepipes. It'll be over any minute."

"The girl—what about her?" I asked.

"We figure she's dead. If not, it only means a certain amount of unpleasant discomfort, and I'm sure she'll consider it's worth it. Don't *worry*, Harland. It's all organised. Look, it's starting now."

I looked. Murray was quite right: it was starting now. Two more fire engines had arrived, and there were hosepipes spread over the road and front garden. Two uniformed patrolmen were holding tear gas guns, and there were four wooden boxes of tear gas shells on the pavement close to the garden wall. There must have been fifty police around the

front of the house and another fifty at the back. Gilley hadn't got a snowflake's chance in hell.

"All right," I said. "But I want a telephone, anyway. Can you fix it?"

Murray sighed. "Harland, why don't you just go into a coma? It would make things much easier. However, if you insist—though I can't see what good it will do . . ."

He signalled one of his plain-clothed men—a lean character with iron grey hair and a long jaw. "Find him a telephone, Joe. He's got verbal diarrhoea. If he drops dead on the way, don't let me know."

Murray walked away. I tried to sit up on the stretcher, which was rather difficult. Joe grabbed my shoulder and heaved. I found myself in a semi-standing, tottering position. "You want a telephone," he stated gruffly. "The Postmaster-General will be pleased with you."

Half-supporting me, he conducted me to a house on the opposite side of the road. The sightseers now numbered hundreds. We pushed our way through the clustered throng, who were watching the scene as if it were telly, and arrived at a front door. Joe pressed the bell-push. The door was opened about one tenth of a second later by a middle-aged woman in a green dressing-gown.

"Scuse me, ma'm," said Joe. "Have you got a telephone we could use?"

She looked startled, then pleased. "Oh, certainly—of course. Do come in. What's happening?"

"Nothing very much," Joe said. "Just routine." He was clearly a master of understatement.

We were ushered into a pale green lounge (if that is the word for a very small claustrophobic

front room), and the telephone receiver was placed in my hand. Joe and the elderly duck stood by, operating a monitoring service for different reasons.

"Number please," said the metallic female voice of the local exchange.

"R.U.8, Barnham," I said.

A pause, and then: "There's no such number as R.U.8. Would you like Directory Enquiries?"

I groaned, but kept my temper. "R.U.8 is a government research establishment near Barnham. It is ex-directory, but it has twenty-five lines and six direct lines to the Ministry of Defence, and a standing G.P.O. Procedure D Notice. Does that ring a bell?"

"I'll pass you to the supervisor, sir."

The supervisor happened to be with it. She had actually heard of R.U.8, and she knew about G.P.O. Procedure D. Within thirty seconds I was through to the R.U.8 exchange.

"Can you get Anderton for me?" I asked.

"Hold on, please."

A pause, then: "I'm sorry. Mr. Anderton isn't here yet."

"Well, see if you can get me any other responsible member of the research staff."

"I'll try, sir. Who's calling?"

"Harland."

"Very well, Mr. Harland—but it's only seven-thirty, and I doubt whether anybody will be in."

I'd overlooked the sheer mechanics of the clock. Anderton was probably still in bed, fast asleep, or at the best he would be shaving and drinking coffee. The same applied to the others. But Anderton was the man I wanted because he seemed to

possess a clearer understanding of Gilley's particular psychosis.

I said: "Ring Anderton's flat for me, would you? It's urgent."

"Yes, Mr. Harland."

Two or three more minutes ticked by. I looked through the window at the scene across the road. They had swung the fire ladder into position again, close to the upper windows, and there were two men near the top of it, one holding a hosepipe. The main activity seemed to be at the rear of the house, where Gilley was installed, but nothing could be seen at this angle. The procedure would be, I imagined, to use tear gas to drive Gilley out of his room, then subdue him with hose jets while the police seized him and pinioned his arms. The theory seemed sound enough, but I was doubtful as to how it would work out in practice. Gilley probably still had a card or two up his sleeve.

"Anderton," said a sleepy, rusty voice in my ear.

"Guy, this is Mark. Listen carefully. I want you to . . ."

"Jeeze, Mark. I'm off duty. Doesn't a guy get any privacy round this part of the world?"

"Not Guy Anderton. Gilley's broken out and gone mad. I'm over at Rapton with the police. Gilley and Synøve are under siege in a house, and the police are going in with tear gas and hosepipes."

A moment of silence, then: "I knew it. I knew I should have stayed in pharmacy. My father warned me . . ."

"Shut up and do me a favour. Get over to R.U.8 as quickly as you can—in your pyjamas if neces-

sary. I want you to destroy all the programme tapes for Gilley's Beast project."

"Are you crazy, Mark?"

"You know where they're kept?"

"Yes, of course, but . . ."

"Don't argue, Guy. I want them destroyed as quickly as you can. Throw them in the furnace as if they were outdated secret documents."

"Wouldn't it be simpler to put them in the bulk eraser?"

"Yes—if we've got a bulk eraser." The bulk eraser was a small cabinet which would wipe clean about a dozen spools of magnetic tape within a few seconds; when switched on it merely produced a high-intensity alternating field which cancelled out all prerecorded magnetic symbols.

"Well we have," Anderton said. "Okay, Mark—but, erm—what sort of authorisation have you got for this kind of sabotage?"

"D.S.S. authorisation," I said.

"Ha—I knew it all along. Okay. You carry the can—I'll do it."

"Good guy. Make it fast."

I hung up. Even unwashed, unshaved, undressed, Anderton would still need about ten minutes to reach D.S.S. and carry out his assignment—and even then there was no guarantee that it would influence events in the least. I was merely playing a hunch, but there was nothing else I could do.

I thanked the elderly duck and went out into the road with Joe—just in time to witness the most incredible sight of all. Gilley, still stripped to the waist, was climbing on to the ridge of the roof of the house. Around his shoulders was what ap-

peared to be a knotted sheet, and slung in the sheet on his back was Synøve, conscious and moving a little, but quite passive—probably terrified. Gilley seemed to have difficulty in seeing, and kept rubbing his eyes. That was probably the tear gas. His skin was glistening with water from the hoses. But the assault had stopped momentarily, and the water jets had been turned off in deference to the girl.

He straddled the apex of the roof, ignoring his captive audience below, and gently swung the girl around into his arms. Then he slipped the tied ends of the sheet over his head, and cradled her for a while as if she were a baby. The fire ladder extended and moved towards him, but there was nothing the two men at the top could do, even with the hosepipe. It swung and hovered, almost within touching distance. Gilley stood up, incredibly maintaining his balance on the sloping tiles of the roof, and carried the girl towards a chimney stack, where he was better able to preserve his balance. The ladder followed him, but while he was still holding the girl there was nothing to be done.

Gilley squatted on the edge of the chimney stack, the girl propped on his lap. He looked suddenly pathetic and worn out, like a fox surrendering to the hounds. But the moment of surrender was not yet. He must have realised, Beast or not, that there was no escape, and that the only reason why high pressure water jets were not sending him spinning from roof to ground was because of Synøve. And for that reason he clung to her. She had become his instrument of survival in a new and unexpected way.

Murray was holding new conferences with his officers, but I wasn't in on them. The situation was simple enough. All they had to do was to play the waiting game. Meanwhile the fire brigade men had produced nets and had spread them out beneath the roof for quick action.

There ought to have been a dramatic end. The Beast, in a surge of fury against hostile mankind, ought to have done something spectacular and memorable; ought to have ridden the whirlwind, or whistled up a tidal wave to wash away his tormentors. It wasn't like that at all. Gilley sat on the chimney stack, holding the girl, apparently lost in thought—and then suddenly he slumped to one side. Synøve dropped from his grasp. Both fell down the steep tiles of the roof, rolling and twisting uncontrollably, and they dropped into the space beyond the gutter simultaneously. The net caught the girl, but Gilley hit the concrete path around the house at the standard acceleration of thirty-two feet per second squared. I checked the time. It was twelve minutes since I had hung up on Anderton.

Gilley was already dead when they scraped him off the concrete.

Chapter Fourteen

MAKIN was in a sour sceptical mood. His desk was littered with dossiers, reports and miscellaneous typewritten sheets of paper. I seemed to be in his doghouse for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was that I had ordered Anderton to destroy the Beast tapes. Makin just would not believe that Gilley had died at the instant the tapes were erased—or rather, if he accepted the coincidence in time, he refused to consider for a moment any causal relationship. I must admit that I myself was very dubious about the whole thing.

"According to the pathologist," Makin said, referring to a pale blue document, "Gilley died of heart failure. He was dead before he hit the ground. Circulation had stopped before contusions were formed."

"You mean thrombosis?"

"No mention of thrombosis. Apparently the heart failed as a reaction to the hypermetabolism which he had undergone throughout the night. He'd burned himself out."

I shrugged. "One theory's as good as another. It's just as plausible to assume that when the Beast was destroyed Gilley's body became an empty shell. It wasn't so much heart failure as life failure."

Makin regarded me sternly. "Harland, you know

as well as I do that there never was a Beast in any real sense. It was all in the mind. Gilley simply went round the bend."

"Nevertheless," I pointed out, "he died at the precise moment that Anderton erased the programme tapes. Coincidence or cause and effect? Take your pick."

"You checked the times."

"Yes. Anderton erased the tapes twelve minutes after I finished the telephone conversation. That was when Gilley collapsed and fell from the roof."

He made a grimace and rubbed his hand across his chin in a weary gesture. "It's not reasonable, Harland. The Ministry won't wear it. And to destroy the tapes—why, that removes all the evidence and takes us back to square one. We can't prove a damn thing."

"I'm sorry about that," I said. "I still think I destroyed the Beast in the only way possible. So Gilley was destroyed, too. At least we saved the girl. And there's enough documentation—Gilley's log, notes, photographs and so on—to reconstruct the experiment if necessary."

"That's already in hand," Makin said with a wry grin. "Only this time there isn't a Gilley to be taken over, and the final results will probably be quite different."

"I take it I'm reprimanded."

"I'm afraid you are, and you haven't heard the last of it yet." He spread his hands on the desk and leaned towards me. "Still, Harland, I approve of initiative. I'm in favour of decision-making—even if it happens to be the wrong decision. Not that I'm excusing you in any way, but you'll probably find that the Ministry's attitude is quite different. My

reprimand is one thing, but the reprimand of a shower of fuddy-duddys, while meaning less, could be far more serious. It could jeopardise your career."

I eyed him sardonically. "You call it a career? I could do better working for the Port of London Authority."

"Why don't you try it then? I'm always good for a reference."

"You want my resignation?"

He considered for a moment. "Actually, no. We need a few idiots like you around to encourage the bright boys—to improve their morale."

"Thank you, Chief," I said.

He grinned. "You made one mistake, Harland —you destroyed the Beast. The Ministry may never forgive you for it. Gilley was expendable, but not the Beast."

"I thought the Ministry was anti-Beast."

"In terms of policy, yes. But you have to allow for a delayed action effect. It takes months for any original idea to filter through to the higher echelons of governmental administration. The Gilley crisis has accelerated matters. Suddenly they're interested. They want full details—they actually want to evaluate the experiment. Why the hell didn't Gilley put his cards on the table in the first place?"

"I asked him to. I pleaded with him. No good. You see, Chief, there never really was a Beast at all, and Gilley knew it. The Beast was part of Gilley's own mind—a rather nasty and perverse piece of his subconscious. He used the computer to rationalise it and justify it in terms of formulae and

equations. The Beast was the expression of Gilley's insanity."

Makin gave me an old fashioned look. "We'll see. Don't underestimate the computer. I can tell you this—that the experiment is being transferred to R.U.4, where they've just installed a bigger and better computer, and it looks as if Synøve Rayner may be put in charge of programming when she comes out of hospital."

"Good for Syn," I said. "With her in charge, the next Beast should be an absolute wow. By the way, how is she?"

"Improving. Four fractured ribs and a broken arm. Gilley didn't know his own strength. She'll be back to normal in about six weeks."

"Well, she'll know better next time," I commented.

"Won't we all?"

A few days later I went to visit Synøve in hospital. She looked pale and tired, and also curiously distant.

I said: "Hello, Syn. How're you making out?"

"I'm all right." Her voice was apathetic.

"I hear you're going to be promoted—in charge of a new Beast programme."

"I know. I'm the only one who knows enough about it. The Ministry have decided that it's of national importance."

"Congratulations."

"Thank you, Mark."

"I don't suppose we shall meet up again—but—you know—all the best and all the rest of it."

She smiled, but it was a thin, cynical smile. "Don't worry about me. What's more, I don't need

a computer to produce another Beast. I've got a feeling—just a feeling . . ."

"You mean . . ."

"It's on the cards. I admire you, Mark. You theorised very well. In a sense I'm highly privileged. I shall be the first woman to have a computer bred baby."

"You mean a baby Beast."

"Thank you for those kind words."

"Come down to earth," I said. "You're indulging in fantasy."

She looked reflective for a moment. "On the whole I like fantasy, Mark. Fantasy is better than people."

Well, that was that. The end of another case. Back to the routine of D.S.S. work in London. Bennett returned to his previous post at R.U.8. Synøve was never pregnant, and her baby Beast was just a pathetic idea with as much reality as the magnetic impulses on a computer tape. I never saw her again.

After my return to London I telephoned Lynn at her office. It was the only way to make sure of contacting her.

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume," she said.

There was something in the tone of her voice that was off-putting. I hung up.

Harland, I said to myself, what you need is phenobarbitone.

I went out to a pub and bought myself a very large whisky.

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B.E.A.S.T.

Biological
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Dr. Charles Howard Gilley was a brilliant man. And he was in charge of a very remarkable, very expensive computer.

So expensive, and so remarkable, that the authorities were much concerned with his proper use of its time.

They of course couldn't know that to Dr. Gilley the computer had ceased to be an "it."