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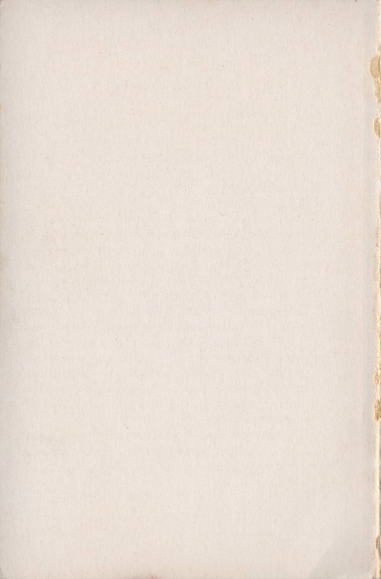
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Shot in the Dark

23 astounding
stories that are
out of this world



A BANTAM BOOK



SHOT IN THE DARK!

. . . What is it?

The lure of the unknown . . . the thrill of the unseen . . . the challenge of the unexpected! A new collection of really *different* stories. You'll read about things that haven't happened . . . yet; that *might* have happened . . . yesterday; that can't ever happen . . . *on earth*. You'll find stories of travel through space and time, of devils and dead ones you can't refuse to believe in, of strange life on other planets, and stranger life on earth itself a hundred or a hundred thousand years from now.

If you haven't discovered science-fantasy, this collection was made especially for you. You'll find your favorite writers of realistic fiction, and you'll like them better than ever when they let their imaginations go. If you like new people and places . . . if you dream or doubt or wonder about the world around you . . . if you want up-to-date fiction to fit the incredible facts of life today . . . then these stories are for you.

These stories were picked for style and content both, for depth of humanity as much as width of vision, for pace and action as well as novelty of ideas.

Judith Merril

***About* THE COVER**

This unusual cover painting is based on a scene in *The Halfling*, tense tale of the passionate struggle between a man who thought he was tough . . . and a girl who wasn't as soft as she looked . . . nor as human.

***Illustrated by* H. E. BISCHOFF**

Shot in the Dark

EDITED BY

Judith Merrill



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SHOT IN THE DARK

THANKS . . .

. . . to the many science-fiction and fantasy enthusiasts, writers, editors, publishers, and readers, who generously contributed their time, knowledge, and back-number magazines to the compilation of this anthology . . . to "fans" Forrest J. Ackerman, A. Langley Searles, and Wilson Tucker, for invaluable specialized information about hard-to-get old "pulp" stories . . . to publisher James A. Williams of Prime Press, for access to many of these magazines . . . to authors Anthony Boucher and Lewis Padgett for their many helpful suggestions of other writers' stories . . . to editors Malcolm Reiss of Fiction House, and Walter Bradbury of Doubleday, for their prompt and pleasant cooperation on behalf of several writers . . . to Frederik Pohl, of the Dirk Wylie Agency, for uncounted favors, small and large, and to other members of New York's Hydra Club, for their personal help and the use of their library of back-number magazines . . . and most particularly to James A. Sandoe, mystery critic and librarian extraordinary, for the use of otherwise unobtainable books, as well as for his incredible memory, voluminous correspondence, and unparalleled generosity.

—JM, September, 1949

They accused him of murder . . . but he insisted it was really much worse.

THE SKY WAS FULL OF SHIPS

by Theodore Sturgeon

SYKES DIED, AND AFTER TWO YEARS THEY TRACKED GORDON Kemp down and brought him back, because he was the only man who knew anything about the death. Kemp had to face a coroner's jury in Switchpath, Arizona, a crossroads just at the edge of the desert, and he wasn't too happy about it, being city-bred and not quite understanding the difference between "hicks" and "folks."

The atmosphere in the courtroom was tense. Had there been great wainscoted walls and a statue of blind Justice, it would have been more impersonal and, for Kemp, easier to take. But this courtroom was a crossroads granger's hall in Switchpath, Arizona.

The presiding coroner was Bert Whelson, who held a corncob pipe instead of a gavel. At their ease around the room were other men, dirt-farmers and prospectors like Whelson. It was like a movie short. It needed only a comedy dance number and somebody playing a jig.

But there was nothing comic about it. These hicks were in a position to pile trouble on Kemp, trouble that might very easily wind up in the gas chamber.

The coroner leaned forward. "You got nothin' to be afeared of, son, if your conscience is clear."

"I still ain't talking. I brought the guy in, didn't I? Would I of done that if I'd killed him?"

The coroner stroked his stubble, with a soft rasping sound like a rope being pulled over a wooden beam.

"We don't know about that, Kemp. *Hmm*. Why can't you get it through your head that nobody's accusing you of anything? You're jest a feller knows something about the death of this here Alessandro Sykes. This court'd like to know exactly what happened."

He hesitated, shuffled.

"Sit down, son," said the coroner.

That did it. He slumped into the straight chair that one of the men pushed up for him, and told this story.

I guess I better go right back to the beginning, the first time I ever saw this here Sykes.

I was working in my shop one afternoon when he walked in. He watched what I was doing and spoke up.

"You Gordon Kemp?"

I said yes and looked him over. He was a scrawny feller, prob'ly sixty years old and wound up real tight. He talked fast, smoked fast, moved fast, as if there wasn't time for nothin', but he had to get on to somethin' else. I asked him what he wanted.

"You the man had that article in the magazine about the concentrated atomic torch?" he said.

"Yeah," I told him. "Only that guy from the magazine, he used an awful lot of loose talk. Says my torch was three hundred years ahead of its time." Actually it was something I stumbled on by accident, more or less. The ordinary atomic hydrogen torch—plenty hot.

I figured out a ring-shaped electro-magnet set just in front of the jet, to concentrate it. It repelled the hydrogen parti-

cles and concentrated them. It'll cut anything—anything. And since it got patented, you'd be surprised at the calls I got. You got no idea how many people want to cut into bank vaults an' the side doors of hock shops. Well, about Sykes. . . .

I told him this magazine article went a little too far, but I did have quite a gadget. I gave him a demonstration or two, and he seemed satisfied. Finally I told him I was wasting my time unless he had a proposition.

He's lookin' real happy about this torch of mine, an' he nods.

"Sure. Only you'll have to take a couple of weeks off. Go out West. Arizona. Cut a way into a cave there."

"Cave, huh?" I said. "Is it legal?" I didn't want no trouble.

"Sure it's legal," he tells me.

"How much?"

He says he hates to argue.

"If you'll get me into that place—and you can satisfy yourself as to whether it's legal—I'll give you five thousand dollars," he says.

NOW, FIVE THOUSAND BERRIES CUTS A LOT OF ICE FOR ME. Especially for only two weeks' work. And besides, I liked the old guy's looks. He was queer as a nine-dollar bill, mind you, and had a funny way of carryin' on, but I could see he was worth the kind of money he talked.

He looked like he really needed help, too. Aw, maybe I'm just a boy scout at heart. As I say, I liked him, money or no money, and chances are I'd have helped him out for free.

He came to see me a couple more times and we sweated out the details. It wound up with him and me on the train and my torch and the other gear in the baggage car up front. Maybe some of you remember the day we arrived

here. He seemed to know a lot of people here. Mm? I thought so. He told me how many years he had been coming out to Switchpath.

He told me lots of things. He was one of the talkin'est old geezers I ever did see. I understood about one ninth of what he said. He was lonely, I guess. I was the first man he ever called in to help him with his work, and he spilled the overflow of years of workin' by himself.

About this Switchpath proposition, he told me that when he was just a punk out of college, he was a archyologist roamin' around the desert lookin' for old Indian stuff, vases and arrowheads and such stuff. And he run across this here room in the rock, at the bottom of a deep cleft.

He got all excited when he told me about this part of it. Went on a mile a minute about plasticine ages and messy zorics and pally o' lithographs or something. I called him down to earth and he explained to me that this room was down in rock that was very old—a couple of hundred thousand years, or maybe a half million.

He said that rock had been there either before mankind had a start here on earth, or maybe about the same time as the missing link. Me, I don't care about dead people or dead people's great-grandfathers, but Sykes was all enthusiastic.

Anyhow, it seems that this cave had been opened by some sort of an earthquake or something, and the stuff in it must have been there all that time. What got him excited was that the stuff was machinery of some kind and must have been put there 'way before there was any human beings on earth at all!

That seemed silly to me. I wanted to know what kind of machinery.

"Well," he says, "I thought at first that it was some sort of a radio transmitter. Get this," he says. "Here is a machine with an antenna on top of it, just like a micro-wave job. And beside it is another machine.

"This second machine is shaped like a dumb-bell standing on one end. The top of it is a sort of covered hopper, and at the waist of the machine is an arrangement of solenoids made out of some alloy that was never seen before on this earth.

"There's gearing between this machine and the other, the transmitter. I have figured out what this dumb-bell thing is. It's a recorder."

I want to know what is it recording. He lays one finger on the side of his nose and winks at me.

"Thought," he says. "Raw thought. But that isn't all. Earthquakes, continental shifts, weather cycles, lots more stuff. It integrates all these things with thought."

I want to know how he knows all this. That was when he told me that he had been with this thing for the better part of the last thirty years. He'd figured it out all by himself. He was real touchy about that part of it.

Then I began to realize what was the matter with the poor old guy. He really figured he had something big here and he wanted to find out about it. But it seems he was an ugly kid and a shy man, and he wanted to make the big splash all by himself. It wouldn't do for him just to be known as the man who discovered this thing.

"Any dolt could have stumbled across it," he'd say. He wanted to find out everything there was about this thing before he let a soul know about it. "Greater than the Rosetta Stone," he used to say. "Greater than the nuclear hypothesis." Oh, he was a great one for slinging the five-dollar words.

"And it will be Sykes who gave this to the world," he would say. "Sykes will give it to humanity, complete and provable, and history will be reckoned from the day I speak."

Oh, he was wacky, all right. I didn't mind, though. He was harmless, and a nicer little character you'd never want to meet.

FUNNY GUY, THAT SYKES. WHAT KIND OF A LIFE HE LED I CAN only imagine. He had dough—inherited an income or something, so he didn't have the problems that bother most of the rest of us. He would spend days in that cavern, staring at the machines. He didn't want to touch them. He only wanted to find out what they were doing there. One of them was running.

The big machine, the dumb-bell-shaped one, was running. It didn't make any noise. Both machines had a little disk set into the side. It was half red, half black. On the big machine, the one he called the recorder, this disk was turning. Not fast, but you could see it was moving. Sykes was all excited about that.

On the way out here, on the train, he spouted a lot of stuff. I don't know why. Maybe he thought I was too dumb to ever tell anybody about it. If that's what he thought, he had the right idea. I'm just a grease-monkey who happened to have a bright idea. Anyway, he showed me something he had taken from the cave.

It was a piece of wire about six feet long. But wire like I have never seen before or since. It was about 35 gauge—like a hair. And crooked. Crimped, I mean. Sykes said it was magnetized, too. It bent easy enough, but it wouldn't kink at all, and you couldn't put a tight bend in it. I imagine it'd dent a pair of pliers.

He asked me if I thought I could break it. I tried and got a gash in my lunch-hook for my trouble. So help me, it wouldn't break, and it wouldn't cut, and you couldn't get any of those crimps out of it. I don't mean you'd pull the wire and it would snap back. No. You couldn't pull it straight at all.

Sykes told me on the train that it had taken him eight months to cut that piece loose. It was more than just tough. It fused with itself. The first four times he managed to cut it through, he couldn't get the ends apart fast enough to keep them from fusing together again.

He finally had to clamp a pair of steel blocks around the wire, wait for enough wire to feed through to give him some slack and then put about twelve tons on some shears to cut through the wire. Forged iridium steel, those cutters were, and that wire left a heck of a hole in them.

But the wire parted. He had a big helical spring hauling the wire tight, so that the instant it parted it was snapped out of the way. It had to be cut twice to get the one piece out, and when he put the ends together they fused. I mean, both on the piece he took out and the two free ends in the machine—not a mark, not a bulge.

Well, you all remember when we arrived here with all that equipment, and how we hired a car and went off into the desert. All the while the old man was happy as a kid.

"Kemp, my boy," he says, "I got it decoded. I can read that tape. Do you realize what that means? Every bit of human history—I can get it in detail. Every single thing that ever happened to this earth or the people in it."

"You have no idea in what detail that tape records," he says. "Want to know who put the bee on Alexander the Great? Want to know what the name of Pericles' girl friend really was? I have it all here. What about these Indian and old Greek legends about a lost continent? What about old Fort's fireballs? Who was the man in the iron mask? I have it, son, I have it."

That was what went on all the way out there, to that place in the dry gulch where the cave was.

You wouldn't believe what a place that was to get to. How that old guy ever had the energy to keep going back to it I'll never know. We had to stop the car about twenty miles from here and hoof it.

The country out there is all tore up. If I hadn't already seen the color of his money I'd have said the heck with it. Sand and heat and big rocks and more places to fall into and break your silly neck—*Lord!*

Me with a pack on my back too, the torch, the gas, and

a power supply and all. We got to this cleft, see, and he outs with a length of rope and makes it fast to a stone column that's eroded nearby. He has a slip-snaffle on it. He lowers himself into the gulch and I drop the gear down after him, and then down I go.

Brother, it's dark in there. We go uphill about a hundred and fifty yards, and then Sykes pulls up in front of a facing. By the light of his flash I can see the remains of a flock of campfires he's made there over the years.

"There it is," he says. "It's all yours, Kemp. If that three-hundred-years-in-the-future torch of yours is any good—prove it."

I unlimbered my stuff and got to work, and believe me it was hard, slow goin'. But I got through. It took nine hours before I had a hole fit for us to crawl through, and another hour for it to cool enough so's we could use it.

ALL THAT TIME THE OLD MAN TALKED. IT WAS MOSTLY BRAGGING about the job he'd done decoding the wire he had. It was mostly Greek to me.

"I have a record here," he says, swishin' his hunk of wire around, "of a phase of the industrial revolution in Central Europe that will have the historians gnashing their teeth. But have I said anything? Not me. Not Sykes!

"I'll have the history of mankind written in such detail, with such authority, that the name of Sykes will go into the language as a synonym for the miraculously accurate." I remember that because he said it so much. He said it like it tasted good.

I remember once I asked him why it was we had to bother cutting in. Where was the hole he had used?

"That, my boy," he says, "is an unforeseen quality of the machines. For some reason they closed themselves up. In a way I'm glad they did. I was unable to get back in and I was forced to concentrate on my sample. If it hadn't been for that, I doubt that I would ever have cracked the code."

So I asked him what about all this—what were the machines and who left them there and what for? All this while I was cutting away at that rock facing. And, man! I never seen rock like that. If it was rock, which, now, I doubt.

It come off in flakes, in front of my torch. My torch, that'll cut anything. Do you know that in those nine hours I only got through about seven and a half inches of that stuff? And my torch'll walk into laminated bank vaults like the door was open.

When I asked him he shut up for a long time, but I guess he wanted to talk. He sure was enthusiastic. And besides, he figured I was too dumb to savvy what he was talking about. As I said before, he was right there. So he run off about it, and this is about how it went—

“Who left these machines here or how they operate, we may never know. It would be interesting to find out, but the important thing is to get the records and decode them all.”

It had taken him a while to recognize that machine as a recorder. The tipoff was that it was running and the other one, the transmitter, was not.

He thought at first that maybe the transmitter was busted, but after a year or two of examining the machines without touching them he began to realize that there was a gear-train waiting by the tape where it fed through the gismo that crimped it.

This gear train was fixed to start the transmitter, see? But it was keyed to a certain crimp in the tape. In other words, when something happened somewhere on earth that was just the right thing, the crimper would record it and the transmitter would get keyed off.

Sykes studied that setup for years before he figured the particular squiggle in that wire that would start that transmitter to sending. Where was it sending to? Why? Sure, he thought about that. But that didn't matter to him.

What was supposed to happen, when the tape ran out?

Who or what would come and look at it when it was all done? You know, he didn't care. He just wanted to read that tape, is all. Seems there's a lot of guys write history books and stuff. And he wanted to call them liars. He wanted to tell them the way it really was. Can you imagine?

So there I am, cutting away with my super-torch on what seems to be a solid wall made out of some stuff that has no right to be so tough. I can still see it.

So dark, and me with black goggles on, and the doc with his back to me so's he won't wreck his eyes, spoutin' along about history and the first unbiased account of it. And how he was going to thrust it on the world and just kill all those guys with all those theories.

I remember quitting once for a breather and letting the mercury cells juice up a bit while I had a smoke. Just to make talk I ask Sykes when does he think that transmitter is going to go to work.

"Oh," he says. "It already did. It's finished. That's how I knew that my figuring was right. That tape has a certain rate through the machine. It's in millimeters per month. I have the figure. It wouldn't matter to you. But something happened a while ago that made it possible to check. July sixteenth, nineteen hundred and forty-five, to be exact."

"You don't tell me," I says.

"Oh," he says, real pleased, "but I do! That day something happened which put a wiggle in the wire there—the thing I was looking for all along. It was the crimp that triggered the transmitter. I happened to be in the cave at the time.

"The transmitter started up and the little disk spun around like mad. Then it stopped. I looked in the papers the next week to see what it was. Nothing I could find. It wasn't until the following August that I found out."

I suddenly caught wise.

"Oh—the atom bomb! You mean that rig was set up to

send something as soon as an atomic explosion kicked off somewhere on earth!"

HE NODDED HIS HEAD. BY THE GLARE OF THE RED-HOT ROCK he looked like a skinny old owl.

"That's right. That's why we've got to get in there in a hurry. It was after the second Bikini blast that the cave got sealed up. I don't know if that transmission is ever going to get picked up.

"I don't know if anything is going to happen if it is picked up. I do know that I have the wire decoded and I mean to get those records before anybody else does."

If that wall had been any thicker I never would've gotten through. When I got my circle cut and the cut-out piece dropped inside, my rig was about at its last gasp. So was Sykes. For the last two hours he'd been hoppin' up an' down with impatience.

"Thirty years' work," he kept saying. "I've waited for this for thirty years and I won't be stopped now. Hurry up! Hurry up!"

And when we had to wait for the opening to cool I thought he'd go wild. I guess that's what built him up to his big breakdown. He sure was keyed up.

Well, at last we crawled into the place. He'd talked so much about it that I almost felt I was comin' back to something instead of seeing it for the first time.

There were the machines, the big one about seven feet tall, dumb-bell shaped, and the little one sort of a rounded cube with a bunch of macaroni on top that was this antenna he was talking about.

We lit a pressure lantern that flooded the place with light—it was small, with a floor about nine by nine—and he jumped over to the machines.

He scrabbles around and hauls out some wire. Then he stops and stands there looking stupid at me.

"What's the matter, Doc?" I say. I called him Doc. He gulps and swallows.

"The reel's empty. It's empty! There's only eight inches of wire here. Only—" and that was when he fainted.

I jumped up right away and shook him and shoved him around a little until his eyes started to blink. He sits up and shakes himself.

"Refilled," he says. He is real hoarse. "Kemp! They've been here!"

I began to get the idea. The lower chamber is empty. The upper one is full. The whole set-up is arranged to run off a new recording. And where is Sykes' thirty years' work?

He starts to laugh. I look at him. I can't take that. The place is too small for all that noise. I never heard anybody laugh like that. Like short screams, one after the other, fast. He laughs and laughs.

I carry him out. I put him down outside and go back in for my gear. I can hear him laughing out there and that busted-up voice of his echoing in the gulch. I get everything onto the back pack and go to put out the pressure lantern when I hear a little click.

It's that transmitter. The little red and black disk is turning around on it. I just stand there watching it. It only runs for three or four minutes. And then it begins to get hot in there.

I got scared. I ducked out of the hole and picked up Sykes. He didn't weigh much. I looked back in the hole. The cave was lit up. Red. The machines were cherry-red, straw-color, white, just that quick. They melted. I saw it. I ran.

I don't hardly remember getting to the rope and tying Sykes on and climbing up and hauling him up after me. He was quiet then, but conscious. I carried him away until the light from the gulch stopped me. I turned around to watch.

I could see a ways down into the gulch. It was fillin' up

with lava. It was lightin' up the whole desert. And I never felt such heat. I ran again.

I got to the car and dumped Sykes in. He shifted around on the seat some. I asked him how he felt. He didn't answer that but mumbled a lot of stuff.

Something like this.

"They knew we'd reached the atomic age. They wanted to be told when. The transmitter did just that. They came and took the recordings and refilled the machine.

"They sealed off the room with something they thought only controlled atomic power could break into. This time the transmitter was triggered to human beings in that room. Your torch did it, Kemp—that three-hundred-years-in-the-future torch! They think we have atomic power! They'll come back!"

"Who, Doc? Who?" I says.

"I don't know," he mumbles. "There'd be only one reason why someone—some creature—would want to know a thing like that. And that's so they could stop us."

SO I LAUGHED AT HIM. I GOT IN AND STARTED THE CAR AND laughed at him.

"Doc," I said, "we ain't goin' to be stopped now. Like the papers say, we're in the atomic age if it kills us. But we're in for keeps. Why, humanity would have to be killed off before it'd get out of this atomic age."

"I know that, Kemp—I know—that's what I mean! What have we done? What have we done?"

After that he's quiet a while and when I look at him again I see he's dead. So I brought him in. In the excitement I faded. It just didn't look good to me. I knew nobody would listen to a yarn like that.

There was silence in the courtroom until somebody coughed, and then everyone felt he had to make a sound

with his throat or his feet. The coroner held up his hand.

"I kin see what Brother Kemp was worried about. If that story is true I, for one, would think twice about tellin' it."

"He's a liar!" roared a prospector from the benches. "He's a murderin' liar! I have a kid reads that kind of stuff, an I never did like to see him at it. Believe me, he's a-goin' to cut it out as of right now. I think this Kemp feller needs a hangin'!"

"Now, Jed!" bellowed the coroner. "If we kill off this man we do it legal, hear?" The sudden hubbub quieted, and the coroner turned to the prisoner.

"Listen here, Kemp—somethin' jést occurred to me. How long was it from the time of the first atom blast until the time that room got sealed up?"

"I dunno. About two years. Little over. Why?"

"An' how long since that night you been talking about, when Sykes died?"

"Or was murdered," growled the prospector.

"Shut up, Jed. Well, Kemp?"

"About eighteen mon—No. Nearer two years."

"Well, then," said the coroner, spreading his hands. "If there was anything in your story, or in that goofy idea of the dead man's about someone comin' to kill us off—well, ain't it about time they did?"

There were guffaws, and the end of the grange hall disappeared in a burst of flame. Yelling, cursing, some of them screaming, they pushed and fought their way out into the moonlit road.

The sky was full of ships.

The beautiful dancer was . . . really . . . out of this world.

THE HALFLING

by Leigh Brackett

I WAS WATCHING THE SUNSET. IT WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL in the line of California sunsets, and the first one I'd seen in about nine years. The pitch was in the flatlands between Culver City and Venice, and I could smell the sea. I was born in a little dump at Venice, Cal., and I've never found any smell like the clean cold salt of the Pacific—not anywhere in the Solar System.

I was standing alone, off to one side of the grounds. The usual noises of a carnival around feeding time were being made behind me, and the hammer gang was pinning the last of the tents down tight. But I wasn't thinking about Jade Greene's Interplanetary Carnival, The Wonders of the Seven Worlds Alive Before Your Eyes.

I was remembering John Damien Greene running bare-foot on a wet beach, fishing for perch off the end of a jetty, and dreaming big dreams. I was wondering where John Damien Greene had gone, taking his dreams with him, because now I could hardly remember what they were.

Somebody said softly from behind me, "Mr. Greene?"

I turned around.

She stood about five-three on her bronze heels, and her eyes were more purple than the hills of Malibu. She had a funny little button of a nose and a pink mouth, smiling just enough to show her even white teeth. The bronze metal-cloth dress she wore hugged a chassis with no flaws in it anywhere.

"They said you were Mr. Greene. If I've made a mistake . . ."

She had an accent, just enough to be fascinating.

I said, "I'm Greene. Something I can do for you?"

It's hard to describe a girl like that. You can say she's five-three and beautiful, but you can't pass on the odd little tilt of her eyes and the way her mouth looks, or the something that just comes out of her like light out of a lamp, and hooks into you so you know you'll never be rid of it, not if you live to be a thousand.

She said, "Yes. You can give me a job. I'm a dancer."

I shook my head. "Sorry, miss. I got a dancer."

Her face had a look of steel down under the soft kittenish roundness. "I'm not just talking," she said. "I need a job so I can eat. I'm a good dancer. I'm the best dancer you ever saw anywhere. Look me over."

That's all I had been doing. I guess I was staring by then.

"I still have a dancer," I told her, "a green-eyed Martian babe who is plenty good, and who would tear my head off, and yours too, if I hired you."

"Oh," she said. "Sorry. I thought you bossed this carnival." She let me think about that, and then grinned. "Let me show you."

She was close enough so I could smell the faint, spicy perfume she wore. But she'd stopped me from being just a guy chinning with a pretty girl. Right then I was Jade Greene, the carny boss-man, with a show to keep running.

If this kid had something Sindi didn't have, something to drag in the cash customers—well, Sindi would have to

take it and like it. Besides, Sindi was getting so she thought she owned me.

The girl was watching my face. I scowled at her.

"You'd have to sign up for the whole tour. I'm blasting off next Monday for Venus, and then Mars, and maybe into the Asteroids."

"I don't care. Anything to be able to eat. Anything to—"

She stopped right there and bent her head again, and suddenly I could see tears on her thick brown lashes.

I said, "Okay. Come over to the cooch tent and we'll have a look."

She said shakily, "You don't soften up very easily, do you?" We started across the lot toward the main gate. The night was coming down cool and fresh. Everything was clean, new and graceful. Only the thin fog and the smell of the sea were old.

We were close to the gate, stumbling a little in the dusk of the afterglow. Suddenly a shadow came tearing out from between the tents.

It went erratically in lithe, noiseless bounds, and it was somehow not human even though it went on two feet. The girl caught her breath and shrank in against me. The shadow went around us three times like a crazy thing, and then stopped.

There was something eerie about the sudden stillness. The shadow stretched itself toward the darkening sky and let go a wail like Lucifer falling from Heaven.

I cursed. The carny lights came on, slamming a circle of blue-white glare against the night.

"Laska, come here!" I yelled.

The girl screamed.

I put my arm around her. "It's all right," I said, and then, "Come here, you misbegotten Thing!"

There were more things I wanted to say, but the girl cramped my style. Laska slunk in towards us. I didn't blame her for yelping. Laska wasn't pretty.

He wasn't much taller than the girl, and looked shorter because he was drooping. He wore a pair of tight dark trunks and nothing else except the cross-shaped mane of fine blue-gray fur that went across his shoulders and down his back, from the peak between his eyes to his long tail. He was dragging the tail, and the tip of it was twitching. There was more of the soft fur on his chest and forearms, and a fringe of it down his lank belly.

I grabbed him by the scruff and shook him. "I ought to boot your ribs in! We got a show in less than two hours."

He looked up at me. The pupils of his yellow-green eyes were closed to thin hairlines, but they were flat and cold with hatred. The glaring lights showed me the wet whiteness of his pointed teeth and the raspy pinkness of his tongue.

"Let me go. Let me go, you human!" His voice was hoarse and accented.

"I'll let you go." I cuffed him across the face. "I'll let you go to the immigration authorities. You wouldn't like that, would you? You wouldn't even have coffee to hop up on when you died."

The sharp claws came out of his fingers and toes, flexed hungrily and went back in again.

I dropped him.

"Go on back inside. Find the croaker and tell him to straighten you out. I don't give a damn what you do on your own time, but you miss out on one more show and I'll take your job and call the I-men. Get it?"

"I get it," said Laska sullenly, and curled his red tongue over his teeth. He shot his flat, cold glance at the girl and went away, not making any sound at all.

The girl shivered and drew away from me. "What was—that?"

"Cat-man from Callisto. My prize performer. They're pretty rare."

"I-I've heard of them. They evolved from a cat-ancestor instead of an ape, like we did."

"That's putting it crudely, but it's close enough. I've got a carload of critters like that, geeks from all over the System. They ain't human, and they don't fit with animals either. Moth-men, lizard-men, guys with wings and guys with six arms and antennae. They all followed evolutionary tracks peculiar to their particular hunks of planet, only they stopped before they got where they were going. The Callistan kitties are the aristocrats of the bunch. They've got an I. Q. higher than a lot of humans, and wouldn't spit on the other halflings."

"Poor things," she said softly. "You didn't have to be so cruel to him."

I laughed. "That What's-it would as soon claw my insides out as look at me—or any other human, including you—just on general principles. That's why Immigration hates to let 'em in even on a work permit. And when he's hopped up on coffee . . ."

"Coffee? I thought I must have heard wrong."

"Nope. The caffeine in Earthly coffee berries works just like coke or hashish for 'em. Venusian coffee hits 'em so hard they go nuts and then die, but our own kind just keeps 'em going. It's only the hoppy ones you ever find in a show like this. They get started on coffee and they have to have it no matter what they have to do to get it."

She shuddered a little. "You said something about dying."

"Yeah. If he's ever deported back to Callisto his people will tear him apart. They're a clannish bunch. I guess the first humans on Callisto weren't very tactful, or else they just hate us because we're something they're not and never can be. Anyway, their tribal law forbids them to have anything to do with us except killing. Nobody knows much about 'em, but I hear they have a nice friendly religion, something like the old-time Thugs and their Kali worship."

I paused, and then said uncomfortably, "Sorry I had to rough him up in front of you. But he's got to be kept in line."

She nodded. We didn't say anything after that. We went in past the main box and along between the burglars readying-up their layouts—Martian getak, Venusian shalil and the game the Mercurian hillmen play with human skulls. Crooked? Sure—but suckers like to be fooled, and a guy has to make a living.

I couldn't take my eyes off the girl. I thought, *if she dances the way she walks . . .*

She didn't look much at the big three-dimensional natural-color pictures advertising the geek show. We went by the brute top, and suddenly all hell broke loose inside of it. I've got a fair assortment of animals from all over. They make pretty funny noises when they get started, and they were started now.

They were nervous, unhappy noises. I heard prisoners yammering in the Lunar cell-blocks once, and that was the way this sounded—strong, living things shut up in cages and tearing their hearts out with it—hate, fear and longing like you never thought about. It turned you cold.

The girl looked scared. I put my arm around her again, not minding it at all. Just then Tiny came out of the brute top.

Tiny is a Venusian deep-jungle man, about two sizes smaller than the Empire State Building, and the best zoo-man I ever had, drunk or sober. Right now he was mad.

"I tell that Laska stay 'way from here," he yelled. "My kids smell him. You listen!" I didn't have to listen. His "kids" could have been heard halfway to New York. Laska had been expressly forbidden to go near the brute top because the smell of him set the beasts crazy. Whether they were calling to him as one animal to another, or scared of him as something unnatural, we didn't know.

I said, "Laska's hopped again. You get the kids quiet and then send one of the punks over and tell the cook I said if he ever gives Laska a teaspoonful of coffee again without my say-so I'll fry him in his own grease."

Tiny nodded and vanished, cursing. I said to the girl, "Still want to be a carny?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "Anything, as long as you serve food!"

"That's a pretty accent you got. What is it?"

"Just about everything. I was born on a ship between Earth and Mars, and I've lived all over. My father was in the diplomatic corps."

I said, "Oh. Well, here's the place. Go to it."

Sindi was sitting cross-legged on the stage, sipping *thil* and listening to sad Martian music on the juke box behind the screen of faded Martian tapestry. She looked up and saw us, and she didn't like what she saw.

She got up. She was a Low-Canaler, built light and wiry. She had long emerald eyes and black hair with little bells braided in it, and clusters of tiny bells in her ears. She was wearing the skin of a Martian sand-leopard, no more clothes than the law forced her to wear. She was something to look at, and she had a disposition like three yards of barbed wire.

I said, "Hi, Sindi. This kid wants a try-out. Climb down, huh?"

Sindi looked the kid over. She smiled and climbed down and put her hand on my arm.

She sounded like a shower of rain when she moved, and her nails bit into me, hard.

I said between my teeth, "What music do you want, kid?"

"My name's Laura—Laura Darrow. Do you have En-haili's *Primitive Venus*?"

Not more than half a dozen dancers in the System can

do justice to that collection of tribal music. Some of it's sub-human and so savage it scares you. We use it for mood music, to draw the crowd.

I started to protest, but Sindi smiled and tinkled her head back. "Of course. Put it on, Jade."

I shrugged and went in and fiddled with the juke box. When I came out Laura Darrow was upon the stage and we had an audience. I shoved my way through a bunch of Venusian lizard-men and sat down. There were three or four little moth-people from Phobos roosting up on the braces so their delicate wings wouldn't get damaged in the crush.

The music started. Laura kicked off her shoes and danced.

I don't think I breathed all the time she was on the stage. The girl wasn't human. She was sunlight, quicksilver, a leaf riding the wind—but nothing human, nothing tied down to muscles and gravity and flesh. She was—oh, hell, there aren't any words. She was the music.

When she was through we sat there a long time, perfectly still. Then the Venusians, human and half-human, let go a yell and the audience came to and tore up the seats.

In the middle of it Sindi looked at me with deadly green eyes and said, "I suppose she's hired."

"Yeah. But it doesn't have anything to do with you, baby."

"Listen, Jade. This suitcase outfit isn't big enough for two of us. Besides, she's got you hooked, and she can have you."

I yelled, "What do you want me to do, throw her out on her ear? With that talent?"

"Talent!" snarled Sindi. "She's not talented. She's a freak."

She went out, leaving me sore and a little uneasy.

I jammed my way up to the stage. Laura was being mobbed. She looked scared—some of the halflings are

enough to give a tough guy nightmares—and she was crying.

I said, "Relax, honey. You're in." I knew that Sindi was telling the truth. I was hooked. I was so hooked it scared me, but I wouldn't have wiggled off if I could.

I fed her in my own quarters. She shuddered when I poured her coffee and refused it, saying she didn't think she'd ever enjoy it again. She took tea instead. She was hungry, all right. I thought she'd never stop eating.

Finally I said, "The pay's forty credits, and found." She nodded.

I said gently, "You can tell me. What's wrong?"

She gave me a wide, purple stare. "What do you mean?"

"A dancer like you could write her own ticket anywhere, and not for the kind of peanuts I can pay you. You're in a jam."

She looked at the table and locked her fingers together. Their long pink nails glistened.

She whispered, "It isn't anything bad. Just a—a passport difficulty. I told you I was born in space. The records got lost somehow, and living the way we did—well, I had to come to Earth in a hurry, and I couldn't prove my citizenship, so I came without it. Now I can't get back to Venus where my money is, and I can't stay here. That's why I wanted so badly to get a job with you. You're going out, and you can take me."

I knew how to do that, all right. I said, "You must have had a big reason to take the risk you did. If you're caught it means the Lunar cell-blocks for a long time before they deport you."

She shivered, and I let it drop there.

I took her to her tent, left her there and went out to get the show running.

That evening I hired the punk, just a scrawny kid with a white face and hungry brown eyes. He said he needed work and Tiny needed somebody to help out in the brute top.

WE PLAYED IN LUCK THAT WEEK. SOME GILDED DARLING OF the screen showed up with somebody else's husband who wasn't quite divorced yet, and we got a lot of free publicity. Laura went on the second night and brought down the house. We turned 'em away for the first time in history. The only thing that worried me was Sindi. She wouldn't speak to me, only smile at me along her green eyes as though she knew a lot she wasn't telling and not any of it nice.

For five days I walked a tightrope between heaven and hell. Everybody on the pitch knew I was a dead duck where Laura was concerned.

I couldn't keep away from her.

I kissed her on the fifth night, out back of the cooch tent when the show was over. It was dark there; we were all alone, and the faint spicy breath of her came to me through the thin salt fog. I kissed her.

Her mouth answered mine. Then she wrenched away, suddenly, with a queer fury. I let her go.

I said, "I'm sorry."

"It isn't that. Oh, Jade, I—" She stopped. I could hear the breath sobbing in her throat. Then she turned and ran away, and the sound of her weeping came back to me through the dark.

I went to my quarters and got out a bottle. After the first shot I just sat staring at it with my head in my hands. I haven't any idea how long I sat there. I only know that the pitch was dark, sound asleep under a pall of fog, when I heard the scream,—a voice of terror and final pain, far beyond anything human.

I got my gun out of the table drawer. I remember my palm was slippery with cold sweat. I went outside, catching up the big flashlight kept for emergencies near the tent flap. It was very dark out there, very still, and yet not quiet.

The pitch was beginning to wake up. The stir and rustle spread out from the scream like ripples from a stone, and

over in the brute top a Martian sand-cat began to wail, thin and feral, like an echo of death.

I found her back of the cooch tent, not far from where I'd kissed Laura. It was Sindi; she was lying on her face, huddled up, like a brown island in a red sea. The little bells were still in her ears.

I walked in her blood and knelt down in it and put my hand on her shoulder. I thought she was dead, but the bells tinkled faintly, like something far away on another star. I tried to turn her over.

She gasped, "Don't." It wasn't a voice. It was hardly a breath, but I could hear it. I can still hear it. I took my hand away.

"Sindi—"

A little wash of sound from the bells, like rain far off—"You fool," she whispered. "The stage. Jade, the stage—"

She stopped. The croaker came from somewhere behind me and knocked me out of the way, but I knew it was no use. I knew Sindi had stopped for good.

Humans and halflings were jammed in all round, staring, whispering. The brute top had gone crazy. They smelt blood and death on the night wind, and they wanted to be free and a part of it.

"Claws," the croaker said. "Something clawed her. Her throat—"

I said, "Yeah. Shut up." I turned around. The punk was standing there, the white-faced kid, his wide brown eyes staring at Sindi's body.

"You," I said. "Go back to Tiny and tell him to make sure all his kids are there . . . All the roustabouts and every man that can handle a gun or a tent stake, get armed as fast as you can and stand by . . . Mike, take whatever you need and guard the gate. Everybody else get inside and stay there. I'm going to call the police."

The crowd started to break up. Laura Darrow came out of it and took my arm.

"Look out," I said. "I'm all—blood."

I could feel it on my shoes, soaking through the thin stuff of my trouser legs. My stomach rose up under my throat. I closed my eyes and all the time Laura's voice was soothing me. She hadn't let go of my arm. I could feel her fingers. They were cold, and too tight. Even then, I loved her so much I ached with it.

"Jade," she said. "Jade, darling. Please—I'm so frightened."

That helped. I put my arm around her and we started back toward my place and the phone. Nobody had thought to put the big lights on yet, and my torchbeam cut a fuzzy tunnel through the fog.

"I couldn't sleep very well," Laura said suddenly. "I was lying in my tent thinking, and a little while before she screamed I thought I heard something—something like a big cat, padding."

The thing that had been in the back of my mind came out yelling. I hadn't seen Laska in the crowd. If Laska had got hold of some coffee behind the cook's back . . .

I said, "You were probably mistaken."

"No. Jade."

"Yeah?" It was dark between the tents. I wished somebody would turn the lights on. I wished I hadn't forgotten to tell them to. I wished they'd shut up their over-all obligato of gabbling, so I could hear . . .

"Jade. I couldn't sleep because I was thinking—"

Then she screamed.

He came out of a dark tunnel between two storage tents. He was going almost on all fours, his head flattened forward, his hands held in a little to his belly. His claws were out. They were wet and red, and his hands were wet and red, and his feet. His yellow-green eyes had a crazy shine to them.

He didn't say anything. He made noises, but they weren't

speech and they weren't sane. They weren't anything but horrible. He sprang.

I pushed Laura behind me. I brought up my gun and fired, three shots.

The heavy slugs nearly tore him in two, but they didn't stop him. He let go a mad animal scream and hit me, slashing. I went part way down, firing again, but Laska was still going. His hind feet clawed into my hip and thigh, using me as something to push off from. He wanted the girl.

She had backed off, yelling bloody murder. I could hear feet running, and people shouting. The lights came on. I twisted around and got Laska by the mane of fur on his backbone. He was suddenly a very heavy weight. I think he was dead when I put the fifth bullet through his skull.

I let him drop.

I said, "Laura, are you all right?" I saw her eyes like dark stars in her white face. She was saying something, but I couldn't hear what it was. I said, "You ought to faint, or something," and laughed.

But it was me, Jade Greene, that did the fainting.

I came out of it too soon. The croaker was still working on my leg. I called him everything I could think of in every language I knew, out of the half of my mouth that wasn't taped shut. He was a heavy man, with a belly and a dirty chin.

He laughed and said, "You'll live. That critter damn near took half your face off, but with your style of beauty it won't matter much. Just take it easy a while until you make some more blood."

I said, "The hell with that. I got work to do." I poured some Scotch in to help out the blood shortage, and managed to get over to the office.

I walked pretty well.

That was largely because Laura let me lean on her. She cried a little and laughed a little and told me how wonder-

ful I was, and pretty soon I began to feel like a kid waking up from a nightmare into a room full of sunshine.

The law had arrived when we got to the office. There wasn't any trouble. Sindi's torn body and the crazy cat-man added up, and the Venusian cook put the lid on it. He always took a thermos of coffee to bed with him, so he'd have it first thing when he woke up—Venusian coffee, with enough caffeine in it to stand an Earthman on his head. Enough to finish off a Callistan cat-man. Somebody had swiped it when he wasn't looking. They found the thermos in Laska's quarters.

The show went on. Mobs came to gawk at the place where the killing had happened. I took it easy for one day, lolling in a shiny golden cloud with Laura holding my head.

Along about sundown she said, "I'll have to get ready for the show."

"Yeah. Saturday's a big night. Tomorrow we tear down, and then Monday we head out for Venus. You'll feel happier then."

She put her head down over mine. Her hair was like warm silk. I put my hands up on her throat. It was firm and alive, and it made my hands burn.

She whispered, "Jade, I—" A big hot tear splashed down on my face, and then she was gone.

I lay still, hot and shivering like a man with swamp-fever, thinking, "Maybe . . ."

It was nice dreaming for a while.

It was a nice night, too, full of stars and the clean, cool ocean breeze, when Tiny came over to tell me they'd found the punk dead in a pile of straw with his throat torn out, and the Martian sand-cat loose.

WE JAMMED OUR WAY THROUGH THE MOB ON THE MIDWAY. Nobody knew about the killing. Tiny had had the cat rounded up and caged before it could get outside the brute top, which had not yet opened for business.

The punk was dead, all right—dead as Sindi, and in the same way. His twisted face was not much whiter than I remembered it, the closed eyelids faintly blue. He lay almost under the sand-cat's cage.

The cat paced, jittery and snarling. There was blood on all its six paws. The cages and pens and pressure tanks seethed nastily all around me, held down and quiet by Tiny's wranglers.

I said, "What happened?"

Tiny lifted his gargantuan shoulders. "Dunno. Everything quiet. Even no yell, like Sindi. Punk kid all lonesome over here behind cages. Nobody see; nobody hear. Only Mars kitty waltz out on main aisle, scare hell out of everybody. We catch, and then find punk, like you see."

I turned around wearily. "Call the cops again and report the accident. Keep the rubes out of here until they pick up the body." I shivered. They come in threes—always in threes. Sindi, the punk—what next?

Tiny sighed. "Poor punk. So peaceful, like sleeper with shut eye."

"Yeah." I started away. I limped six paces and stopped and limped back again.

I said, "That's funny. Guys that die violent aren't tidy about their eyes."

I leaned over. I didn't quite know why, then. I do now. You can't beat that three-time jinx. One way or another, it gets you.

I pushed back one thin, waxy eyelid. After a while I pushed back the other. Tiny breathed heavily over my shoulder. Neither of us said anything. The animals whimpered and yawned and paced.

I closed his eyes again and went through his pockets. I didn't find what I was looking for. I got up very slowly, like an old man. I felt like an old man. I felt dead, deader than the white-faced kid.

I said, "His eyes were brown."

Tiny stared at me. He started to speak, but I stopped him. "Call Homicide, Tiny. Put a guard on the body. And send men with guns . . ."

I told him where to send them. Then I went back across the midway.

A couple of Europeans with wiry little bodies and a twenty-foot wing-spread were doing Immelmans over the geek top, and on the bally stand in front of it two guys with six hands apiece and four eyes on movable stalks were juggling. Laura was out in front of the cooch tent, giving the rubes a come-on.

I went around behind the tent, around where I'd kissed her, around where Sindi had died with the bells in her ears like a wash of distant rain.

I lifted up the flap and went in.

The tent was empty except for the man that tends the juke box. Enhaili's *Primitive Venus* was crying out with a rhythm like thrown spears.

I pulled the stage master, and then the whites. They glared on the bare boards, naked as death and just as yielding.

After a while the man behind me said uneasily, "Boss, what—"

"Go out front," I told him. "Send Laura Darrow in here. Then tell the rubes there won't be a show here tonight."

I heard his breath suck in, and then catch. He went away down the aisle.

I got a cigarette out and lit it very carefully, broke the match in two and stepped on it.

Laura came down the aisle. She was beautiful. Her gold-brown hair was caught in a web of brilliants. She wore a sheath-tight thing of sea-green metal scales, with a short skirt swirling around her white thighs, and sandals of the shiny scales with no heels to them. She moved with the music, part of it, wild with it, a way I'd never seen any other woman move.

She stopped. The music wailed and throbbed on the still, warm air.

I said, "Take off your shoes, Laura. Take off your shoes and dance."

She moved then, still with the beat of the savage drums. She drew in upon herself, a shrinking and tightening of muscles, a preparation.

She said, "You know."

I nodded. "You shouldn't have closed his eyes. I might never have noticed. I might never have remembered that the kid had brown eyes. He was just a punk. Nobody paid much attention. He might just as well have had purple eyes—like yours."

"He stole them from me." Her voice came sharp under the music. It had a hiss and a wail in it I'd never heard before, and the accent was harsher. "While I was in your tent, Jade. I found out when I went to dress. He was an I-man. I found his badge inside his clothes and took it."

Purple eyes looking at me—purple eyes as phony as the eyes on the dead boy. Contact lenses painted purple to hide what was underneath.

"Too bad you carried an extra pair, Laura, in case of breakage."

"He put them in his eyes, so he couldn't lose them or break them or have them stolen, until he could report. He threw away the little suction cup. I couldn't find it. I couldn't get the shells off his eyeballs. All I could do was close his eyes and hope—"

"And let the sand-cat out of his cage to walk through the blood." My voice was coming out all by itself.

"You almost got by with it, Laura. Just like you got by with Sindi. She got in your way, didn't she? She was jealous. She knew that no true human could dance like you. She said so. She said you were a freak."

That word hit her like my fist. She showed me her teeth,

white, even teeth that I knew now were as phony as her eyes.

I said, "Sindi gave you away before she died, only I was too dumb to know what she meant. She said, 'The stage.'"

I think we both looked, down at the stark boards under the stark lights, looked at the scratches on them where Laura had danced barefoot that first time and left the marks of her claws on the wood.

She nodded, a slow, feral weaving of the head.

"Sindi was too curious. She searched my tent, and she left her scent—just as the young man did today. I followed her back here in the dark—I can move in the dark, Jade, very quickly and quietly."

She made a soft purring sound under the wicked music.

"I smelt the cook's coffee. It was easy for me to steal it and slip it through the tent flap by Laska's cot. I knew he couldn't help drinking it. I knew he'd smell the blood then, and go to it."

I felt the sullen pain of the claw marks on my face and leg. Laska, crazy with caffeine and dying with it, knowing he was dying and wanting with all the strength of his drugged brain to get at the creature who had killed him. He'd wanted Laura that night, not me. I was just something to claw out of the way.

I wished I hadn't stopped him.

I said, "Why? All you wanted was Laska. Why didn't you kill him?"

The shining claws flexed out of her fingertips, under the phony plastic nails.

She said huskily, "My tribe sent me to avenge its honor. There are others like me, tracking down the renegades, the dope-ridden creatures like Laska who sell our race for human money.

"But I was not to be caught. I cost my people time and effort, and I am not easily replaced. I have killed seven

renegades, Jade. I was to escape. So I wanted to wait until we were out in space."

She stopped. The music hammered in my temples, and inside I was dead and dried up and crumbled away.

I said, "What would you have done in space?"

I knew the answer. She gave it to me, very simply, very quietly.

"I would have destroyed your whole filthy carnival with one bomb in the jet timers, and gone away in one of the lifeboats."

I nodded. "But Sindi didn't give you time. Your life came first. And if it hadn't been for the punk . . ."

No, not just a punk—an Immigration man. A white-faced youngster, doing his job quietly in the shadows, and dying without a cry. I started to climb down off the stage.

She backed off. The music screamed and stopped, leaving a silence like the feel of a suddenly stopped heart.

Laura whispered, "Jade, will you believe something if I tell you?"

"I love you, Jade." She was still backing off down the aisle, not making any sound. "I deserve to die for that. I'm going to die. I think you're going to kill me, Jade. But when you do, remember that those tears—were real."

She turned and ran, out onto the midway.

I had men out there, waiting. I thought she couldn't get through. But she did. She went like a wisp of cloud on a gale, using the rubes as a shield. We didn't want a panic; we let her go.

I knew Tiny had men at the gates and all around the pitch, anywhere that she could possibly get out. I wasn't worried. She couldn't get away. Laura Darrow . . .

I wondered what her name was, back on Callisto. I wondered what she looked like when she let the cross-shaped mane grow thick along her back and shoulders. I wondered what color her fur was. I wondered why I had ever been born.

I went back to my place and got my gun and then went out into the crowd again. The show was in full swing; lots of people having fun, lots of kids crazy with excitement; lights and laughter and music—and a guy out in front of the brute top telling the crowd that something was wrong with the lighting system and it would be a while before they could see the animals.

A while before the cops would have got what they wanted and cleaned up the mess under the sand-cat's cage.

The squad cars would be coming in a few minutes. There wasn't anything to do but wait.

Then a Mercurian cave-tiger screamed. The Ionian quags took it up in their deep, rusty voices, and then the others chimed in, whistling, roaring, squealing, shrieking, and doing things there aren't any names for. I stopped, and gradually everybody on the pitch stopped and listened.

You could hear the silence along the midway and in the tents. People not breathing, people with the glassy shine of fear in their eyes and the cold tightening of the skin that comes from way back beyond humanity. Then the muttering started, low and uneasy, the prelude to panic. I pushed my way through the crowd toward the noise.

I wanted to tell them all to get the hell out, but I knew they'd kill themselves if they started. Somebody got the music going again, loud and silly. People began to relax and laugh nervously and talk too loudly. I ran for the brute top.

Tiny met me at the tent flap. I grabbed him and said, "For God's sake, can't you keep them quiet?"

"She's in there, Boss—like shadow. No hear, no see. One man dead. She let my kids out. She—"

More shots from inside, and a brute scream of pain. Tiny groaned.

"My kids! No lights, Boss. She wreck 'em."

I said, "Keep 'em inside. Get lights from somewhere."

I went inside. There were torchbeams spearing the dark,

men sweating and cursing, a smell of hot, wild bodies and the sweetness of fresh blood.

Somebody poked his head inside the flap and yelled, "The cops are here!"

I yelled back, "Tell 'em to clear the grounds if they can, without starting trouble. Tell—"

Somebody screamed. There was a sudden spangle of lights in the high darkness, balls of crimson and green and vicious yellow tumbling toward us, spots of death no bigger than your fist—the stinging fireflies of Ganymede. Laura had opened their case.

We scattered, fighting the fireflies. Somewhere a cage went over with a crash. Bodies thrashed, and feet padded on the packed earth—and somewhere above the noise was a voice that was sweet and silky and wild, crying out to the beasts and being answered.

I knew then why the brute top went crazy when Laska was around. It was kinship, not fear. She talked to them, and they understood.

I called her name.

Her voice came down to me out of the hot dark, human and painful with tears. "Jade! Jade, get out; go somewhere safe!"

"Laura, don't do this! For God's sake—"

"Your God, or mine? Get out! I'm turning the animals loose. Go somewhere safe!"

I fired at the sound of her voice.

She said softly, "Not yet, Jade. Maybe not at all."

I beat off a bunch of fireflies hunting for me with their poisoned stings. Cage doors banged open. Wild throats coughed and roared, and suddenly the whole side wall of the tent fell down, cut free at the top, and there wasn't any way to keep the beasts inside any more.

A long mob scream went up from outside, and the panic was on.

I could hear Tiny bellowing, sending his men out with ropes and nets and guns.

I climbed up on the remains of the bally stand. There was plenty of light outside—blue-white, glaring light, to show me the packed mass of people screaming and swaying between the tents, trampling toward the exits, to show me a horde of creatures sweeping down on them, led by a lithe and leaping figure in shining green.

Tiny's men were between the bulk of the mob and the animals, but they didn't have time to get set. They gave the critters all they had. It wasn't enough, but it sent the animals scattering off sideways between the tents.

One Martian sand-cat was dead, one quag kicking its life out, and that was all. They hadn't touched Laura, and she was gone.

I got out my whistle and blew it, the rallying call. A snake-headed kibi from Titan sneaked up and tried to rip me open with its double-pointed tail. I fed it three soft-nosed slugs, and then there were half a dozen little moth-people bouncing in the air over my head, squeaking with fear and shining their great eyes at me.

I told them what I wanted. While I was yelling the Europeans swooped in on their wide wings and listened.

"Did any of you see which way *she* went?"

The mothlings were tumbling away to spread my orders. "That way." One of them pointed back across the midway. I called two of the Europeans; and the bird-men picked me up and carried me across, over the crowd.

All this hadn't taken five minutes. Things like that move fast. The Europeans set me down, alone, and by the time they were out of sight the mothlings were back, spotting prowling beasts and rolling above them in the air to guide men to them—men and geeks.

Geeks with armor-plated backs and six arms, carrying tear-gas guns and nets; lizard-men, fast and powerful, armed

with their own teeth and claws and whatever they could pick up; spider-people, spinning sticky lassos out of their own bodies; the Europeans, dive-bombing the quags with tear gas.

The geeks saved the day for us. They saved lives, and the reputation of their kind, and the carnival. Without them, God only knows how many would have died on the pitch. I saw the mothlings dive into the thick of the mob and pick up fallen children and carry them to safety. Three of them died, doing that.

I went on, alone.

I got to the tent I wanted, and four big cats slunk out of the shadows. There was enough light left to show me their eyes and their teeth, and the hungry licking of their tongues.

Laura's voice came through the canvas, tremulous but no softer nor more yielding than the blue barrel of my gun.

"I'm going away, Jade. At first I didn't think there was any way, but there is. Don't try to stop me. Please don't try."

I walked toward the tent flap, watching the cats.

One was a six-legged Martian sand-cat, about the size of an Earthly leopard. Two were from Venus, the fierce white beauties of the high plateaus. The fourth was a Mercurian cave-cat, carrying its twenty-foot body on eight powerful legs and switching a tail that had bone barbs on it.

Laura called to them, and I know they understood her.

"Jade, they won't touch you if you go."

I fired.

One of the white Venusians dropped without a whimper. Its mate let go a sobbing shriek and came for me, with the other two beside it.

I snapped at shot at the Martian. It went over kicking, and I dived aside. The white Venusian shot over me, so close its hind claws tore my shirt. I put a slug in its belly. Out of the tail of my eye I saw the dying Martian tangle

with the Mercurian, just because it happened to be the nearest moving object.

The Venusian's teeth snapped a half inch short of my nose, and then I got my gun up under its jaw and that was that. I had four shots left.

The Martian cat was dead. The Mercurian stood over it, watching me with its four pale, hot eyes, twitching its barbed tail. Laura spoke to it, and it sank to its belly, not wanting to.

I raised my gun hand. The big cat rose with it. She was beyond the cat. I could shoot the cat, but a Mercurian lives a long time after it's shot.

She said, "I'm going. Throw down your gun, Jade, and let me go."

I said, "No."

Just a whisper of sound in her throat, and the cat sprang.

I didn't have time to get away. I aimed into the cat's nearest eye and fired. Then I dropped down flat and let it fall on top of me. I only wanted to live a couple of seconds longer. After that, the hell with it!

The cat was doing a lot of screaming and thrashing. I was between two sets of legs. I huddled up small, hoping it wouldn't notice me there under its belly. Laura was going off fast, with her head down, just a pretty girl, mingling with the mob streaming off the pitch. I steadied my right hand on my left wrist, and shot her three times, carefully, between the shoulders.

The cat stopped thrashing. Its weight crushed me. I knew it was dead. My first bullet had found the way into the cat's little brain and killed it.

I pulled myself out from under it. The pitch was almost quiet now, the mob gone, the animals mostly under control. I kicked the dead cat. It had died too soon.

My gun was empty. I remember I clicked the hammer twice. I got more bullets out of my pocket, but my fingers

wouldn't hold them and I couldn't see to load. I threw the gun away.

I walked away in the thin, cold fog, down toward the distant beat of the sea.

He wanted to live, and love . . . so he had to make friends with death.

KNOCK

by Fredric Brown

THERE IS A SWEET LITTLE HORROR STORY THAT IS ONLY TWO sentences long:

"The last man on Earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock on the door. . ."

Two sentences and an ellipsis of three dots. The horror, of course, isn't in the two sentences at all; it's in the ellipsis, the implication: what knocked at the door? Faced with the unknown, the human mind supplies something vaguely horrible.

But it wasn't horrible, really.

The last man on Earth—or in the universe, for that matter—sat alone in a room. It was a rather peculiar room. He'd just noticed how peculiar it was and he'd been studying out the reason for its peculiarity. His conclusion didn't horrify him, but it annoyed him.

Walter Phelan, who had been associate professor of anthropology at Nathan University up until the time two days ago when Nathan University had ceased to exist, was not a man who horrified easily. Not that Walter Phelan was a heroic figure, by any wild stretch of the imagination.

He was slight of stature and mild of disposition. He wasn't much to look at, and he knew it.

Not that his appearance worried him now. Right now, in fact, there wasn't much feeling in him. Abstractedly, he knew that two days ago, within the space of an hour, the human race had been destroyed, except for him and, somewhere, a woman—one woman. And that was a fact which didn't concern Walter Phelan in the slightest degree. He'd probably never see her and didn't care too much if he didn't.

Women just hadn't been a factor in Walter's life since Martha had died a year and a half ago. Not that Martha hadn't been a good wife—albeit a bit on the bossy side. Yes, he'd loved Martha, in a deep, quiet way. He was only forty now, and he'd been only thirty-eight when Martha had died, but—well—he just hadn't thought about women since then. His life had been his books, the ones he read and the ones he wrote. Now there wasn't any point in writing books, but he had the rest of his life to spend in reading them.

True, company would be nice, but he'd get along without it. Maybe after a while, he'd get so he'd enjoy the occasional company of one of the Zan, although that was a bit difficult to imagine. Their thinking was so alien to his that there seemed no common ground for discussion, intelligent though they were, in a way.

An ant is intelligent, in a way, but no man ever established communication with an ant. He thought of the Zan, somehow, as super-ants, although they didn't look like ants, and he had a hunch that the Zan regarded the human race as the human race had regarded ordinary ants. Certainly what they'd done to Earth had been what men did to ant hills—and it had been done much more efficiently.

BUT THEY HAD GIVEN HIM PLENTY OF BOOKS. THEY'D BEEN nice about that, as soon as he had told them what he

wanted, and he had told them that the moment he had learned that he was destined to spend the rest of his life alone in this room. The rest of his life, or as the Zan had quaintly expressed it, for-ev-er. Even a brilliant mind—and the Zan obviously had brilliant minds—has its idiosyncrasies. The Zan had learned to speak Terrestrial English in a matter of hours but they persisted in separating syllables. But we digress.

There was a knock on the door.

You've got it all now, except the three dots, the ellipsis, and I'm going to fill that in and show you that it wasn't horrible at all.

Walter Phelan called out, "Come in," and the door opened. It was, of course, only a Zan. It looked exactly like the other Zan; if there was any way of telling one of them from another, Walter hadn't found it. It was about four feet tall and it looked like nothing on earth—nothing, that is, that had been on Earth until the Zan came there.

Walter said, "Hello, George." When he'd learned that none of them had names he decided to call them all George, and the Zan didn't seem to mind.

This one said, "Hel-lo, Wal-ter." That was ritual; the knock on the door and the greetings. Walter waited.

"Point one," said the Zan. "You will please hence-forth sit with your chair turned the oth-er way."

Walter said, "I thought so, George. That plain wall is transparent from the other side, isn't it?"

"It is trans-par-ent."

"Just what I thought. I'm in a zoo. Right?"

"That is right."

Walter sighed. "I knew it. That plain, blank wall, without a single piece of furniture against it. And made of something different from the other walls. If I persist in sitting with my back to it, what then? You will kill me?—I ask hopefully."

"We will take a-way your books."

"You've got me there, George. All right, I'll face the other way when I sit and read. How many other animals besides me are in this zoo of yours?"

"Two hun-dred and six-teen."

Walter shook his head. "Not complete, George. Even a bush league zoo can beat that—could beat that, I mean, if there were any bush league zoos left. Did you just pick at random?"

"Ran-dom sam-ples, yes. All spe-cies would have been too man-y. Male and fe-male each of one hun-dred and eight kinds."

"What do you feed them? The carnivorous ones, I mean."

"We make food. Syn-thet-ic."

"Smart," said Walter. "And the flora? You got a collection of that, too?"

"Flo-ra was not hurt by vi-bra-tions. It is all still grow-ing."

"Nice for the flora," said Walter. "You weren't as hard on it, then, as you were on the fauna. Well, George, you started out with 'point one.' I deduce there is a point two kicking around somewhere. What is it?"

"Some-thing we do not un-der-stand. Two of the oth-er a-ni-mals sleep and do not wake. They are cold."

"It happens in the best regulated zoos, George," Walter Phelan said. "Probably not a thing wrong with them except that they're dead."

"Dead? That means stopped. But noth-ing stopped them. Each was a-lone."

Walter stared at the Zan. "Do you mean, George, you don't know what natural death is?"

"Death is when a be-ing is killed, stopped from liv-ing."

Walter Phelan blinked. "How old are you, George?" he asked.

"Six-teen—you would not know the word. Your planet went a-round your sun a-bout sev-en thou-sand times. I am still young."

Walter whistled softly. "A babe in arms," he said. He thought hard a moment. "Look, George," he said, "you've got something to learn about this planet you're on. There's a guy here who doesn't hang around where you come from. An old man with a beard and a scythe and an hour-glass. Your vibrations didn't kill him."

"What is he?"

"Call him the Grim Reaper, George. Old Man Death. Our people and animals live until somebody—Old Man Death—stops them ticking."

"He stopped the two crea-tures? He will stop more?"

WALTER OPENED HIS MOUTH TO ANSWER, AND THEN CLOSED it again. Something in the Zan's voice indicated that there would be a worried frown on his face, if he had had a face recognizable as such.

"How about taking me to these animals who won't wake up?" Walter asked. "Is that against the rules?"

"Come," said the Zan.

That had been the afternoon of the second day. It was the next morning that the Zan came back, several of them. They began to move Walter Phelan's books and furniture. When they'd finished that, they moved him. He found himself in a much larger room a hundred yards away.

He sat and waited and this time, too, when there was a knock on the door, he knew what was coming and politely stood up. A Zan opened the door and stood aside. A woman entered.

Walter bowed slightly. "Walter Phelan," he said, "in case George didn't tell you my name. George tries to be polite, but he doesn't know all of our ways."

The woman seemed calm; he was glad to notice that.

She said. "My name is Grace Evans, Mr. Phelan. What's this all about? Why did they bring me here?"

Walter was studying her as she talked. She was tall, fully as tall as he, and well-proportioned. She looked to be somewhere in her early thirties, about the age Martha had been. She had the same calm confidence about her that he'd always liked about Martha, even though it had contrasted with his own easy-going informality. In fact, he thought she looked quite a bit like Martha.

"I think I know why they brought you here, but let's go back a bit," he said. "Do you know just what has happened otherwise?"

"You mean that they've—killed everyone?"

"Yes. Please sit down. You know how they accomplished it?"

She sank into a comfortable chair nearby. "No," she said, "I don't know just how. Not that it matters, does it?"

"Not a lot. But here's the story—what I know of it, from getting one of them to talk, and from piecing things together. There isn't a great number of them—here, anyway. I don't know how numerous a race they are where they came from and I don't know where that is, but I'd guess it's outside the Solar System. You've seen the space ship they came in?"

"Yes. It's as big as a mountain."

"Almost. Well, it has equipment for emitting some sort of a vibration—they call it that, in our language, but I imagine it's more like a radio wave than a sound vibration—that destroys all animal life. It—the ship itself—is insulated against the vibration. I don't know whether its range is big enough to kill off the whole planet at once, or whether they flew in circles around the earth, sending out the vibratory waves. But it killed everybody and everything instantly and, I hope, painlessly. The only reason we, and the other two-hundred-odd animals in this zoo, weren't killed

was because we were inside the ship. We'd been picked up as specimens. You do know this is a zoo, don't you?"

"I—I suspected it."

"The front walls are transparent from the outside. The Zan were pretty clever at fixing up the inside of each cubicle to match the natural habitat of the creature it contains. These cubicles, such as the one we're in, are of plastic, and they've got a machine that makes one in about ten minutes. If Earth had had a machine and a process like that, there wouldn't have been any housing shortage. Well, there isn't any housing shortage now, anyway. And I imagine that the human race—especially you and I—can stop worrying about the A-bomb and the next war. The Zan certainly solved a lot of problems for us."

GRACE EVANS SMILED. "ANOTHER CASE WHERE THE OPERATION was successful, but the patient died. Things were in an awful mess. Do you remember being captured? I don't. I went to sleep one night and woke up in a cage on the space ship."

"I don't remember either," Walter said. "My hunch is that they used the vibratory waves at low intensity first, just enough to knock us all out. Then they cruised around, picking up samples more or less at random for their zoo. After they had as many as they wanted, or as many as they had space in the ship to hold, they turned on the juice all the way. And that was that. It wasn't until yesterday they knew they'd made a mistake and had underestimated us. They thought we were immortal, as they are."

"That we were—what?"

"They can be killed, but they don't know what natural death is. They didn't, anyway, until yesterday. Two of us died yesterday."

"Two of— Oh!"

"Yes, two of us animals in their zoo. One was a snake and one was a duck. Two species gone irrevocably. And by

the Zan's way of figuring time, the remaining member of each species is going to live only a few minutes, anyway. They figured they had permanent specimens."

"You mean they didn't realize what short-lived creatures we are?"

"That's right," Walter said. "One of them is young at seven thousand years, he told me. They're bi-sexual themselves, incidentally, but they probably breed once every ten thousand years or thereabouts. When they learned yesterday how ridiculously short a life expectancy we terrestrial animals have, they were probably shocked to the core—if they have cores. At any rate they decided to reorganize their zoo—two by two instead of one by one. They figure we'll last longer collectively if not individually."

"Oh!" Grace Evans stood up, and there was a faint flush on her face. "If you think—If they think—" She turned toward the door.

"It'll be locked," Walter Phelan said calmly. "But don't worry. Maybe they think, but I don't think. You needn't even tell me you wouldn't have me if I was the last man on Earth; it would be corny under the circumstances."

"But are they going to keep us locked up together in this one little room?"

"It isn't so little; we'll get by. I can sleep quite comfortably in one of these overstuffed chairs. And don't think I don't agree with you perfectly, my dear. All personal considerations aside, the least favor we can do the human race is to let it end with us and not be perpetuated for exhibition in a zoo."

She said, "Thank you," almost inaudibly, and the flush receded from her cheeks. There was anger in her eyes, but Walter knew that it wasn't anger at him. With her eyes sparkling like that, she looked a lot like Martha, he thought.

He smiled at her and said, "Otherwise—"

She started out of her chair, and for an instant he thought she was going to come over and slap him. Then she sank

back wearily. "If you were a man, you'd be thinking of some way to— They can be killed, you said?" Her voice was bitter.

"The Zan? Oh, certainly. I've been studying them. They look horribly different from us, but I think they have about the same metabolism we have, the same type of circulatory system, and probably the same type of digestive system. I think that anything that would kill one of us would kill one of them."

"But you said—"

"Oh, there are differences, of course. Whatever factor it is in man that ages him, they don't have. Or else they have some gland that man doesn't have, something that renews cells."

SHE HAD FORGOTTEN HER ANGER NOW. SHE LEANED FORWARD eagerly. She said, "I think that's right. And I don't think they feel pain."

"I was hoping that. But what makes you think so, my dear?"

"I stretched a piece of wire that I found in the desk of my cubicle across the door so my Zan would fall over it. He did, and the wire cut his leg."

"Did he bleed red?"

"Yes, but it didn't seem to annoy him. He didn't get mad about it; didn't even mention it. When he came back the next time, a few hours later, the cut was gone. Well, almost gone. I could see just enough of a trace of it to be sure it was the same Zan."

Walter Phelan nodded slowly.

"He wouldn't get angry, of course," he said. "They're emotionless. Maybe, if we killed one, they wouldn't even punish us. But it wouldn't do any good. They'd just give us our food through a trap door and treat us as men would have treated a zoo animal that had killed a keeper. They'd just see that he didn't have a crack at any more keepers."

"How many of them are there?" she asked.

"About two hundred, I think, in this particular space ship. But undoubtedly there are many more where they came from. I have a hunch this is just an advance guard, sent to clear off this planet and make it safe for Zan occupancy."

"They did a good—"

THERE WAS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR, AND WALTER PHELAN called out, "Come in."

A Zan stood in the doorway.

"Hello, George," said Walter.

"Hel-lo, Wal-ter," said the Zan.

It may or may not have been the same Zan, but it was always the same ritual.

"What's on your mind?" Walter asked.

"An-oth-er crea-ture sleeps and will not wake. A small fur-ry one called a wea-sel."

Walter shrugged.

"It happens, George. Old Man Death. I told you about him."

"And worse. A Zan has died. This morning."

"Is that worse?" Walter looked at him blandly. "Well George, you'll have to get used to it, if you're going to stay around here."

The Zan said nothing. It stood there.

Finally Walter said, "Well?"

"A-bout wea-sel. You ad-vise same?"

Walter shrugged again. "Probably won't do any good. But sure, why not?"

The Zan left.

Walter could hear his footsteps dying away outside. He grinned. "It might work, Martha," he said.

"Mar— My name is Grace, Mr. Phelan. What might work?"

"My name is Walter, Grace. You might as well get used

to it. You know, Grace, you do remind me a lot of Martha. She was my wife. She died a couple of years ago."

"I'm sorry," said Grace. "But what might work? What were you talking about to the Zan?"

"We'll know tomorrow," Walter said. And she couldn't get another word out of him.

That was the fourth day of the stay of the Zan.

The next was the last.

It was nearly noon when one of the Zan came. After the ritual, he stood in the doorway, looking more alien than ever. It would be interesting to describe him for you, but there aren't words.

He said, "We go. Our coun-cil met and de-cid-ed."

"Another of you died?"

"Last night. This is plan-et of death."

Walter nodded. "You did your share. You're leaving two hundred and thirteen creatures alive, out of quite a few billion. Don't hurry back."

"Is there an-y-thing we can do?"

"Yes. You can hurry. And you can leave our door unlocked, but not the others. We'll take care of the others."

Something clicked on the door; the Zan left.

Grace Evans was standing, her eyes shining.

She asked, "What—? How—?"

"Wait," cautioned Walter. "Let's hear them blast off. It's a sound I want to remember."

The sound came within minutes, and Walter Phelan, realizing how rigidly he'd been holding himself, relaxed in his chair.

"There was a snake in the Garden of Eden, too, Grace, and it got us in trouble," he said musingly. "But this one made up for it. I mean the mate of the snake that died day before yesterday. It was a rattlesnake."

"You mean it killed the two Zan who died? But—"

Walter nodded. "They were babes in the woods here. When they took me to look at the first creatures who 'were

asleep and wouldn't wake up,' and I saw that one of them was a rattler, I had an idea, Grace. Just maybe, I thought, poison creatures were a development peculiar to Earth and the Zan wouldn't know about them. And, too, maybe their metabolism was enough like ours so that the poison would kill them. Anyway, I had nothing to lose trying. And both maybes turned out to be right."

"How did you get the snake to—"

Walter Phelan grinned. He said, "I told them what affection was. They didn't know. They were interested, I found, in preserving the remaining one of each species as long as possible, to study the picture and record it before it died. I told them it would die immediately because of the loss of its mate, unless it had affection and petting—constantly. I showed them how with the duck. Luckily it was a tame one, and I held it against my chest and petted it a while to show them. Then I let them take over with it—and the rattlesnake."

HE STOOD UP AND STRETCHED, AND THEN SAT DOWN AGAIN more comfortably.

"Well, we've got a world to plan," he said. "We'll have to let the animals out of the ark, and that will take some thinking and deciding. The herbivorous wild ones we can let go right away. The domestic ones, we'll do better to keep and take charge of; we'll need them. But the carnivora—Well, we'll have to decide. But I'm afraid it's got to be thumbs down."

He looked at her. "And the human race. We've got to make a decision about that. A pretty important one."

Her face was getting a little pink again, as it had yesterday; she sat rigidly in her chair.

"No!" she said.

He didn't seem to have heard her. "It's been a nice race, even if nobody won it," he said. "It'll be starting over again now, and it may go backward for a while until it gets its

breath, but we can gather books for it and keep most of its knowledge intact, the important things anyway. We can—"

He broke off as she got up and started for the door. Just the way his Martha would have acted, he thought, back in the days when he was courting her, before they were married.

He said, "Think it over, my dear, and take your time. But come back."

The door slammed. He sat waiting, thinking out all the things there were to do, once he started, but in no hurry to start them; and after a while he heard her hesitant footsteps coming back.

He smiled a little. See? It wasn't horrible, really.

The last man on Earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock on the door. . .

No man dared explore those deadly ruins . . . or the real-life fairyland inside.

VOICES IN THE DUST

by Gerald Kersh

I LANDED ON THE NORTHEAST COAST WITH TINNED GOODS AND other trade goods such as steel knives, beads and sweet chocolate, intending to make my way to the ruins of Annan.

A chieftain of the savages of the central belt warned me not to go to The Bad Place. That was his name for the ancient ruins of the forgotten city of Annan, a hundred miles to the southeast. Some of the tribesmen called it The Dead Place or The Dark Place. He called it The Bad Place. He was a grim but honorable old ruffian, squat and hairy and covered with scars. Over a pot of evil-smelling black beer—they brew it twice a year, with solemn ceremony, and everyone gets hideously drunk—he grew communicative, and, as the liquor took hold of him, boastful. He showed me his tattooing; every mark meant something, so that his history was pricked out on his skin. When a chieftain of the central belt dies he is flayed and his hide is hung up in the hut that is reserved for holy objects; so he lives in human memory.

Showing his broken teeth in a snarling smile, he pointed

to a skillfully executed fish on his left arm; it proved that he had won a great victory over the fish eaters of the north. A wild pig on his chest celebrated the massacre of the pig men of the northwest. He told me a bloody story, caressing a black-and-red dog that lay at his feet, and watched me with murderous yellow eyes. Oh, the distances he had traveled, the men he had killed, the women he had ravished, the riches he had plundered! He knew everything. He liked me—had I not given him a fine steel knife? So he would give me some good advice.

"I could keep you here if I liked," he said, "but you are my friend, and if you want to go, you may go. I will even send ten armed men with you. You may need them. If you are traveling southward you must pass through the country of the red men. They eat men when they can catch them, and move fast; they come and go. Have no fear, however, of the bird men. For a handful of beads and a little wire—especially wire—they will do anything. My men will not go with you to The Bad Place. Nobody ever goes to The Bad Place. Even I would not go to The Bad Place, and I am the bravest man in the world. Why must you go? Stay. Live under my protection. I will give you a wife. Look. You can have her." He jerked a spatulate thumb in the direction of a big, swarthy girl with greased hair who squatted, almost naked, a couple of yards away. "She is one of mine. But you can have her. No man has touched her yet. Marry her. Stay."

I said, "Tell me, why have you—even you, chief—stayed away from that place?"

He grew grave. "I fear no man and no beast," he said.

"But——"

"But"—he gulped some more black beer—"there are Things."

"What things?"

"Things. Little people." He meant fairies. "I'll fight anything I can see. But what of that which man cannot see?"

Who fights that? Stay away from The Bad Place. Marry her. Stay here. Feel her—fat! Don't go. Nobody goes. . . . hup! I like you. You are my friend. You must stay here."

I gave him a can of peaches. He crowed like a baby. "You are my friend," he said, "and if you want to go, then go. But if you get away, come back."

"If?" I said. "I am not much afraid of what I cannot see. First I see. Then I believe. I cannot fear that which I do not believe."

His eyebrows knotted, his fists knotted, and he bared his teeth. "Are you saying that what I say is not true?" he shouted.

"King . . . great chief," I said, "I believe, I believe. What you say is true."

"If I had not given my word, I should have had you killed for that," he grunted. "But I have gi-given my word. . . . hup! My—my word is a word. I . . . you . . . go, go!"

Next morning he was ill. I gave him magnesia in a pot of water, for which he expressed gratitude. That day I set out with ten squat, sullen warriors—killers, men without fear.

But when we came in sight of the place that was called The Bad Place, The Dark Place or The Dead Place, they stopped. For no consideration would they walk another step forward. I offered each man a steel knife. Their terror was stronger than their desire. "Not even for that," said their leader.

I went on alone.

It was a Dead Place because there was no life in it, and therefore it was also a Dark Place. No grass grew there. It had come to nothingness. Not even the coarse, hardy weeds that find a roothold in the uncooled ashes of burned-out buildings pushed their leaves out of its desolation. Under the seasonal rain it must have been a quagmire. Now, baked by the August sun, it was a sort of ash heap, studded with

gray excrescences that resembled enormous cinders. A dreary, dark-gray, powdery valley went down; a melancholy dust heap of a hill crept up and away. As I looked I saw something writhe and come up out of the hillside; it came down toward me with a sickening, wriggling run, and it was pale gray, like a ghost. I drew my pistol. Then the gray thing pirouetted and danced. It was nothing but dust, picked up by a current of warm air. The cold hand that had got hold of my heart relaxed, and my heart fell back into my stomach, where it had already sunk.

I went down. This place was so dead that I was grateful for the company of the flies that had followed me. The sun struck like a floodlight out of a clean blue sky; every crumb of grit threw a clear-cut black shadow in the dust. A bird passed, down and up, quick as the flick of a whip, on the trail of a desperate dragonfly. Yet here, in a white-hot summer afternoon, I felt that I was going down, step by step, into the black night of the soul. This was a Bad Place.

The dust clung to me. I moved slowly between half-buried slabs of shattered granite. Evening was coming. A breeze that felt like a hot breath on my neck stirred the ruins of the ancient city; dust devils twisted and flirted and fell; the sun grew red. At last I found something that had been a wall, and pitched my tent close to it. Somehow it was good to have a wall behind me. There was nothing to be afraid of—there was absolutely nothing. Yet I was afraid. What is it that makes a comfortable man go out with a pickax to poke among the ruins of ancient cities? I was sick with nameless terror. But fear breeds pride. I could not go back. And I was tired, desperately tired. If I did not sleep, I should break.

I ate and lay down. Sleep was picking me away, leaf by leaf. Bad Place . . . Dead Place . . . Dark Place . . . little people. . . .

Before I fell asleep I thought I heard somebody singing

a queer, wailing song: "Oh-oo, oh-oo, oh-oo!" It rose and descended—it conveyed terror. It might have been an owl or some other night bird, or it might have been the wind in the ruins or a half dream. It sounded almost human, though. I started awake, clutching my pistol. I could have sworn that the wail was forming words. What words? They sounded like some debased sort of Arabic:

*"Ooki'karabin,
Ooki'karabin,
Isapara, mibanara,
Iki'karabin,
Ooki'karabin."*

As I sat up, the noise stopped. Yes, I thought, *I was dreaming*. I lay back and went to sleep. Centuries of silence lay in the dust.

All the same, in that abominable loneliness I felt that I was not alone. I woke five times before dawn to listen. There was nothing. Even the flies had gone away. Yet when day broke I observed that something strange had happened.

My socks had disappeared. In the dust—that powdery dust in which the petal of a flower would have left its imprint—there were no tracks. Yet the flap of my tent was unfastened and my socks were gone.

For the next three days I sifted the detritus of that dead city, fumbling and feeling after crumbs of evidence, and listening to the silence. My pickax pecked out nothing but chips of stone and strange echoes. On the second day I unearthed some fragments of crumbling glass and shards of white, glazed pottery, together with a handful of narrow pieces of iron which fell to nothing as I touched them. I also found a small dish of patterned porcelain, on which were five letters—ESDEN—part of some inscription. It was sad and strange that this poor thing should have survived the smashing of the huge edifices and noble monu-

ments of that great city. But all the time I felt that someone or something was watching me an inch beyond my field of vision.

On the third day I found a red drinking vessel, intact, and a cooking pot of some light white metal, with marks of burning on the bottom of it and some charred powder inside. The housewife to whom this pot belonged was cooking some sort of stew, no doubt, when the wrath of God struck the city.

When the blow fell that city must have ceased to be in less time than it takes to clap your hands; it fell like the cities of the plain when the fire came down from heaven. Here, as in the ruins of Pompeii, one might discover curiously pathetic ashes and highly individual dust. I found the calcined skeleton of a woman, clutching, in the charred vestiges of loving arms, the skeletal outline of a newly born child. As I touched these remains they broke like burnt paper. Not far away, half-buried in a sort of volcanic cinders, four twisted lumps of animal charcoal lay in the form of a cross, the center of which was a shapeless mass of glass; this had been a sociable drinking party. This lump of glass had melted and run into a blob the outlines of which suggested the map of Africa. But in the equatorial part of it, so to speak, one could distinguish the base of a bottle.

I also found a tiny square of thin woven stuff. It must have been a handkerchief, a woman's handkerchief. Some whimsey of chance let it stay intact. In one corner of it there was embroidered a roman letter A. Who was A? I seemed to see some fussy, fastidious gentlewoman, discreetly perfumed—a benevolent tyrant at home, but every inch a lady. Deploring the decadence of the age, she dabbed this delicate twenty-five square inches of gauzy nothingness at one sensitive nostril. Then — psst! — she and the house in which she lived were swept away in one lick of frightful heat. And the handkerchief fluttered down on her ashes.

Near by, untouched by time and disaster, stood a low wall of clay bricks. On this wall was an inscription in chalk. A child must have scrawled it. It said: *LYDIA IS A DIRTY PIC.* Below it lay the unidentifiable remains of three human beings. As I looked, the air currents stirred the dust. Swaying and undulating like a ballet dancer, a fine gray powdery corkscrew spun up and threw itself at my feet.

That night, again, I thought I heard singing. But what was there to sing? Birds? There were no birds. Nevertheless, I lay awake. I was uneasy. There was no moon. I saw that my watch said 12:45. After that I must have slipped into the shallow end of sleep, because I opened my eyes—instinct warned me to keep still—and saw that more than two hours had passed. I felt, rather than heard, a little furtive sound. I lay quiet and listened. Fear and watchfulness had sharpened my ears. In spite of the beating of my heart I heard a “tink-tink” of metal against metal. My flashlight was under my left hand; my pistol was in my right. I breathed deeply. The metal clinked again. Now I knew where to look. I aimed the flashlight at the noise, switched on a broad beam of bright light, and leaped up with a roar of that mad rage which comes out of fear. Something was caught in the light. The light paralyzed it. The thing was glued in the shining, white puddle; it had enormous eyes. I fired at it—I mean, I aimed at it and pressed my trigger, but had forgotten to lift my safety catch. Holding the thing in the flashlight beam, I struck at it with the barrel of the pistol. I was cruel because I was afraid. It squealed, and something cracked. Then I had it by the neck. If it was not a rat, it smelled like a rat. “*Oh-oo, oh-oo, oh-oo!*” it wailed, and I heard something scuffle outside. Another voice wailed, “*Oh-oo, oh-oo oh-oo!*” A third voice picked it up. In five seconds the hot, dark night was full of a most woe-begone crying. Five seconds later there was silence, except for the gasping of the cold little creature under my hand.

I was calm now, and I saw that it was not a rat. It was

something like a man—a little, distorted man. The light hurt it, yet it could not look away; the big eyes contracted, twitching and flickering, out of a narrow and repulsive face fringed with pale hair.

"Oh, oh, oh," it said—the wet, chisel-toothed mouth was quivering on the edge of a word.

I noticed then that it was standing on something gray; I looked again, and saw my woolen jacket. It had been trying to take this jacket away. But in the right-hand pocket there was a coin and a small key; they had struck together and awakened me.

I was no longer afraid, so I became kind. "Calm," I said, as one talks to a dog. "Calm, calm, calm! Quiet now, quiet!"

The little white one held up a wrist from which dropped a skinny, naked hand like a mole's paw, and whispered, "Oh-oo."

"Sit!" I said.

It was terrified and in pain. I had broken its wrist. I should say his wrist; he was a sort of man; a male creature, wretched, filthy and dank, dwarfish, debased; greenish-white, like mildew, smelling like mildew, cold and wetly yielding like mildew; rat-toothed, rat-eared and chinless, yet not unlike a man. If he had stood upright, he would have been about three feet tall.

This, then, was the nameless thing that had struck such terror into the bloody old chieftain of the savages of the middle belt—this bloodless, chinless thing without a forehead, whose limbs were like the tendrils of a creeping plant that sprouts in the dark, and who cringed, twittering and whimpering, at my feet. Its eyes were large, like a lemur's. The ears were long, pointed and almost transparent; they shone sickly pink in the light, and I could see that they were reticulated with thin, dark veins. There had been some attempt at clothing—a kind of primitive jacket and leggings of some thin gray fur, tattered and indescrib-

ably filthy. My stomach turned at the feel of it and its deathly, musty smell.

This, then, was one of the fairies, one of the little people of The Dead Place, and I had it by the neck.

I may say, at this point, that I have always believed in fairies. By "fairies," I do not mean little delicate, magical, pretty creatures with butterfly wings, living among the flowers and drinking nectar out of bluebell blossoms. I do not believe in such fairies. But I do believe in the little people — the gnomes, elves, pucks, brownies, pixies and leprechauns of legend. Belief in these little people is as old as the world, universal and persistent. In the stories, you remember, the outward appearance of the little people is fairly constant. They are dwarfish. They have big eyes and long, pointed features. They come out at night, and have the power to make themselves invisible. Sometimes they are mischievous.

It is best to keep on the good side of the little people, because they can play all kinds of malevolent tricks—spoil the butter, frighten the cows, destroy small objects. You will have observed that they have no power seriously to injure mankind, yet they carry with them the terror of the night. In some parts of the world peasants placate the little people by leaving out a bowl of hot porridge or milk for them to drink, for they are always hungry and always cold. Note that.

Every child has read the story of the Cold Lad of the Hill. A poor cobbler, having spent his last few coins on a piece of leather, fell asleep, too tired to work. When he awoke in the morning, he found that the leather had been worked with consummate skill into a beautiful pair of slippers. He sold these slippers and bought a larger piece of leather, which he left on the bench, together with a bowl of hot soup. Then he pretended to fall asleep and saw, out of the corner of his eye, a tiny, pale, shivering, naked man who

crept in and set to work with dazzling speed. Next morning there were two pairs of slippers. This went on for several days. Prosperity returned to the house of the cobbler. His wife, to reward the little man, knitted him a little cloak with a hood. They put the garment on the bench. That night the little man came again. He saw the cloak and hood, put them on with a squeal of joy, capered up and down the cobbler's bench admiring himself, and at last sprang out of the window, saying, "I have taken your cloak, I have taken your hood, and the Cold Lad of the Hill will do no more good." He never appeared again. He had got what he wanted—a woolen cloak with a hood.

The little people hate the cold, it appears. Now, if they are sensitive to cold and hunger, as all the stories indicate, they must be people of flesh and blood. Why not? There are all kinds of people. There is no reason why, in the remote past, certain people should not have gone to live underground, out of the reach of fierce and powerful enemies. For example, there used to be a race of little men in North Britain called the Picts. History records them as fierce and cunning little border raiders — men of the heather, who harried the Roman garrisons in ancient times and stole whatever they could lay their hands on. These Picts—like the African Bushmen, who, by the way, were also little people—could move so quickly and surely that they seemed to have a miraculous gift of invisibility. In broad daylight a Pict could disappear, and not a single heather blossom quivered over his hiding place. The Picts disappeared off the face of the earth at last. Yet, for centuries, in certain parts of Scotland, the farmers and shepherds continued to fear them. They were supposed to have gone underground, into the caves, whence they sometimes emerged to carry off a sheep, a woman, a cooking pot or a child.

It seems to me not unreasonable to assume that, during the long-drawn-out period of strife on the western borders

of Britain, certain little weak people went underground and made a new life for themselves secure in the darkness of the caves. Living in the dark, of course, they would grow pale. After many generations they would have developed a cat's faculty for seeing in the dark.

The little people are supposed to know the whereabouts of great buried treasures. This also is possible. Their remote ancestors may have taken their riches with them to bury, meaning to unearth them in safer times which never came. Again, these strange underground men, who knew every stone, every tree and every tuft of grass in their country, may easily have come across treasures buried by other men. In how many fairy tales has one read of the well-disposed little one who left behind him a bright gold coin?

I am convinced that ever since frightened men began to run away and hide there have been little people—in other words, fairies. And such was the nightmarish little thing that trembled in my grip that night in the tent.

I remembered, then, how frightened I had been. As I thought of all the awe that such creatures had inspired through the ages, I began to laugh. The little man—I had better call him a man—listened to me. He stopped whimpering. His ears quivered, then he gave out a queer, breathless, hiccuping sound, faint as the ticking of a clock. "Are you human?" I asked.

He trembled, and laboriously made two noises, "Oon-ern."

He was trying to repeat what I had said. I led him to an angle of the tent, so that he could not escape, and tied up his wrist with an elastic plaster. He looked at it, gibbering. Then I gave him a piece of highly sweetened chocolate. He was afraid of that too.

I bit off a corner and chewed it, saying, "Good. Eat."

I was absurdly confident that, somehow, he would understand me. He tried to say what I had said—"Oo-ee"—and crammed the chocolate into his mouth. For half a second

he slobbered, twitching with delight, then the chocolate was gone. I patted his head. The touch of it made me shudder, yet I forced my hand to a caress. I was the first man on earth who had ever captured a fairy; I would have taken him to my bosom. I smiled at him. He blinked at me. I could see by the movement of his famished little chest that he was a little less afraid of me. I found another piece of chocolate and offered it to him. But in doing so, I lowered my flashlight. The chocolate was flicked out of my hand. I was aware of something that bobbed away and ran between my legs. Before I could turn, the little man was gone. The flap of the tent was moving. If it had not been for that and a stale dirty smell, I might have thought I had been dreaming. I turned the beam of my flashlight to the ground. This time the little man had left tracks.

As I was to discover, the little people of The Dead Place used to cover their tracks by running backward on all fours and blowing dust over the marks their hands and feet had made. But my little man had not had time to do this to-night.

Dawn was beginning to break. I filled my pockets with food and set out. Nothing was too light to leave a mark in that place, but the same quality that made the fine dust receptive made every mark impermanent. I began to run. The little man's tracks resembled those of a gigantic mole. The red-dust sun was up and the heat of the day was coming down, when I came to the end of his trail. He had scuttled under a great, gray heap of shattered stone. This had been a vast—possibly a noble—building. Now it was a rubbish heap, packed tight by the inexorable pull of the earth through the centuries. Here was fairyland, somewhere in the depths of the earth.

Enormous edifices had been crushed and scattered like burned biscuits thrown to the wild birds. The crumbs were identifiable. The shape of the whole was utterly lost. The

loneliness was awful. Inch by inch I felt myself slipping into that spiritual twilight which sucks down to the black night of the soul. The tracks of the little man had disappeared—the dust was always drifting and the contours of the lost city were perpetually changing. Yesterday was a memory. Tomorrow was a dream. Then tomorrow became yesterday — a memory, and memory blurred and twirled away with the dust devils. I was sick. There was bad air in the ruins of Annan. I might have died or run away, if there had not been the thunderstorm.

It threatened for forty-eight hours. I thought that I was delirious. Everything was still—dreadfully still. The air was thick and hard to breathe. It seemed to me that from some indefinable part of the near distance I heard again that thin, agonized singing which I had heard once before. Male and female voices wailed a sort of hymn:

*"Ah-h-h, Balasamo,
Balasamo! Oh!
Sarnacorpano! Oh-oh!
Binno Mosha,
Sada Rosha,
Chu mila Balasamo! Oh!"*

Then the storm broke, and I thanked God for it. It cleared the air and it cleared my head. The sky seemed to shake and reverberate like a sheet of iron. Lightning feinted and struck, and the rain fell. Between the thunder I could still hear the singing. As dawn came, the storm rumbled away and the aspect of the ruins was changed. Annan wore a ragged veil of mist. Thin mud was running away between the broken stones. The sun was coming up and in a little while the dust would return, but for the moment the rain had washed the face of the ruin.

So I found the lid of the underworld. It was a disk of eroded metal that fitted a hole in the ground. I struck it with my hammer; it fell to pieces. The pieces dropped away,

and out of the hole in the ground there rose a musty, sickening, yet familiar smell. The hole was the mouth of an ancient sewer. I could see the rusty remains of a metal ladder. The top rung was solid—I tried it with my foot. The next rung supported my weight. I went down.

The fifth rung broke, and I fell. I remember that I saw a great white light; then a great dark. Later—I do not know how much later—I opened my eyes. I knew that I was alive, because I felt pain. But I was not lying where I had fallen. I could see no circle of daylight such as I had seen, in falling, at the mouth of the manhole. There was nothing to be seen; I was in the dark. And I could hear odd little glottal voices.

"Water!" I said.

"Ah-awa," said a thin, whining voice. Something that felt like a cracked earthenware saucer was pressed against my lips. It contained a spoonful or two of cold water—half a mouthful. The cracked earthenware saucer was taken away empty and brought back full. I took hold of it to steady it. It was a little cupped hand, a live hand.

I knew then that I had fallen down into the underground world of the little people that haunt the desolate ruin called Annan, or The Bad Place. I was in fairyland. But my right leg was broken. My flashlight was broken and I was in the dark. There was nothing to be done. I could only lie still.

The little people squatted around me in a circle. One high, ecstatic, piping voice began to sing:

"Ooki!karabin,
Ooki!karabin!"

Thirty or forty voices screeched:

"*Isapara, mibanara,*
Iki!karabin!"

Then, abruptly, the singing stopped. Something was com-

ing. These little people knew the art of making fire and understood the use of light. One of them was holding a tiny vessel in which flickered a dim, spluttering flame no larger than a baby's fingernail. It was not what we would call illumination. It was better than darkness; it permitted one to see, at least, a shadow. You will never know the comfort that I found in that tiny flame. I wept for joy. My sobbing jolted my broken leg, and I must have fainted. I was a wounded man, remember. Shivering in a wet cold that came from me and not from the place in which I lay. I felt myself rising on waves of nausea out of a horrible emptiness.

The little people had gone, all but one. The one that stayed had my elastic plaster on his left wrist. His right hand was cupped, and it held water, which I drank. Then he made a vague gesture in the direction of my pockets—he wanted chocolate. I saw this in the light of the little lamp, which still flickered. His shadow danced; he looked like a rat waltzing with a ghost. I had some chocolate in my pocket, and gave him a little. The light was dying. I pointed at it with a forefinger, and gesticulated up, up, up with my hands. He ran away and came back with another lamp.

I can tell you now that the oil that feeds those little lamps is animal fat—the fat of rats. The wicks of the lamps are made of twisted rat hair. The little men of Annan have cultivated rats since they went underground. There are hereditary rat herds, just as there used to be hereditary shepherds and swineherds. I have learned something—not much—of the habits of the little men of the dust in Annan. They dress in rat-skin clothes and have scraped out runs, or burrows, which extend for miles to the thirty-two points of the compass. They have no government and no leaders. They are sickly people. They are perishing.

Yet they are men of a sort. They have fire, although they cannot tolerate the glare of honest daylight. They have—like all of their kind—a buried treasure of useless coins. They have the vestiges of a language, but they are always cold. The poor creature whose wrist I broke had wanted my woollen jacket; now I gave it to him, and he wept for joy. They cultivate fungi—which I have eaten, not without relish—to augment their diet of the rank meat which they get by butchering the gray creatures that provide them with food, fat and fur. But they are always hungry. The rats are getting slower and less reliable in their breeding; the herds are thinning out.

My little man kept me supplied with meat and water. In the end I began to understand the meaning of his whisperings and snuffling underworld language. This fairy, this man of the dust of Annan, was kind to me in his way. He adored me as a fallen god. Sometimes, when I raved and wept in delirium, he ran away. But he always came back. My leg was throbbing. I knew that infection was taking hold of the wound, and began to lose hope down in the dark. I tried to detach my mind from the miserable condition of my body. I listened to the strange songs of the rat people. It was through the chant *Balasamo* that I learned their language. It came to me in a flash of revelation as I lay listening. *Balasamo, Balasamo*, the tune wove in and out. It gave me no peace. I had heard something like it at home. Doctor Opel had been lecturing on ancient music.

Suddenly I understood. I remembered.

*Balasamo,
Balasamo,
Sarnacorpano!*

This was a song five hundred years old. It used to be a marching song during World Wars One, Two and Three. The words, which time had corrupted and misery debased, should have been:

*Bless 'em all,
Bless 'em all,
Sergeants and corporals and all!
There'll be no promotion
This side of the ocean,
So cheer up, my lads, bless 'em all!*

Similarly, Ooki'l'karabin meant Who Killed Cock Robin.

And, of course, "Annan" came down, whine by whine, through "Unnon" and "Lunnon" from "London"! The little people spoke archaic English. I could see, then, something of their melancholy history. I could see the proud city dwellers going down to become shelter dwellers at the outbreak of the Atom War, the Ten-Minute War of 19—19—I forget the exact date. My head is swimming. My little rat man watches me with terrified eyes. Somewhere his people are singing. But the light is dying, and so am I.

He had to get back . . . back to the girl he left thousands of years ahead.

A HITCH IN TIME

by James MacCreigh

OBVIOUSLY THE MAN WAS DYING, AND THERE WAS NO CHANCE that he ever would be discovered.

I blessed the carelessness that had caused me to set the space-time dials a little off when I began this journey to the distant past. I had come to this barbaric era in the proper time, indeed, but millions of miles removed from it in space. It had been only after an annoying search that I had discovered Earth, jetted toward it in my space-drive suit and had come down out of the skies to land on this tiny, deserted island in the middle of an empty sea.

But it was incredible luck that had brought me there. For I had found exactly what I needed—a man who would give me information, clothing and an identity—and then die, and obliterate the record of my interference with the course of events!

I walked toward him. Feeble though he was, he opened his eyes and stared at me.

"Thank Heaven!" he whispered, in the thick, hideous language of that era. "I couldn't have lasted much longer if you hadn't found me." He fell back and smiled at me

with heartfelt gratitude, and for a moment I felt a wild, fleeting impulse to help him, to save his life. But of course, I dared not interfere. For that would change the shape of the future, and that meant destruction for me. . . .

When I blasted off from the island, a little later, he was dead, and I was wearing his uniform—and his name.

He gave me information before he died, and I had no trouble locating the spot I wanted. I waited till dark before landing a few hundred yards from the war-dome. Then I hid my space-drive suit in a cluster of ancient trees, and walked into the building that housed the most murderous weapon of all time.

The sentry challenged me, of course, but I was ready for him. After a quick look at my stolen credentials he sheathed his ray pistol.

"Pass, sir," he said, and I walked in, identified as Captain San Requa of the Intelligence Service.

At once I saw the atom-rocket. It was on the other side of the great chamber, nestled in a wheeled cradle, ready to be rolled out to the blast-off point. Hurrying technicians swarmed about it with last-minute checks. I walked over, saluted the officer who was supervising and began to witness events which I had crossed so tremendous a span of years to observe.

The atom-rocket was a long, silvery torpedo, a cluster of tubes at the rear, a snub-nosed warhead at the front. A panel in the side of it was open, and technicians were setting dials according to the figures read off by a white-haired old officer with the insignia of a general on his collar.

I LISTENED IN AWE AND REVERENCE, STRAINING TO NOTE AND remember everything that occurred. To think that I was actually present at the climactic moment of the legendary War of Annihilation! It was the most thrilling moment of my life. Almost I forgot to curse Master Lys and his duplicity as I watched.

Almost—but not quite. For the thing was too fresh in my mind, and I was aware that I was still in danger.

It had begun with a routine notice that my preparatory work had been approved, and that I was authorized to enter a theme in ortho-history for my final Citizenship Ratings. The theme, I saw with a sinking heart, was the War of Annihilation.

I had hurried to Master Lys, my instructor, sure that there was an error.

"Master, you give me an impossible task," I had said. "The theme regulations are that I must make a 'real and complete contribution to human knowledge.' But how can I? We have so pitifully few records of the War of Annihilation—all of them have been studied, and analyzed, and worked over for thousands of years. There is no way for me to add to what has been written already!"

He cackled at me in his insufferable Tri-Alpha way.

"There is a way," he mumbled, peeping at me out of his rheumy old eyes.

It took me a moment to realize what he meant.

"The time-belts!" And Master Lys nodded.

Well, I argued with him, of course. The time-belts were too dangerous; not one time-traveler in ten returned from the past, even when their projects were as recent as a hundred years ago. And the farther into the past one ventured, the more certain it became that return would be impossible.

For although the mechanism of the time-belts could be trusted and there was no physical menace that the conductor-screens or the katonator-guns could not cope with, there was the ever-present danger of Fan-Shaped Time itself.

It was the First Law of Chronistics: Our era is the product of everything that occurred in the past. Should anything in the past be changed, our age would also be changed. Oh, it would continue to exist, but in a parallel

branch of time—and there was no way of passing from one branch to another. And if a traveler into the past should *interfere* in the course of events, he would be bound to the new time-stream his actions created, and the unlucky traveler would never be able to return.

The branches of Fan-Shaped time could never be retraced. The man who interfered with the space-time matrix, displacing even a comma in the great scroll of time, would be cut off from his origin forever.

The danger was too great. I refused to accept the assignment, even though I knew it would mean I could never rise to the status of Tri-Alpha citizenship which was otherwise my right.

But then I heard about Elren—lovely, adored Elren Dri—and I could no longer refuse.

For Elren's Mating Indices were posted, and she was a Tri-Alpha herself! Then I understood what had been in Master Lys' mind when he set that impossible task for me. For I knew that the gnarled, worm-eaten old wreck had dared to covet my Elren! Loving me, she could never be his. But with me out of the way he might have a chance.

I accepted the assignment. Master Lys secured a time-belt for me—he was willing enough to help at my execution—and I began my perilous journey through time.

I came back to my surroundings with a start. Something was wrong!

Subconsciously I had been studying the atom-rocket, and now I was jolted out of my reveries as I realized that it did not look as it should have.

THE ORTHO-HISTORY BOOKS WERE CLEAR ON ONE FACT: Venus had been destroyed in the War of Annihilation by means of a hydrogen-chain reaction, the most deadly atom blast known. Atoms of hydrogen, under the influence of gamma-particle bombardment, coalesced to form atoms of helium—and all the incalculable power represented by the

odd fraction of mass left over was released in the form of free energy.

But the atom-rocket before me seemed to be nothing more than a simple nuclear-fission affair! Where were the photon-exciter? The gamma-ray bombardment equipment?

Of course, even a fission bomb could do a good deal of local damage, as shown in the first atom-bombed cities during the Little Wars of the early Twentieth Century. But, unless our nuclear science was in error, it could not set off a chain reaction of the type that had destroyed the Venusian colonies. Was I in the wrong place?

Alarmed, I shoved my way closer to the rocket, staring at it. It was a crude, primitive affair, of course, and it was hard for me to identify its parts. I examined it with frantic curiosity—and abruptly I found myself in peril!

One of the technicians I had pushed aside was staring at me, eyes filled with suspicion. I caught his gaze and cursed myself for having acted so rashly. Desperately I strove to think of a way to allay his suspicions, but it was too late.

"What are you doing?" the technician demanded. "Who are you?"

I tried to conciliate him.

"Captain San Requa's my name," I said, using the name on the stolen identity papers. "I am—" But I got no farther than that. My accent gave me away.

"He's a spy!" roared the technician. "Help!" And a dozen ray-pistols flashed out of their holsters as the men around us were galvanized into action.

I lost my head. Terrified, I grabbed for the safety belt concealed beneath my stolen tunic, touched the button that controlled my conductor-screen. The screen shimmered into instant life, and not a moment too soon. Rays from the weapons pointed at me flashed from all sides,

sparked against the opalescent curtain of the screen and were dissipated.

I was safe—but only for an instant.

For I had made my second great mistake. I was too close to the atom-rocket. My conductor screen grazed the warhead itself!

Its energies surged through the unstable elements in the warhead; a warning bell sprang into clamorous life. The group around me froze in their tracks, mouths open, faces mirroring fright and disbelief — and the frightful power of the strained atoms within the warhead began to grind toward nuclear fission!

There was only one thing to do, and a poor choice it was! But in a moment the warhead would explode, and of me and my mission, and the whole future of Earth, nothing would be left but a puff of fiery vapor.

Quickly I dropped the shield of my conductor screen. Trusting that my luck would hold, and the men around me would be too dazed to fire their weapons again, I drew my katonator, set it at *drain*, focused it on the atomic warhead.

The twin violet beams sprang out and impinged on the silvery metal, pierced it and sucked the heart from the seething mass of erupting matter within. Blinding energies were drawn from those toppling atomic structures, surging through the carrier-beam of the katonator into the photon-pack cartridges at my waist. I had an instant's fear as I wondered if the storage pack would hold all the mighty energies of the warhead, far greater than the maximum load for which it was designed.

But lightnings of static electricity played about my head, dissipating brilliantly but harmlessly into the air, and in an instant the danger was over. The bursting energies of the warhead had been drawn out, and the mass of matter inside it was inert.

Before me lay the atom-rocket, harmless, dead.
I had destroyed Earth's most potent weapon!

I GIVE THOSE ANCIENTS CREDIT FOR BRAVERY. DANGEROUS though I must have seemed, they closed in on me without firing their weapons. Meekly I raised my arms over my head.

The white-haired general blazed hatred at me from his pale eyes.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

I shrugged. Carefully I phrased my words in their outlandish tongue.

"I am a—a visitor from the future," I said. "I regret the accident that just happened more than I can say."

"Regret it?" he blazed. "Hah! You'll regret it twice as much when you face the firing squad!"

I spread my hands helplessly. In truth, death had no terrors for me now. A firing squad would seem almost a blessing—for I had destroyed the bomb that would have blasted Venus. Whatever happened now, the future before me was changed—and in a changed future I had no place, and my Elren would not exist!

"Take him out and shoot him," the general cried.

I turned to go to death, almost eagerly. In my heart I whispered:

"Elren! Elren, my lost love!"

The technician who had unmasked me interfered.

"Wait!" he begged. "Let me question him, sir. Perhaps he's telling the truth."

The general glowered. "What's the difference? He's wrecked the bomb!" But he hesitated and finally said, "All right. Question him. The harm's done anyhow."

Sunk in despair I scarcely heard the other officer's sharp queries, but he was hesitant and I told him whence I had come, and why. He looked at me incredulously.

"But the bomb?" he demanded. "What did you do to it?"

I patted the photon-pack cartridges strung along my belt. "I had to drain it," I said. "It was about to explode—"

"Drain it? How?"

"With the katonator." I explained to him how the energies of the exploding atoms were drawn off through the katonator-beams and trapped in the photon-pack.

He stared at the tiny power cells, eyes wide but showing a sudden glint of hope.

"Can you take that energy out again and send it into another object?"

"You mean to energize the atom-bomb again?" I said. "No, of course not."

He was shaking his head. "I mean something else," he said. "Can you send them across fifty million miles of space?"

I stared at him, fascinated and afraid.

"I dare not interfere," I whispered.

"But you *have* interfered," he yelled. "You've wrecked our chance to win this war. You've got to help us!"

I stepped back, bewildered. What he said was true enough. Yet all my training, all the warnings of Elren and Master Lys, said over and over: You must not interfere!

Yet I had interfered already; I had started a new time-sequence by destroying Earth's chance to wipe out Venus. If I could neutralize that act by helping them now, perhaps there would be a chance.

"I will show you how to use the katonator," I said weakly.

Silently I adjusted it, slipped the belt off and handed it to him. He led me outside to where stars blazed in a black night. He looked upward hesitantly, pointed to a brilliant blue planet.

"Is that it?" he asked one of his companions. The man

nodded. Carefully he took aim, pressed the trigger as I had showed him.

Lightning roared again! The twin violet beams leaped from the muzzle of the weapon, howled up into the heavens. In a fraction of a second the photon-pack was drained and the pyrotechnic display died away. All was silent.

One of the officers raced back into the building, pounded the keys of a calculator. He returned almost at once.

"At this distance it will take just under nine minutes for light to make the round trip," he said.

The officer who had fired the katonator whirled to confront me.

"Suppose I missed?" he cried in sudden alarm. "It is so far—a fraction of a second of arc would make the beam miss entirely."

I shook my head. "The beam fans out," I explained. "And a planet has mass and the photons are attracted by gravity. Even if they should miss, the attraction of the planet would draw them into it."

He nodded and was silent. Silence cloaked us all—a hundred ancients and myself, all staring up into a mysterious night.

Nine minutes passed as slowly as nine terrible years. But by and by the hands of my chronometer completed their revolutions.

Suddenly we saw the katonator beams strike.

Above us a new sun blazed forth, kindling like the striking of a cosmic match. Night fled around us, and day came flaring up into noonday brilliance, and beyond. Heat poured down upon us, brilliant rays of sunlight more intense than I had ever seen. The dome behind me sparkled and glistened in the incredible radiations from the stricken planet millions of miles away, and for a moment I could almost feel the fierce actinic waves of ultra-violet, cosmics and a thousand other super-spectral radiations.

Then the peak was reached, and the light began to fade as all the hydrogen was transmuted and consumed. In a moment the flare of energies was gone, and the pale blue planet had become a glowing orange coal.

We had seen a billion persons dying in a planetary suttee. The vastness of the dead stunned me. I found that I was sobbing, almost weeping as I felt myself stained with a cosmic guilt.

The officer who had destroyed a billion lives glanced at me in full understanding of what he had done. He placed a hand on my shoulder, strangely comforting.

"It couldn't be helped," he said in a voice that surged with emotion.

I nodded bleakly. It couldn't be helped. "It was for the sake of Earth," I said, blindly seeking justification. "Earth was destined to win, in my time-sequence, and I had interfered—I had to correct the consequences of my blunder—"

I stopped. Wild astonishment burst through the tragic mask on the face of the officer. He drew back his arm as though he had found himself embracing an adder.

"What's the matter?" I asked in astonishment.

He stared at me with dawning comprehension—and pity. "Say that again!" he whispered.

"Why—I said I had to correct my mistake. I had interfered, and the time-traveler who interferes maroons himself hopelessly. I had destroyed your weapon against Venus—yet Venus had to be obliterated, or else I had no chance of return. I was lost—and now, perhaps, I may have a chance to get back."

He shook his head. There was compassion in his voice. "No, you have no chance," he said, and hesitated while I tried to take in his meaning. "You see, this is Venus." He waved at the glowing cinder in the sky. "That was Earth up there."

The moon wasn't exciting any more; safe as an Earth city . . . they said.

GENTLEMEN, BE SEATED

by Robert Heinlein

IT TAKES BOTH AGORAPHOBES AND CLAUSTROPHOBES TO COLONIZE the Moon. Or make it agoraphiles and claustrophiles, for the men who go out into space had better not have phobias. If anything on a planet, or in a planet, or in the empty reaches around the planets can frighten a man, he should stick to Mother Earth. A man who would make his living away from *terra firma* must let himself be shut up in the cramped quarters of a spaceship, knowing that it may be his coffin, and yet he must be undismayed by the wide-open spaces of space itself. Spacemen—men who work in space, pilots and jetmen and astrogators and such—are men who like a few million miles of elbow room.

On the other hand the Moon colonists need to be the sort who feel cozy burrowing around underground like so many pesky moles.

On my second trip to Luna City I went over to Richardson Observatory both to see the Big Eye and to pick up a story to pay for my vacation. I flashed my Journalists' Guild card, sweet-talked a bit, and ended with the paymaster showing me around. We went out the north tunnel, which

was then being bored to the site of the projected coronascope.

It was a dull trip—climb on a scooter, ride down a completely featureless tunnel, climb off and go through an airlock, get on another scooter and do it all over again. Mr. Knowles filled in with sales talk. "This is temporary," he explained. "When we get the second tunnel dug, we'll cross-connect, take out the airlocks, put a northbound slidewalk in this one, a southbound slidewalk in the other one, and you'll make the trip in less than three minutes. Just like Luna City—or Manhattan."

"Why not take out the airlocks now?" I asked, as we entered another lock—about the seventh. "So far, the pressure is the same on each side of each lock."

Knowles looked at me quizzically. "You wouldn't take advantage of a peculiarity of this planet just to work up a sensational article?"

I was irked. "Look here," I said, "is there something about this project that's not quite kosher?"

"Take it easy, Jack," he said mildly—first use of my first name; I noted it and discounted it. "Everything's kosher. It's just that the Moon's had too much bad publicity lately—publicity it didn't deserve."

I didn't say anything.

"Every engineering job has its hazards," he insisted, "and its advantages, too. Our men don't get malaria and they don't have to watch out for rattlesnakes. I can show you figures that prove it's safer to be a sandhog in the Moon than a file clerk in Des Moines. For example, we rarely have broken bones in the Moon; the gravity is so low—while that Des Moines file clerk takes his life in his hands every time he steps in or out of his bathtub."

"Okay," I butted in, "the place is safe. But you keep unnecessary airlocks. Why?"

He hesitated before he answered. "Quakes. Earthquakes—moonquakes, I mean." I glanced at the curving walls

sliding past and wished *I* were in Des Moines. Nobody wants to be buried alive, but to have it happen in the Moon—why, you wouldn't stand a chance. No matter how quick they got to you, your lungs would rupture. No air.

"They don't happen very often," Knowles went on, "but we have to be prepared."

I NODDED. "THESE AIRLOCKS ARE TO CONFINE YOUR LOSSES, in case of a quake?" I started seeing myself as one of the losses.

"Yes and no. The locks would limit an accident, if there was one—which there won't be. This place is safe. Primarily they let us work on a section of the tunnel at no pressure without disturbing the rest of it. More than that, each one is a temporary expansion joint. You can tie a compact structure together and let it ride out a quake, but a thing as long as this tunnel has to give, or it'll spring a leak."

The scooter stopped as Knowles was speaking and we got off just as half a dozen men were coming out of the next airlock. They were wearing spacesuits, or, more properly, pressure suits, for there were hose connections instead of oxygen bottles, and no sun visors. The helmets were thrown back and each man had his head pushed through the opened zipper in the front of his suit, giving him a curiously two-headed look.

Knowles called, "Hey, Konski!"

One of the men turned around. He must have been six feet two, and fat for his size. I guessed him at three hundred pounds, earthside.

"Mr. Knowles," he said happily. "Don't tell me I've gotten a raise."

"You're making too much now, Fatso. Shake hands with Jack Arnold. Jack, this is Fatso Konski, best sandhog in four planets."

"Only four?" inquired Konski. He slid his right arm out

of his suit and stuck his bare hand into mine. I said I was glad to meet him and tried to get my hand back before he mangled it.

"Jack wants to see how you seal these tunnels," Knowles went on. "Come along with us."

Konski stared at the overhead. "Well, now that you mention it, Mr. Knowles," he said, "I've just finished my shift."

Knowles said, "Fatso, you're a money grubber and inhospitable as well. Okay—time-and-a-half."

KONSKI TURNED AND STARTED UNDOGGING THE AIRLOCK.

The tunnel beyond looked much the same as the section we had left except that there were no scooter tracks and the lights were temporary, rigged on extensions. A couple of hundred feet away the tunnel was blocked by a bulkhead with a circular door in it.

The fat man followed my glance. "That's a movable lock," he explained. "No air beyond it. We excavate just ahead of it."

"Can I see where you've been digging?"

"Not without we go back and get you a suit."

I shook my head. There were perhaps a dozen bladder-like objects in the tunnel, the size and shape of toy balloons. They seemed to displace exactly their own weight of air, for they floated without displaying much tendency to rise or settle.

Konski batted one out of his way and answered me before I could ask. "This piece of tunnel was pressurized today. These tag-alongs search out stray leaks. They're sticky inside. They get sucked up against a leak, break, and the goo gets sucked in, freezes, and seals the leak."

"Is that a permanent repair?" I wanted to know.

"Are you kidding? It just shows the follow-up man where to weld."

"Show him a flexible joint," Knowles directed.

"Coming up." We paused halfway down the tunnel and Konski pointed to a ring segment that ran completely around the tubular tunnel. "We put in a flex joint every hundred feet. It's glass cloth, gasketed onto the two steel sections it joins. Gives the tunnel a certain amount of springiness."

"Glass cloth? To make an airtight seal?" I objected.

"The cloth doesn't seal; it's for strength. You got ten layers of cloth, with a silicone grease spread between the layers. It gradually goes bad, from the outside in, but it'll hold five years or more before you have to put on another coat."

I asked Konski how he liked his job, thinking I might get some story. He shrugged. "It's all right. Nothing to it—only one atmosphere of pressure. Now when I was working under the Hudson—"

"And getting paid a tenth what you get here," put in Knowles.

"Mr. Knowles, you grieve me," Konski protested. "It ain't the money; it's the art of the matter. Take Venus. They pay as well on Venus but a man has to be on his toes. The muck is so loose you have to freeze it. It takes real caisson men to work there. Half of the punks here are just miners; a case of the bends would scare them silly."

"Tell him why you left Venus, Fatso."

Konski expressed hurt dignity. "Shall we examine the movable shield, gentlemen?" he asked.

We puttered around a while longer and I was ready to go back. There wasn't much to see, and the more I saw of the place the less I liked it. Konski was about to open the door of the airlock leading back when something happened.

I was down on my hands and knees and the place was pitch dark. Maybe I screamed—I don't know. There was

a ringing in my ears. I tried to get up and then stayed where I was.

IT WAS THE BLACKEST DARK I EVER SAW. I THOUGHT I WAS blind.

A torchlight beam cut through it, picked me out, and then moved on. "What happened?" I shouted. "Was it a quake?"

"Stop yelling," Konski's voice answered me casually. "That was no quake; it was some sort of explosion. Mr. Knowles, you all right?"

"I guess so." Knowles gasped for breath. "What was it?"

"Dunno. Let's look around a bit." Konski stood up and poked his beam around the tunnel, whistling softly. His light was the sort that has to be pumped; it flickered.

"Looks tight, but I hear— Oh, oh! Sister!" His beam was focused on a part of the flexible joint near the floor. The tag-alongs were gathering at this spot. Three were already there; others were drifting in slowly. As we watched, one of them burst and collapsed in a sticky mass that marked the leak.

The hole sucked up the burst balloon and began to hiss. Another rolled onto the spot, joggled about a bit, then it, too, burst. It took a trifle longer this time for the leak to absorb and swallow the gummy mass.

Konski passed me the light. "Keep pumping it, kid." He shrugged his right arm out of his suit and placed his bare hand over the spot where, at that moment, a third bladder burst.

"How about it, Fats?" Mr. Knowles demanded.

"Can't say. Feels about as big as my thumb. And it sucks like the mischief."

"How could you get a hole like that?"

"Search me. Poked through from the outside, maybe."

"You got the leak checked?"

"I think so. Go back and check the gage. Jack, give him the light."

Knowles trotted back to the airlock. Presently he sang out, "Pressure steady!"

"Can you read the vernier?" Konski called to him.

"Sure. Steady by the vernier."

"How much we lose?"

"Not more than a pound or two. What was the pressure before?"

"Earth-normal."

"Lost a pound and four-tenths, then."

"Not bad. Keep on going, Mr. Knowles. There's a tool kit just beyond the lock in the next section. Bring me back a Number Three patch or bigger."

"Right."

We heard the door open and clang shut, and again we were in total darkness. I must have made some sound, for Konski told me to keep my chin up.

Presently we heard the door, and the blessed light shone out again.

"Got it?" said Konski.

"No, Fatso. No . . ." Knowles' voice was shaking. "There's no air on the other side. The door wouldn't open."

"Jammed, maybe?"

"No, I checked the manometer. There's no pressure in the next section."

Konski whistled again. "Looks like we'll have to wait till they come for us. In that case . . . Keep the light on me, Mr. Knowles. Jack, help me out of this suit."

"What are you planning to do?"

"If I can't get a patch, I've got to make one, Mr. Knowles. This suit is the only thing around." I started to help him—a clumsy job, since he had to keep his hand on the leak.

"You can stuff my shirt in the hole," Knowles suggested.

"I'd as soon bail water with a fork. It's got to be the suit; there's nothing else around that'll hold the pressure."

When he was free of the suit, he had me smooth out a portion of the back, then, as he snatched his hand away, I slapped the suit down over the leak. Konski promptly sat on it. "There," he said happily, "we've got it corked. Nothing to do but wait."

"Let me see your hand," Knowles demanded.

"It's nothing much." Knowles examined it, anyway. I looked at it and got a little sick. He had a perfect stigmata on the palm, a bloody, oozing wound. Knowles tied it up with his handkerchief.

"Thank you," Konski said, then added, "We've got some time to kill. How about a little pinochle?"

"With your cards?" asked Knowles.

"Why, Mr. Knowles! Well, never mind. It isn't right for paymasters to gamble, anyhow. Speaking of paymasters—you realize this is pressure work now, Mr. Knowles?"

"For a pound and four-tenths differential?"

"I'm sure the union would take that view—in the circumstances."

"Suppose I sit on the leak."

"But the rate applies to the area, helpers included."

"Okay, miser, triple-time it is."

"That's more like your sweet nature. I hope it's a nice long wait."

"How long a wait do you think it will be, Fatso?"

"Well, it shouldn't take them more than an hour, even if they have to come all the way from Richardson."

"Hmmm . . . what makes you think they will be looking for us?"

"Huh? Doesn't your office know where you are?"

"I'm afraid not. I told them I wouldn't be back today."

Konski thought about it. "I didn't drop my time card. They'll know I'm still inside."

"Sure they will—tomorrow, when your card doesn't show up at my office."

"There's that lunkhead on the gate. He knows he's got three extra inside."

"Provided he remembered to tell his relief. And provided he wasn't caught in this, too."

"Yes, I guess so," Konski said thoughtfully. "Jack, better quit pumping that light. You just use up more oxygen."

WE SAT IN THE DARKNESS QUITE A LONG TIME, SPECULATING as to what had happened. Konski was sure it was an explosion; Knowles said it put him in mind of a time he had seen a freight rocket crash on take-off. When the talk started to die out, Konski told some stories. I tried to tell one, but I was so nervous—scared—that I couldn't remember the snapper. I wanted to scream.

After a long silence Konski said, "Jack, give us the light again. I got something figured out."

"What is it?" Knowles asked.

"If we had a patch, you could put on my suit and go for help."

"There's no oxygen for the suit."

"That's why I nominated you. You're the smallest. There'll be enough air in the suit itself to get you through the next section."

"Well, okay. What are you going to use for a patch?"

"I'm sitting on it."

"Huh?"

"This big, broad, round thing I'm sitting on. I'll take my pants off. If I push one of my hams up against that hole, I'll guarantee you it'll be sealed tight."

"But— No, Fats, it won't do. Look what happened to your hand. You'd hemorrhage through your skin and bleed to death before I could get back."

"I'll give you two to one I wouldn't—for fifty, say. Look—I've got two, three inches of fat padding me. I won't bleed much."

Knowles shook his head. "It's not necessary. If we keep quiet, there's air enough here for several days."

"It's not the air, Mr. Knowles. Noticed it's getting chilly?"

I had noticed, but hadn't thought about it. In my misery and funk, being cold didn't seem anything more than appropriate. Now I thought about it. When we lost the power line, we lost the heaters, too. It would keep getting colder and colder . . . and colder.

Knowles saw it, too. "Okay, Fats. Let's get on with it."

I sat on the suit while Konski got ready. After he got his pants off, he snagged one of the tag-alongs, burst it, and smeared the sticky insides on his right buttock. Then he turned to me. "Okay, kid—up off the nest."

We made the swap-over fast, without losing much air, though the leak hissed angrily. "Comfortable as an easy chair, folks." He grinned.

Knowles hurried into the suit and left, taking the light with him. We were in darkness again.

AFTER A WHILE KONSKI SAID, "THERE'S A GAME WE CAN PLAY in the dark, Jack. You play chess?"

"Why, yes—play at it, that is."

"A good game. Used to play it in the decompression chamber when I worked under the Hudson. Twenty on a side, to make it fun?"

"Okay." He could have said a thousand; I didn't care.

"Fine. King's pawn to king three."

"Uh—king's pawn to king four."

"Conventional, aren't you? Puts me in mind of a girl I knew in Hoboken . . ." What he told about her had nothing to do with chess, although it did prove she was conventional, in a manner of speaking. "King's bishop to queen's bishop four. Remind me to tell you about her sister, too. Seems she hadn't always been a redhead, but she wanted

people to think so. So she—Sorry. Go ahead with your move."

My head was spinning. "Queen's pawn to queen three."

"Queen to king's bishop three. Anyhow, she—" He went on, in detail. It wasn't new and I doubt it ever happened to him, but it cheered me up. I actually smiled, there in the dark. "Your move."

"Oh." I couldn't remember the board. I decided to get ready to castle, safe enough in the early game. "Queen's knight to queen's bishop three."

"Queen advances to capture your king's bishop's pawn. Checkmate. You owe me twenty, Jack."

"Huh? Why, that can't be!"

"Want to run over the moves?" he asked, and he checked them off.

I managed to visualize them, then said, "I'll be a dirty name! You hooked me with a fool's mate!"

He chuckled. "You should have kept your eye on my queen instead of on the redhead."

I laughed out loud. "Know any more stories?"

"Sure." He told another. But when I urged him to go on, he said, "I think I'll rest a little while, Jack."

"You all right, Fats?"

He didn't answer; I got up and felt my way over to him in the dark. His face was cold and he didn't speak when I touched him. I could hear his heart faintly by pressing an ear to his chest, but his hands and feet were like ice.

I had to pull him loose; he was frozen to the spot. I could feel the ice, though I knew it must be blood. I started rubbing him, but the hissing of the leak brought me up short. I tore off my own trousers, had a panicky time of it before I found the exact spot in the dark, and sat down, with my right buttock pressed against the leak.

It grabbed at me like a suction cup, icy cold. Then it was fire spreading through my flesh. After a time I couldn't feel anything at all, except a dull ache and weariness. . . .

There was a light somewhere. It flickered on, then went out again. I heard a door clang.

"Knowles!" I screamed. "Mr. Knowles!"

The light flickered on again. "Coming, Jack—"

I started to blubber. "Oh, you made it! You made it!"

"No, I didn't, Jack. I couldn't pass the next section. When I got back to the lock I passed out." He stopped to wheeze. "There's a crater—" The light flickered off and fell clanging to the floor. "Help me, Jack," he said querulously. "Can't you see I need help? I tried to—"

I heard him stumble and fall. I called to him, but he didn't answer.

I tried to get up, but I was stuck fast, a cork in a bottle....

I came to, face down, with a clean sheet under me. "Feeling better?" It was Knowles, standing by my bed, dressed in a bathrobe.

"You're dead," I told him.

"Not a bit." He grinned. "They got to us in time."

"What happened?" I stared at him, still not believing my eyes.

"Just like we thought—a crashed rocket. An unmanned mail rocket got out of control and hit the tunnel."

"Where's Fats?"

"Hi!"

I twisted my head around; it was Konski, face down like myself.

"You owe me twenty," he said cheerfully.

"I owe you—" I found I was dripping tears for no good reason. "Okay, I owe you twenty. But you'll have to come to Des Moines to collect it."

*It couldn't happen, of course. They wouldn't . . .
they won't.*

NIGHTMARE NUMBER THREE

by Stephen Vincent Benèt

WE HAD EXPECTED EVERYTHING BUT REVOLT
And I kind of wonder myself when they started thinking—
But there's no dice in that now.

I've heard fellows say
They must have planned it for years and maybe they did.
Looking back, you can find little incidents here and there,
Like the concrete-mixer in Jersey eating the guy
Or the roto press that printed "Fiddle-dee-dee!"
In a three-color process all over Senator Sloop,
Just as he was making a speech. The thing about that
Was, how could it walk upstairs? But it was upstairs,
Clicking and mumbling in the Senate Chamber.
They had to knock out the wall to take it away
And the wrecking-crew said it grinned.

It was only the best
Machines, of course, the superhuman machines,
The ones we'd built to be better than flesh and bone,
But the cars were in it, of course . . .

and they hunted us

Like rabbits through the cramped streets on that Bloody
Monday,
The Madison Avenue busses leading the charge.
The busses were pretty bad—but I'll not forget
The smash of glass when the Duesenberg left the show-
room
And pinned three brokers to the Racquet Club steps
Or the long howl of the horns when they saw men run,
When they saw them looking for holes in the solid
ground . . .

I guess they were tired of being ridden in
And stopped and started by pygmies for silly ends,
Of wrapping cheap cigarettes and bad chocolate bars
Collecting nickels and waving platinum hair
And letting six million people live in a town.
I guess it was that. I guess they got tired of us
And the whole smell of human hands.

But it was a shock
To climb sixteen flights of stairs to Art Zuckow's office
(Nobody took the elevators twice)
And find him strangled to death in a nest of telephones,
The octopus-tendrils waving over his head,
And a sort of quiet humming filling the air . . .
Do they eat? . . . There was red . . . But I did not stop to
look.

I don't know yet how I got to the roof in time
And it's lonely, here on the roof.

For a while, I thought
That window-cleaner would make it, and keep me com-
pany.
But they got him with his own hoist at the sixteenth floor
And dragged him in, with a squeal.
You see, they coöperate. Well, we taught them that
And it's fair enough, I suppose. You see, we built them.
We taught them to think for themselves.

It was bound to come. You can see it was bound to come.
And it won't be so bad, in the country. I hate to think
Of the reapers, running wild in the Kansas fields,
And the transport planes like hawks on a chickenyard,
But the horses might help. We might make a deal with
the horses.

At least, you've more chance, out there.

And they need us, too.

They're bound to realize that when they once calm down.
They'll need oil and spare parts and adjustments and tuning up.

Slaves? Well, in a way, you know, we were slaves before.
There won't be so much real difference—honest, there won't.

(I wish I hadn't looked into that beauty-parlor
And seen what was happening there.

But those are female machines and a bit high-strung.)
Oh, we'll settle down. We'll arrange it. We'll compromise.
It wouldn't make sense to wipe out the whole human race.
Why, I bet if I went to my old Plymouth now
(Of course you'd have to do it the tactful way)

And said, "Look here! Who got you the swell French
horn?"

He wouldn't turn me over to those police cars;

At least I don't think he would.

Oh, it's going to be jake.

There won't be so much real difference—honest, there won't—

And I'd go down in a minute and take my chance—

I'm a good American and I always liked them—

Except for one small detail that bothers me

And that's the food proposition. Because, you see,

The concrete-mixer may have made a mistake,

And it looks like just high spirits.

But, if it's got so they like the flavor . . . well . . .

A visitor from outer space . . . the solar system invaded.

THE STAR

by H. G. Wells.

IT WAS ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE NEW YEAR THAT THE announcement was made, almost simultaneously from three observatories, that the motion of the planet Neptune, the outermost of all the planets that wheel around the sun, had become very erratic. Ogilvy had already called attention to a suspected retardation in its velocity in December. Such a piece of news was scarcely calculated to interest a world the greater portion of whose inhabitants were unaware of the existence of the planet Neptune, nor outside the astronomical profession did the subsequent discovery of a faint, remote speck of light in the region of the perturbed planet cause any very great excitement. Scientific people, however, found the intelligence remarkable enough, even before it became known that the new body was rapidly growing larger and brighter, that its motion was quite different from the orderly progress of the planets, and that the deflection of Neptune and its satellite was becoming now of an unprecedented kind.

Few people without a training in science can realise the huge isolation of the solar system. The sun with its specks

of planets, its dust of planetoids, and its impalpable comets, swims in a vacant immensity that almost defeats the imagination. Beyond the orbit of Neptune there is space, vacant so far as human observation has penetrated, without warmth or light or sound, blank emptiness, for twenty million times a million miles. That is the smallest estimate of the distance to be traversed before the very nearest of the stars is attained. And, saving a few comets more unsubstantial than the thinnest flame, no matter had ever to human knowledge crossed this gulf of space, until early in the twentieth century this strange wanderer appeared. A vast mass of matter it was, bulky, heavy, rushing without warning out of the black mystery of the sky into the radiance of the sun. By the second day it was clearly visible to any decent instrument, as a speck with a barely sensible diameter, in the constellation Leo near Regulus. In a little while an opera glass could attain it.

On the third day of the new year the newspaper readers of two hemispheres were made aware for the first time of the real importance of this unusual apparition in the heavens. "A Planetary Collision," one London paper headed the news, and proclaimed Duchaine's opinion that this strange new planet would probably collide with Neptune. The editorial writers enlarged upon the topic. So that in most of the capitals of the world, on January 3rd, there was an expectation, however vague, of some imminent phenomenon in the sky; and as the night followed the sunset round the globe, thousands of men turned their eyes skyward to see—the old familiar stars just as they had always been.

Until it was dawn in London and Pollux setting and the stars overhead grown pale. The winter's dawn it was, a sickly filtering accumulation of daylight, and the light of gas and candles shone yellow in the windows to show where people were astir. But the yawning policeman saw

the thing; the busy crowds in the markets stopped agape; workmen going to their work betimes, milkmen, the drivers of news-carts, dissipation going home jaded and pale, homeless wanderers, sentinels on their beats; and in the country, laborers trudging afield, poachers slinking home; all over the dusky quickening country it could be seen—and out at sea by seamen watching for the day—a great white star, come suddenly into the westward sky!

Brighter it was than any star in our skies; brighter than the evening star at its brightest. It still glowed out white and large, no mere twinkling spot of light, but a small round clear shining disc, an hour after the day had come. And where science has not reached, men stared and feared, telling one another of the wars and pestilences that are foreshadowed by these fiery signs in the Heavens. Sturdy Boers, dusky Hottentots, Gold Coast Negroes, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Portuguese, stood in the warmth of the sunrise watching the setting of this strange new star. And in a hundred observatories there had been suppressed excitement, rising almost to shouting pitch, as the two remote bodies rushed together, and a hurrying to and fro to gather photographic apparatus and spectroscope, and this appliance and that, to record this novel astonishing sight, the destruction of a world. For it was a world, a sister planet of our earth, far greater than our earth, indeed, that had so suddenly flashed into flaming death. Neptune it was had been struck, fairly and squarely, but the strange planet from outer space and the heat of the concussion had incontinently turned two solid globes into one vast mass of incandescence. Round the world that day, two hours before the dawn, went the pallid white star, fading only as it sank westward and the sun mounted above it. Everywhere men marvelled at it, but of all those who saw it none could have marvelled at it more than those sailors, habitual watchers of the stars, who far away at sea had heard noth-

ing of its advent and saw it now rise like a pigmy moon and climb zenithward and hang overhead and sink westward with the passing of the night.

And when next it rose over Europe everywhere were crowds of watchers on hilly slopes, on house-roofs, in open spaces, staring eastward for the rising of the great new star. It rose with a white glow in front of it, like the glare of a white fire, and those who had seen it come into existence the night before cried out at the sight of it. "It is larger," they cried. "It is brighter!" And, indeed the moon a quarter full and sinking in the west was in its apparent size beyond comparison, but scarcely in all its breadth had it as much brightness now as the little circle of the strange new star.

"It is brighter!" cried the people clustering in the streets. But in the dim observatories the watchers held their breath and peered at one another. "*It is nearer,*" they said. "*Nearer!*"

And voice after voice repeated, "*It is nearer,*" and the clicking telegraph took that up, and it trembled along telephone wires, and in a thousand cities grimy compositors fingered the type. "*It is nearer.*" Men writing in offices, struck with a strange realisation, flung down their pens; men talking in a thousand places suddenly came upon a grotesque possibility in those words, "*It is nearer.*" It hurried along awakening streets, it was shouted down the frost-stilled ways of quiet villages, men who had read these things from the throbbing tape stood in yellow-lit doorways shouting the news to the passers-by. "*It is nearer.*" Pretty women, flushed and glittering, heard the news told jestingly between the dances, and feigned an intelligent interest they did not feel. "*Nearer! Indeed. How curious! How very, very clever people must be to find out things like that!*"

Lonely tramps faring through the wintry night mur-

murmed those words to comfort themselves—looking skyward. "It has need to be nearer, for the night's as cold as charity. Don't seem much warmth from it if it is nearer, all the same."

"What is a new star to me?" cried the weeping woman kneeling beside her dead.

The schoolboy, rising early for his examination work, puzzled it out for himself—with the great white star, shining broad and bright through the frost-flowers on his window. "Centrifugal, centripetal," he said, with his chin on his fist. "Stop a planet in its flight, rob it of its centrifugal force, what then? Centripetal has it, and down it falls into the sun! And this —!"

"Do we come in the way? I wonder —"

The light of that day went the way of its brethren, and with the later watches of the frosty darkness rose the strange star again. And it was now so bright that the waxing moon seemed but a pale yellow ghost of itself, hanging huge in the sunset. In a South-African city a great man had married, and the streets were alight to welcome his return with his bride. "Even the skies have illuminated," said the flatterer. Under Capricorn, two Negro lovers, daring the wild beasts and evil spirits, for love of one another, crouched together in a crane brake where the fire-flies hovered. "That is our star," they whispered, and felt strangely comforted by the sweet brilliance of its light.

The master mathematician sat in his private room and pushed the papers from him. His calculations were already finished. In a small white phial there still remained a little of the drug that had kept him awake and active for four long nights. Each day, serene, explicit, patient as ever, he had given his lecture to his students, and then had come back at once to this momentous calculation. His face was grave, a little drawn and hectic from his drugged activity. For some time he seemed lost in thought. Then he went

to the window, and the blind went up with a click. Half-way up the sky, over the clustering roofs, chimneys, and steeples of the city, hung the star.

He looked at it as one might look into the eyes of a brave enemy. "You may kill me," he said after a silence. "But I can hold you—and all the universe for that matter—in the grip of this little brain. I would not change. Even now."

He looked at the little phial. "There will be no need of sleep again," he said. The next day at noon, punctual to the minute, he entered his lecture theatre, put his hat on the end of the table as his habit was, and carefully selected a large piece of chalk. It was a joke among his students that he could not lecture without that piece of chalk to fumble in his fingers, and once he had been stricken to impotence by their hiding his supply. He came and looked under his grey eyebrows at the rising tiers of young fresh faces, and spoke with his accustomed studied commonness of phrasing. "Circumstances have risen—circumstances beyond my control," he said and paused, "which will debar me from completing the course I had designed. It would seem, gentlemen, if I may put the thing clearly and briefly, that—Man has lived in vain."

The students glanced at one another. Had they heard aright? Mad? Raised eyebrows and grinning lips there were, but one or two faces remained intent upon his calm grey-fringed face. "It will be interesting," he was saying, "to devote this morning to an exposition, so far as I can make it clear to you, of the calculations that have led me to this conclusion. Let us assume —"

He turned towards the blackboard, meditating a diagram in the way that was usual to him. "What was that about 'lived in vain'?" whispered one student to another. "Listen," said the other, nodding towards the lecturer.

And presently they began to understand.

That night the star rose later, for its proper eastward motion had carried it some way across Leo towards Virgo,

and its brightness was so great that the sky became a luminous blue as it rose, and every star was hidden in its turn, save only Jupiter near the zenith, Capella, Aldebaran, Sirius, and the points of the Bear. It was very white and beautiful. In many parts of the world that night a pallid halo encircled it about. It was perceptibly larger; in the clear refractive sky of the tropics it seemed as if it were nearly a quarter the size of the moon. The frost was still on the ground in England, but the world was as brightly lit as if it were midsummer moonlight. One could see to read quite ordinary print by that cold clear light, and in the cities the lamps burnt yellow and wan.

And everywhere the world was awake that night, and throughout Christendom a sombre murmur hung in the keen air over the countryside like the belling of bees in the heather, and this murmurous tumult grew to a clangor in the cities. It was the tolling of the bells in a million belfry towers in steeples, summoning the people to sleep no more, to sin no more, but to gather in their churches and pray. And overhead, growing larger and brighter as the earth rolled on its way and the night passed, rose the dazzling star.

And the streets and houses were alight in all the cities, the shipyards glared, and whatever roads led to high country were lit and crowded all night along. And in all the seas about the civilised lands, ships with throbbing engines, and ships with belling sails, crowded with men and living creatures, were standing out to ocean and the north. For already the warning of the master mathematician had been telegraphed all over the world, and translated into a hundred tongues. The new planet and Neptune, locked in a fiery embrace, were whirling headlong, ever faster and faster towards the sun. Already every second this blazing mass flew a hundred miles, and every second its terrific velocity increased. As it flew now, indeed, it must pass a hundred million of miles wide of the earth and scarcely affect it. But near its destined path, as yet only slightly perturbed, spun

the mighty planet Jupiter and his moons sweeping splendid round the sun. Every moment now the attraction between the fiery star and the greatest of the planets grew stronger. And the result of that attraction? Inevitably Jupiter would be deflected from his orbit into an elliptical path, and the burning star, swung by his attraction wide of its sunward rush, would "describe a curved path" and perhaps collide with, and certainly pass very close to, our earth. "Earthquakes, volcanic outbreaks, cyclones, sea waves, floods, and a steady rise in temperature to I know not what limit"—so prophesied the master mathematician.

And overhead, to carry out his words, lonely and cold and livid, blazed the star of the coming doom.

To many who stared at it that night until their eyes ached, it seemed that it was visibly approaching. And that night, too, the weather changed, and the frost that had gripped all Central Europe and France and England softened towards a thaw.

But you must not imagine, because I have spoken of people praying through the night and people going aboard ships and people fleeing towards mountainous country, that the whole world was already in a terror because of the star. As a matter of fact, use and wont still ruled the world, and save for the talk of idle moments and the splendor of the night, nine human beings out of ten were still busy at their common occupations. In all the cities the shops, save one here and there, opened and closed at their proper hours, the doctor and the undertaker plied their trades, the workers gathered in the factories, soldiers drilled, scholars studied, lovers sought one another, thieves lurked and fled, politicians planned their schemes. The presses of the newspapers roared through the nights, and many a priest of this church and that would not open his holy building to further what he considered a foolish panic. The newspapers insisted on the lesson of the year 1000—for then, too, people had anticipated the end. The star was no star—mere gas—

a comet; and were it a star it could not possibly strike the earth. There was no precedent for such a thing. Common sense was sturdy everywhere, scornful, jesting, a little inclined to persecute the obdurate fearful. That night, at seven-fifteen by Greenwich time, the star would be at its nearest to Jupiter. Then the world would see the turn things would take. The master mathematician's grim warnings were treated by many as so much mere elaborate self-advertisement. Common sense at last, a little heated by argument, signified its unalterable convictions by going to bed. So, too, barbarism and savagery, already tired of the novelty, went about their mighty business, and save for a howling dog here and there, the beast world left the star unheeded.

And yet, when at last the watchers in the European States saw the star rise, an hour later it is true, but no larger than it had been the night before, there were still plenty awake to laugh at the master mathematician—to take the danger as if it had passed.

But hereafter the laughter ceased. The star grew—it grew with a terrible steadiness hour after hour, a little larger each hour, a little nearer the midnight zenith, and brighter and brighter, until it had turned night into a second day. Had it come straight to the earth instead of in a curved path, had it lost no velocity to Jupiter, it must have leapt the intervening gulf in a day, but as it was it took five days altogether to come by our planet. The next night it had become a third the size of the moon before it set to English eyes, and the thaw was assured. It rose over America near the size of the moon, but blinding white to look at, and hot; and a breath of hot wind blew now with its rising and gathering strength, and in Virginia, and Brazil, and down the St. Lawrence valley, it shone intermittently through a driving reek of thunder-clouds, flickering violet lightning and hail unprecedented. In Manitoba was a thaw and devastating floods. And upon all the moun-

tains of the earth the snow and ice began to melt that night, and all the rivers coming out of high country flowed thick and turbid, and soon—in their upper reaches—with swirling trees and the bodies of beasts and men. They rose steadily, steadily in the ghostly brilliance, and came trickling over their banks at last, behind the flying population of their valleys.

And along the coast of Argentina and up the South Atlantic the tides were higher than had ever been in the memory of man, and the storms drove the waters in many cases scores of miles inland, drowning whole cities. And so great grew the heat during the night that the rising of the sun was like the coming of a shadow. The earthquakes began and grew until all down America from the Arctic Circle to Cape Horn, hill-sides were sliding, fissures were opening, and houses and walls crumbling to destruction. The whole side of Cotopaxi slipped out in one vast convulsion, and a tumult of lava poured out so high and broad and swift and liquid that in one day it reached the sea.

So the star, with the wan moon in its wake, marched across the Pacific, trailed the thunderstorms like the hem of a robe, and the growing tidal wave that toiled behind it, frothing and eager, poured over island and island and swept them clear of men. Until that wave came at last—in a blinding light and with the breath of a furnace, swift and terrible it came—a wall of water, fifty feet high, roaring hungrily, upon the long coasts of Asia, and swept inland across the plains of China. For a space the star, hotter now and larger and brighter than the sun in its strength, showed with pitiless brilliance the wide and populous country; towns and villages with their pagodas and trees, roads, wide, cultivated fields, millions of sleepless people staring in helpless terror at the incandescent sky; and then, low and growing, came the murmur of the flood. And thus it was with millions of men that night—a flight nowhither, with

limbs heavy with heat and breath fierce and scant, and the flood like a wall swift and white behind. And then death.

China was lit glowing white, but over Japan and Java and all the islands of Eastern Asia the great star was a ball of dull red fire because of the steam and smoke and ashes the volcanoes were spouting forth to salute its coming. Above was the lava, hot gases and ash, and below the seething floods, and the whole earth swayed and rumbled with the earthquake shocks. Soon the immemorial snows of Tibet and the Himalaya were melting and pouring down by ten million deepening converging channels upon the plains of Burma and Hindustan. The tangled summits of the Indian jungles were aflame in a thousand places, and below the hurrying waters around the stems were dark objects that still struggled feebly and reflected the blood-red tongues of fire. And in a rudderless confusion a multitude of men and women fled down the broad riverways to that one last hope of men—the open sea.

Larger grew the star, and larger, hotter, and brighter with a terrible swiftness now. The tropical ocean had lost its phosphorescence, and the whirling steam rose in ghostly wreaths from the black waves that plunged incessantly, speckled with storm-tossed ships.

And then came a wonder. It seemed to those who in Europe watched for the rising of the star that the world must have ceased its rotation. In a thousand open spaces of down and upland the people who had fled thither from the floods and the falling houses and sliding slopes of hill watched for that rising in vain. Hour followed hour through a terrible suspense, and the star rose not. Once again men set their eyes upon the old constellations they had counted lost to them for ever. In England it was hot and clear overhead, though the ground quivered perpetually, but in the tropics, Sirius and Capella and Aldebaran showed through a veil of steam. And when at last the great star rose near

ten hours late, the sun rose close upon it, and in the centre of its white heat was a disc of black.

Over Asia it was the star had begun to fall behind the movement of the sky, and then suddenly, as it hung over India, its light had been veiled. All the plain of India from the mouth of the Indus to the mouths of the Ganges was a shallow waste of shining water that night, out of which rose temples and palaces, mounds and hills, black with people. Every minaret was a clustering mass of people, who fell one by one into the turbid waters, as heat and terror overcame them. The whole land seemed a-wailing, and suddenly there swept a shadow across that furnace of despair, and a breath of cold wind, and a gathering of clouds, out of the cooling air. Men looking up, near blinded, at the star, saw that a black disc was creeping across the light. It was the moon, coming between the star and the earth. And even as men cried to God at this respite, out of the East with a strange inexplicable swiftness sprang the sun. And then star, sun, and moon rushed together across the heavens.

So it was that presently, to the European watchers, star and sun rose close upon each other, drove headlong for a space and then slower, and at last came to rest, star and sun merged into one glare of flame at the zenith of the sky. The moon no longer eclipsed the star but was lost to sight in the brilliance of the sky. And though those who were still alive regarded it for the most part with that dull stupidity that hunger, fatigue, heat, and despair engender, there were still men who could perceive the meaning of these signs. Star and earth had been at their nearest, had swung about one another, and the star had passed. Already it was receding, swifter and swifter, in the last stage of its headlong journey downward into the sun.

And then the clouds gathered, blotting out the vision of the sky, the thunder and lightning wove a garment round the world; all over the earth was such a downpour of rain

as men had never before seen, and where the volcanoes flared red against the cloud canopy there descended torrents of mud. Everywhere the waters were pouring off the land, leaving mud-silted ruins, and the earth littered like a storm-worn beach with all that had floated, and the dead bodies of the men and brutes, its children. For days the water streamed off the land, sweeping away soil and trees and houses in the way, and piling huge dykes and scooping out Titanic gullies over the countryside. Those were the days of darkness that followed the star and the heat. All through them, and for many weeks and months, the earthquakes continued.

But the star had passed, and men, hunger-driven and gathering courage only slowly, might creep back to their ruined cities, buried granaries, and sodden fields. Such few ships as had escaped the storms of that time came stunned and shattered and sounding their way cautiously through the new marks and shoals of once-familiar ports. And as the storms subsided men perceived that everywhere the days were hotter than of yore, and the sun larger; and the moon, shrunk to a third of its former size, took now four-score days between its new and new.

But of the new brotherhood that grew presently among men, of the saving of laws and books and machines, of the strange change that had come over Iceland and Greenland and the shores of Baffin's Bay, so that the sailors coming there presently found them green and gracious, and could scarce believe their eyes, this story does not tell. Nor of the movement of mankind now that the earth was hotter, northward and southward towards the poles of the earth. It concerns itself only with the coming and the passing of the star.

The Martian astronomers—for there are astronomers on Mars, although they are very different beings from men—were naturally profoundly interested by these things. They saw them from their own standpoint, of course. "Consider-

ing the mass and temperature of the missile that was flung through our solar system into the sun," one wrote, "it is astonishing what a little damage the earth, which it missed so narrowly, has sustained. All the familiar continental markings and the masses of the seas remain intact, and indeed the only difference seems to be a shrinkage of the white discoloration (supposed to be frozen water) round either pole." Which only shows how small the vastest of human catastrophes may seem, at a distance of a few million miles.

*She was much too good for him, he thought . . .
and he was right.*

THE DARK ANGEL

by Lewis Padgett

JUKE-BOX MUSIC ROARED THROUGH THE SMOKY GIN-MILL. THE old man I was looking for sat in a booth far back, staring at nothing, his shaking, veined hands gripping a tiny glass. I recognized him.

He was the one. He could tell me what I wanted to know. After what I had seen tonight, at the Metropolitan—

He was already drunk. His eyes were dull and glazed. As I slid into the booth beside him, I heard him mumbling something, over and over.

"The doll—Joanna, you shouldn't—Joanna—"

He was lost in the dream-world of alcoholism. He saw me, and he didn't see me. I was one of the phantoms of memory that thronged about him.

"Tell me about it," I said.

And even that, from a stranger, couldn't penetrate the mists that fogged his brain. The soul was gone from him. He reacted like a puppet to my words. Once or twice I had to put a few questions to him, but he answered them—and went on—coming back always to Joanna, and the doll.

I was sorry for him. He was already damned. But it was

my business to find out the truth about what had happened at the Metropolitan an hour ago.

"A long time ago," he said thickly. "That's when it started. The night we had that big snowfall, when—or even before that? I don't know."

He didn't know. Later, after the change had begun to be noticeable, he tried to remember, to dredge from his memory tiny incidents that might have been significant. Yet how was he to tell with any certainty?

Gestures, words, actions that might once have seemed perfectly normal were now, in retrospect, freighted with a subtle flavor of horrible uncertainty. But on the night of the snowstorm he had first begun to wonder.

He was forty then, Joanna thirty-five. They had begun to consider settling down to a comfortable middle age, and there was no reason why they shouldn't. Tim Hathaway had risen, in twenty years, from a junior clerk in an advertising firm to general manager, with a good salary and no worries worth mentioning.

They had an apartment in Manhattan, and a bad-tempered little Pekingese named Tzu-Ling. There were no children. Both Tim and Joanna would have welcomed a couple of kids, but it just hadn't turned out that way.

A nice-looking pair, the Hathaways—Joanna with her hair still jet-black, her skin smooth and unlined, and a fresh, sparkling vigor about her—Tim a solid, quiet man with a gentle face and streaks of gray at his temples.

They were beginning to be invited to dinners with the conservative set, but every so often they'd have a quiet binge to keep the grass green.

"But not too green," Joanna said, as the big sedan toiled down the Henry Hudson Parkway with flurries of snow racing toward the windshield. "That gin wasn't so hot."

"Cigarette, please, dear," Tim said. "Thanks. Well, I don't know where Sanderson gets his liquor, but I think

he must dredge it up out of the East River. My stomach's rumbling."

"Watch that—" She spoke too late. Out of the blurry storm twin headlights rushed at them.

Tim swung the wheel desperately and felt the sick twisting of gravity that meant a bad skid. In a moment the sedan jolted and stopped. Tim cursed quietly and got out.

"Our rear wheels are in the ditch," he told Joanna through the open window. "You'd better get out. Even with our lights on, a car wouldn't be able to see us till it was too late."

He contemplated the prospect of having the sedan smashed into a heap of junk, and it seemed the likeliest possibility. As Joanna's fur-coated figure joined him, he bent, gripped the rear bumper and heaved mightily. But he couldn't budge the car's enormous weight.

Grunting, he let go.

"I'll see if I can gun her out," he said. "Wait out here a minute, Jo, and yell if a car comes."

"Okay."

HE PLAYED THE CLUTCH AND GUNNED THE MOTOR. THEN, with catastrophic suddenness, he saw the reflected gleam of headlights approaching.

It was too late to avoid a crash. He jammed his foot on the accelerator, felt the rear wheels skid around without traction—and suddenly, incredibly, the car jumped. There was no other word for it. Someone or something had lifted the sedan and thrust it forward onto the road.

Instinctive reflex made him jockey accelerator and steering-wheel. The other car sped by, missing him by a fraction. White-faced, Tim eased the sedan to the side of the road and got out.

A dark figure loomed through the snowy gusts.

"Joanna?"

There was a pause.

"Yes, Tim."

"What happened?"

"I—don't know."

"You didn't try to lift the car!" But he knew that was impossible.

Yet Joanna hesitated.

"No," she said suddenly. "There must have been solid ground under the snow back there."

"Sure," Tim said. He got a flashlight, went back to the ditch, and made a brief examination.

"Yeah," he said, unconvinced.

They were both silent on the way home. Tim had caught a glimpse of Joanna's grease-smeared gloves.

A small thing—yet it was the beginning. For Tim knew quite well that the car had been *lifted* out of the ditch, and a frail woman of Joanna's build couldn't possibly have managed it.

But their doctor, Farleigh, an endocrinologist, talked to Tim a few weeks later.

"Tell Joanna to come in and see me," he said. "She hasn't been around for quite a while."

"She's healthy enough," Tim said.

Farleigh put his finger-tips together.

"Is she?"

"She's never sick."

"She may be. One of these days."

"There's nothing—"

"I want to keep an eye on her," Farleigh said. "I want to give her another complete check-up—X-rays and everything."

Tim took out a cigarette and lighted it very carefully.

"Okay. Let's have it. What's wrong?"

"I didn't say."

Tim looked at him. Farleigh scowled and took some X-ray plates from his drawer.

"Changes take place," he said. "The glands have a lot to do with it. I'm wondering if I haven't made a mistake."

"How?"

"If I called in a specialist. Joanna is—ah—it may be a form of hypothyroidism. Her skin, the exoderm, is thickening."

"I hadn't noticed."

"You wouldn't. Unless you tried to put a hypodermic needle through it. These X-rays—" He seemed oddly reluctant to show them to Tim.

"I gave her a gastro-intestinal series, and some iodine stains. One way to get a look at interior organs. It's peculiar. There's some sort of intestinal atrophy—the appendix has entirely disappeared, and the heart's much enlarged. Other things—"

"What?"

"Probably nothing," Farleigh said, putting the plates away again. "Just ask Joanna to run in and see me, will you?"

"Yeah," Tim said and left.

When he got home that night, the living-room was dark and empty. A low crooning noise came from the bedroom. He went quietly to the door and looked in. He couldn't see Joanna, but he saw something else, moving across the floor.

It might have been the Pekingese, except that it was even smaller than Tzu-Ling, and it walked, with the automatic precision of a clockwork figure.

The low crooning changed pitch. It became insistent. The tiny figure altered its movement. It attempted something grotesquely like a ballet position, an *entrechat* and an *arabesque*, which it couldn't hold. It fell with a soft thump on the carpet.

The crooning stopped.

"Tim?" Joanna said.

His middle cold and wet with sweat, Tim stepped into the bedroom and switched on the light. Joanna was sitting on the bed, her knees drawn up. For a moment he thought of how lovely she was, her dark hair tumbling in ringlets, her face bright and interested like a girl of seventeen. Then he looked down.

A few years ago, a casual friend had given Joanna a doll, an expensive one, completely articulated and quite life-like, for all its tininess. It was a foot and a half high. Now it lay crumpled at Tim's feet.

He forced himself to stoop and pick it up. The wig felt like real hair under his fingers.

"Joanna," he said, and an empty, gray helplessness gripped him as he stared at his wife. For he knew what he had seen. It was impossible, but the moonlight had been sufficiently bright. The movements of the doll had not been those of a puppet or an automaton.

AND SHE KNEW THAT HE HAD SEEN. SHE DREW HER ROBE closer about her shoulders, shivering.

"Close the window, Tim, will you, please? It's cold."

He obeyed silently. By the time he faced her again, she had made her decision.

"Sit down, Tim," she said, patting the bed beside her. "Put the doll here. It won't move now. Not unless I. . . . Tim, I don't know if you'll understand. If you can understand. But I hope you do."

"And I—rather hope that I'm insane," he said slowly. "What is it, Joanna? *For heaven's sake!*"

"Don't. It's nothing terrible. I've felt it coming for a long while now. I'm changing—that's all."

"Changing?"

"I was afraid at first. But now I—my mind works so much better. So does my body. I can feel things—sense things—and the doll was just an experiment. I can control inanimate objects from a distance. It takes practice.

"I did it with the car, that night in the snowstorm. Didn't you notice how white I was—after? It drained so much of my energy. But I could do it now without any difficulty at all."

"Joanna," he said, "I think you're insane."

She looked away.

"It's hard to begin at the beginning," she said reflectively.

"I've come so far since—since I noticed there was a change. And I'm so far beyond you now, Tim. I can see into your mind, and it's full of blocks and walls that won't let truth in."

"How did you make that doll move?"

Her dark eyes watched him for a moment. Then something cold and very strange seemed to lance into his brain, a whirling maelstrom like a twisting snow-flurry.

It was gone instantly. But now Joanna's voice seemed stronger and clearer. And he could understand, curiously, without questioning, what she was saying.

And—in essence—what she said was this—she was becoming a completely new type of human being. *Human* didn't describe it too accurately. As man evolved, through mutation, an enormous step beyond Neanderthaler, so the new race would come, similarly through mutation.

"But not in the conventional way, Tim. Not the way fiction writers have it. There won't be babies born with heads three feet in diameter and shriveled little bodies. Nothing like that.

"The higher an animal in the evolutionary scale, the longer is the period before maturity. It's natural selection. The super-race wouldn't be safe if it revealed its superiority too soon. It's protective camouflage.

"I think I'm the first mutation of this type, Tim. And not until lately—thirty-five years after my birth—have I begun to mature. Till now, I was adolescent — *merely human.*"

There had been unsuccessful mutations in the past—freaks, abortions, failures. But more and more often now the mutations would occur.

"And we'll breed true. It may take many, many years before another super-human of my type appears. But I don't think I'll die for a long time. It's taken me thirty-five years to mature, so—"

She flung out her arms.

"And I'll change! *I'll change!* I'm seeing the world through new eyes now, the eyes of an adult! Up until now I've been like a child!"

Her eyes glowed.

"There will be more of us. I think I know how it happened in my case. You remember my father? He was connected with the Museum. Before my birth, he was out with that research expedition in Mexico, investigating the great meteoric crater there. My mother was with him.

"The radiations from that buried meteor brought about some rearrangement of genes in the germ-plasm, so the mutation was successful. And now there's so much new work in electronics. So much radiation being broadcast! I'm the only one of my kind now, but in a hundred years, or less—"

Tim looked at her. Yes, she had changed. He could see that now. She looked quite different, with an odd combination of new youthfulness and an underlying firm self-realization—a new maturity.

And there was more than that. As a child gains an intangible quality when he matures, so Joanna had gained something that was no more to be described than the blaze of a candle-flame shining through thin white porcelain.

Yet she was—Joanna. He knew, deep in his mind, how illogical her words were. But he could not disbelieve them. It was as though unseen fingers had reached out and moulded his thoughts into new patterns.

Tim reached for his wife's hand. That, at least, was

familiar. The slim fingers lay warm and relaxed against his palm. He tightened his grip.

There was nothing to say, against the overpowering certainty, the deep belief, that possessed him. She had made him believe, somehow.

"Joanna," he whispered. "You mustn't."

SHE SHOOK HER HEAD.

"You mustn't," he repeated. "So it's happened once. Once in a million years it could happen like this—perhaps. But you can change it."

"I can't," she said. "A plant can't stop growing. It can't grow down again into a seed."

"What about us?"

"I don't know." Her voice was sombre. "I don't think we can go on this way—not for long."

"You know I—"

"And I love you, too, Tim. But I'm afraid. You see, I love Tzu-Ling in a different way. He's an inferior species. Later, after I've matured farther, you might be an inferior species to me too."

"You mean I am now," he said bitterly.

"No, Tim. You're not! But don't you see—I can't help this change. I can't stop it. And eventually we'll grow farther and farther apart, until—"

"Tzu-Ling. I see."

"And that would be horrible. For both of us. It might not be for me—then. It would depend on how much I'd changed by that time. But you understand, darling, don't you? It's better to make the break now, so we'll each have the right memories."

"No," he said, "I don't see that at all. There couldn't be any change that couldn't be compensated for."

"Human logic, based on emotion. You know it isn't true."

"You mustn't leave me, Joanna."

"I won't go tonight, anyway," she said, looking away. "I'm still too human. That makes me vulnerable. I think, in the end, our race will conquer and rule because we won't be vulnerable through emotions. We'll have emotions, yes, but they won't rule us. Logic will be the highest law."

Tim flung the doll into a corner, where it lay crumpled grotesquely. Tzu-Ling awakened at the noise and padded in from the next room to sniff at the doll. Satisfied, he lay down, head on his fluffy golden paws, and slept again.

But Tim did not sleep well that night. For a long while he lay awake, listening to Joanna's quiet breathing beside him, watching her profile in the faint moonlight. He was remembering a great deal. In the end he had come to no conclusion.

He slept at last.

And in the morning Joanna was gone.

For a year there was no trace of her. Tim put a detective agency on the track without result. He told no one the truth. They would not have believed. And he felt that if they *did* believe . . .

Sometimes he had a sickening picture of Joanna, outcast and alien, hunted like an animal by the humans who were no longer akin to her. He did hint a little to Dr. Farleigh, but the physician was so obviously skeptical that Tim didn't pursue the subject.

He waited, though, and followed the newspapers avidly. Somewhere, sometime, he felt, he would see Joanna's face looking up at him from a half-tone reproduction, or read her name in some news item.

When it came, Tim almost missed it. He had read and finished the weekly news-magazine, cast it aside and was smoking idly, listening to the radio. Joanna's face kept materializing in his thoughts. It wasn't quite the same—there was some subtle difference. Then he knew. He picked up the magazine, found the photograph and examined it closely. It wasn't Joanna. It didn't look like her at all.

And yet, beyond the contour of cheek and jaw, beyond the outward difference, there was something of Joanna in the picture. It was impossible that the bony structure of the skull could have changed. And it was equally impossible that Joanna could have grown younger. This woman was scarcely twenty.

Quite young, Tim thought, for her to have such a remarkable discovery in the electronic-radiation field. Unless—

He took a plane to Berkeley, California, the next morning. He did not see Marion Parkhurst—that was the girl scientist's name. She had left for a brief vacation in the Rockies—a vacation from which she didn't return.

Marion Parkhurst dropped out of sight.

FOR TWO YEARS AFTER THAT NOTHING HAPPENED. THERE were a few new inventions patented and put on the market, all of them connected with radiations—an ingenious improvement on the magnetron, for example, and a gadget that brought a new concept into the television field. Little things, none of them important singly, but Tim kept a scrapbook.

Five years.

Seven years.

Ten years.

He had not forgotten. He would never forget, while he lived. Tim had loved Joanna very deeply, and sometimes, in his dreams, he would be St. George, rescuing Joanna from a dragon that wore the terrible shape of the future.

Sometimes he saw that future in his dreams—a world peopled by men and women like gods, alien and inhuman as gods. They were giants and crushed humans like ants beneath their titan feet.

But giants could be killed, Tim knew. The mutation was more deadly, for it masqueraded as human. It had been ten years since Joanna's disappearance, and during that decade

she had not been unmasked. She had been perfectly free to do—what?

Fifteen years.

Seventeen.

And then, one warm summer night in Central Park, he saw her again. Some fantastic radiation from her mind must have impinged on his. For she wasn't Joanna any more. She didn't look like Joanna, or walk like Joanna.

After he had stopped her, Tim had a sick feeling that he must be mistaken. But he gripped her arms and swung her about into the glare of an overhead light. She could have wrenched free. Tim was sixty-two and older than his years.

She stood there, waiting, watching him while he searched her face. He could have seen more clearly with his glasses, but he felt embarrassed about putting them on. Not that his age didn't show clearly in his face, but—

She was between twenty and twenty-five, he guessed, and she bore not the slightest resemblance to Joanna. He didn't look for anything physical, though. He searched for that burning, ardent spark, more than human, that blazed within her like incandescent flame.

It was not there.

So he had been wrong. It was another false hope, after so many others. Tim's shoulders slumped. He felt very weary and very old. He muttered something—an apology—and turned away. Then a slim hand touched his arm.

"Tim," she said.

He looked at her, incredulous. It wasn't possible. It couldn't be happening after seventeen years. This girl didn't have the—the flame.

She read his thought. She leaned toward him, and that tremendous wave of vitality, of godlike fire, pulsed out from her. Tim was shaken by its strength.

"Joanna," he said. "You can't be—"

"I learned," she said very softly. "I learned to control

the Power. It was too dangerous. Men might have learned to recognize me by it."

He couldn't say anything. He fumbled for her hand, but he drew away.

"Don't touch me, Tim," she said. "It's a mistake. I shouldn't have—but when I read your mind and saw all that lost, lonely unhappiness—I couldn't let you go without—"

"I'll never let you go now," he said.

"You've forgotten. I've changed—more than you realize now."

"It's you who've forgotten. Look." He swept out an arm, indicating the tremendous lighted towers of New York that stood like cyclopean guardians ringing the Park.

This had been their favorite view when they were first married. On such warm summer evenings as this they had walked together along the dim paths, listening to the distant music of the carousel, laughing at nothing, talking.

He dropped his hand quickly. The light had mercilessly revealed the brown-splotched skin, the blue veins of age.

"Do you think age matters?" Joanna asked. "I could make you young again, Tim. But you'd still be human. And I'm not any more."

"You could do that?"

"Yes. My power has grown. But it's a question of different species, not of age."

"Joanna," he said, "what do you want? What are you trying to do?"

"Now?" She smiled a little crookedly. "I'm just waiting. For many years I did electronic research, trying to cause an artificial mutation that would duplicate my own.

"But I failed. I'm afraid there's nobody else like me on earth, Tim, and perhaps there never will be. I'll live for a long time—a thousand years or more—and I'll be very lonely. I'm lonely now.

"My heritage—a new race—sustained me for years, but

I've waited until I know how hopeless my wait may be. I'm the first of the new race, and I may be the last."

"Give it up," he said. "You've wasted years."

"I have so many. Too many."

"Come back to me, Joanna. Forget all—"

For an instant he thought she was on the verge of yielding. But something stirred in the bushes near them. A shaggy, unkempt form loomed in the light, black against the green. Tim saw Joanna turn her head. He felt that tremendous wave of power beat out, and he was suddenly blind and giddy.

THEN HE SAW THAT THE DARK FIGURE LAY ON THE GROUND, motionless. His throat dry, he knelt to feel for heart-beat. There was none.

"Joanna," he said. "It was just a tramp. Drunk. You killed him?"

"He heard us. I had to. In all the world, you're the only man who knows, the only man I can trust completely."

"But he was drunk! He wouldn't have remembered. If he had, nobody would have believed him."

"I can take no chances," she said. "I'm one woman against a whole world now. Forget him. His life was worthless."

What she read on Tim's face made her catch her breath in a little sob. She moved a few steps away into the shadow.

"I'm going now, Tim. But if you want to see me, I'm singing at the Met tonight."

That was all. She was gone. Tim shuddered. The night was not cold, but his blood was thin with age. And there was that horribly silent figure at his feet.

He walked south. There was nothing he could do for the tramp now. Death had struck too suddenly, too incredibly. As it might strike anywhere, anytime—with Joanna as the Dark Angel.

He knew now that she was inhuman as an angel, perhaps as amoral. The ties that had bound her to humanity were slipping. Tim was perhaps the last of those ties. When that was cut—

There would be nothing to hold her back from fulfilling the least of her desires. She would not die for a thousand years or more. Her powers were superhuman. Had she achieved full maturity yet?

If not, the future might hold sheer horror.

Tim felt his sanity slipping. He stopped at the nearest bar and ordered whisky. He kept on drinking.

He saw a world helpless, writhing in agony, beneath the rule of a woman who was more than autocrat. Lilith. Juno. A goddess—and, perhaps, mother of a race of gods and goddesses. For that was her destiny—to be mother to the new race that would crush and eradicate humanity.

He was very drunk by eight o'clock. He went home by taxi, got a flat little automatic out of a bureau drawer, and went to the Met. He bought a ticket at an exorbitant sum from a scalper and went into the foyer, ready.

His brain felt on fire.

He recognized Joanna instantly when she appeared. She was Marguerite, and it seemed black, Satanic irony to him that she should represent the spirit of purity, resisting the lures of Faust and his evil genius. He waited.

And then Tim Hathaway was ready. A gaunt, white-haired figure stood up from an orchestra seat and leveled an automatic at Marguerite's white-gowned figure. He was seen instantly. Hands reached for him. Voices rose in excited clamor.

He couldn't miss. He squeezed the trigger. The bullet would go through her heart.

It would go through—Joanna's heart.

Yes—it was easy. The tumult, the radiations from a thousand minds beating furiously through the theatre, had

confused her. She had no chance to use her inhuman power. She wasn't fully mature yet, and Tim could have killed her then.

But he didn't.

At the last moment, he jerked up the automatic. The bullet tore through painted canvas. With a hoarse, sobbing cry, Tim plunged into the heart of the mob that was thronging around him, and lost himself in that human maelstrom.

He slipped through an exit, unobserved. The mob was yelling so loudly that he didn't hear his name called, again and again, by the white-gowned Marguerite on the stage.

"Tim! Come back! You were right, darling! Tim, come back to me!"

Tim Hathaway put his whiskey glass on the table. His bleared eyes stared into mine. He was less drunk than he had been when he began his story.

"She did that?" he whispered. "After I—"

"Yes," I said.

"You were there?"

"I was there."

The juke-box's honky-tonk music blared out again. The grotesque shadows of dancing couples moved jerkily on the wall.

Hathaway stood up.

"Thanks," he said, moistening his lips. "Thanks for coming after me . . . telling me. . . ."

"I had a reason," I said. "Where are you going?"

"Back to her," he said. "Back to my wife."

The booth was secluded. No one could see us. I stood up too—and looked at Hathaway. I used the Power.

He died instantly, without pain. It was merciful.

I waited till his body had slumped down out of sight. I was grateful to him. Therefore—I killed him.

But he had given me the answer for which I had been searching for many years. Even an inferior race can be useful. I put Hathaway out of my mind and went toward the door. I was going to Joanna, the future mother of my children, of the new race that would rule the earth.

The devil you know is really much, much better . . .

MR. LUPESCU

by Anthony Boucher

THE TEACUPS RATTLED AND FLAMES FLICKERED OVER THE logs.

"Alan, I do wish you could do something about Bobby."

"Isn't that rather Robert's place?"

"Oh you know Robert. He's so busy doing good in nice abstract ways with committees in them."

"And headlines."

"He can't be bothered with things like Mr. Lupescu. After all, Bobby's only his son."

"And yours, Marjorie."

"And mine. But things like this take a man, Alan."

The room was warm and peaceful: Alan stretched his long legs by the fire and felt domestic. Marjorie was soothing even when she fretted. The firelight did things to her hair and the curve of her blouse.

A small whirlwind entered at high velocity and stopped only when Marjorie said, "Bob-by! Say hello nicely to Uncle Alan."

Bobby said hello and stood tentatively on one foot.

"Alan. . . ." Marjorie prompted.

Alan sat up straight and tried to look paternal. "Well, Bobby," he said. "And where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"See Mr. Lupescu, 'f course. He usually comes afternoons."

"Your mother's been telling me about Mr. Lupescu. He must be quite a person."

"Oh, gee, I'll say he is, Uncle Alan. He's got a great big red nose and red gloves and red eyes—not like when you've been crying but really red like yours 're brown—and little red wings that twitch, only he can't fly with them 'cause they're rudder-mentary he says. And he talks like—oh, gee, I can't do it, but he's swell, he is."

"Lupescu's a funny name for a fairy godfather, isn't it, Bobby?"

"Why? Mr. Lupescu always says why do all the fairies have to be Irish because it takes all kinds, doesn't it?"

"Alan!" Marjorie said. "I don't see that you're doing a *bit* of good. You talk to him seriously like that and you simply make him think it is serious. And you do know better, don't you, Bobby? You're just joking with us."

"Joking? About Mr. Lupescu?"

"Marjorie, you don't— Listen, Bobby. Your mother didn't mean to insult you or Mr. Lupescu. She just doesn't believe in what she's never seen, and you can't blame her. Now supposing you took her and me out in the garden and we could all see Mr. Lupescu. Wouldn't that be fun?"

"Uh, uh." Bobby shook his head gravely. "Not for Mr. Lupescu. He doesn't like people. Only little boys. And he says if I ever bring people to see him then he'll let Gorgo get me. G'bye now." And the whirlwind departed.

Marjorie sighed. "At least thank heavens for Gorgo. I never can get a very clear picture out of Bobby, but he says Mr. Lupescu tells the most *terrible* things about him. And if there's any trouble about vegetables or brushing teeth all I have to say is Gorgo and hey presto!"

Alan rose. "I don't think you need worry, Marjorie. Mr. Lupescu seems to do more good than harm, and an active imagination is no curse to a child."

"You haven't lived with Mr. Lupescu."

"To live in a house like this, I'd chance it," Alan laughed. "But please forgive me now—back to the cottage and the typewriter. Seriously, why don't you ask Robert to talk with him?"

Marjorie spread her hands helplessly.

"I know," Alan sighed. "I'm always the one to assume responsibilities. And yet you married Robert."

Marjorie laughed. "I don't know. Somehow there's something about Robert. . . ." Her vague gesture happened to include the original Degas over the fireplace, the sterling tea service, and even the liveried footman who came in at that moment to clear away.

MR. LUPESCU WAS PRETTY WONDERFUL THAT AFTERNOON all right. He had a little kind of an itch like in his wings and they kept twitching all the time. Stardust, he said. It tickles. Got it up in the Milky Way. Friend of his has a wagon route up there.

Mr. Lupescu had lots of friends and they all did something you wouldn't ever think of, not in a squillion years. That's why he didn't like people because people don't do things you can tell stories about. They just work or keep house or are mothers or something.

But one of Mr. Lupescu's friends now was captain of a ship only it went in time and Mr. Lupescu took trips with him and came back and told you all about what was happening this very minute five hundred years ago. And another of the friends was a radio engineer only he could tune in on all the kingdoms of faery and Mr. Lupescu would squidgle up his red nose and twist it like a dial and make noises like all the kingdoms of faery coming in on

the set. And then there was Gorgo only he wasn't a friend, not exactly, not even to Mr. Lupescu.

They'd been playing for a couple of weeks only it must've been really hours 'cause Mamselle hadn't yelled about supper yet but Mr. Lupescu says Time is funny, when Mr. Lupescu screwed up his red eyes and said, "Bobby, let's go in the house."

"But there's people in the house and you don't—"

"I know I don't like people. That's why we're going in the house. Come on, Bobby, or I'll—"

So what could you do when you didn't even want to hear him say Gorgo's name?

He went into father's study through the French window and it was a strict rule that nobody ever went into father's study, but rules weren't for Mr. Lupescu.

Father was on the telephone telling somebody he'd try to be at a luncheon but there was a committee meeting that same morning but he'd see. While he was talking Mr. Lupescu went over to a table and opened a drawer and took something out.

When father hung up he saw Bobby first and started to be very mad. He said, "Young man, you've been trouble enough to your mother and me with all your stories about your red-winged Mr. Lupescu, and now if you're to start bursting in—"

You have to be polite and introduce people. "Father, this is Mr. Lupescu. And see, he does, too, have red wings."

Mr. Lupescu held out the gun he'd taken from the drawer and shot father once right through the forehead. It made a little clean hole in front and a big messy hole in back. Father fell down and was dead.

"Now, Bobby," Mr. Lupescu said, "a lot of people are going to come here and ask you a lot of questions. And if you don't tell the truth about exactly what happened, I'll send Gorgo to fetch you."

Then Mr. Lupescu was gone through the French window onto the gravel path.

"IT'S A CURIOUS CASE, LIEUTENANT," THE MEDICAL EXAMINER said. "It's fortunate I've dabbled a bit in psychiatry; I can at least give you a lead until you get the experts in. The child's statement that his fairy god-father shot his father is obviously a simple flight-mechanism, susceptible of two interpretations. A, the father shot himself; the child was so horrified by the sight that he refused to accept it and invented this explanation. B, the child shot the father, let us say by accident, and shifted the blame to his imaginary scapegoat. B has of course its more sinister implications; if the child had resented his father and created an ideal substitute, he might make the substitute destroy the reality . . . But there's the solution to your eye-witness testimony; which alternative is true, Lieutenant, I leave it up to your researches into motive and the evidence of ballistics and fingerprints. The angle of the wound jibes with either."

THE MAN WITH THE RED NOSE AND EYES AND GLOVES AND wings walked down the back lane to the cottage. As soon as he got inside he took off his coat and removed the wings and the mechanism of strings and rubbers that made them twitch. He laid them on top of the ready pile of kindling and lit the fire. When it was well started, he added the gloves. Then he took off the nose, kneaded the putty until the red of its outside vanished into the neutral brown of the mass, jammed it into a crack in the wall, and smoothed it over. Then he took the red-irised contact lenses out of his brown eyes and went into the kitchen, found a hammer, pounded them to powder, and washed the powder down the sink.

Alan started to pour himself a drink and found, to his pleased surprise, that he didn't especially need one. But he did feel tired. He could lie down and recapitulate it all,

from the invention of Mr. Lupescu (and Gorgo and the man with the Milky Way route) to today's success and on into the future when Marjorie, pliant, trusting Marjorie, would be more desirable than ever as Robert's widow and heir. And Bobby would need a man to look after him.

Alan went into the bedroom. Several years passed by in the few seconds it took him to recognize what was waiting on the bed, but then Time is funny.

Alan said nothing.

"Mr. Lupescu, I presume?" said Gorgo.

In Kenie's strange new world, love—and hate, and rebellion—came early.

THE DAY OF THE DEEPIES

by Murray Leinster

KENIE WAKED WITH ALL THE SHIVERING ECSTASY ONE FEELS at the age of thirteen on a morning when excitement looms deliciously ahead. She lay still for a moment, listening to the noises that told her the house was awake. Her brother Tom, down the hall, was doggedly enduring the squawks and howls of the television set he'd put together from wreckage their father had brought back from what used to be Camden. Then there was the whooshing roar of the tractor, pulling past the front of the house with its monstrous wood-gas generator on the back and the squeak that Bub Taylor said was metal-fatigue setting in. But it couldn't be dismantled, for youthening, until the fall wheat had been planted.

Her mother's voice came out of what had been the air-conditioning duct when air conditioners still worked.

"Kenie! It's late!"

"I'm up and practically dressed," said Kenie, anticipating the fact by seconds. "Right down, Mother!"

She slid out of bed. She almost danced across the room to look at herself in the mirror.

The mirror was a trifle leprous, in spots, where the silver had tarnished through, but she found her own eyes bright and anticipating. She beamed at her reflection. She didn't know how things would turn out, but excitement was sure. Her very best boy friend, Bub, had told her in strict confidence that the neighbors were coming over today to warn her father that Tom had to stop fiddling with science. And that ghastly deepie, Mr. Wedderson, was coming to receive the family's answer to his proposal for Aunt Sarah's hand. And Kenie was practically certain that Roland—whom her sister Cissie used to be in love with—was hiding out somewhere in the woods. So it would be a full day.

She went blithely down the stairs in work-stained shorts and jumper. It was just as exciting to be thirteen in the year 2096 as it had been when Kenie's great-great-grandmother watched soldiers march off to some war or other, back in the days when they had wars. Now, of course, war was just a word. There couldn't be a war when there was nothing to fight with and you didn't know whom to fight.

Anyhow, Kenie doubted that a war would be as exciting as knowing that Bub was secretly working on an electric generator in the cellar he'd dug under his father's barn, or having a delicious suspicion that Roland was hiding nearby and that Cissie had seen him at least once.

Roland would be hung as a matter of public safety if he were discovered, because he was a scientist. And if she merely hinted her suspicion of his presence to her brother Tom, he'd go crazy trying to find Roland to pump scientific information out of him, because Tom meant to be a scientist, too.

She felt that she could burst, but she seemed completely demure as she went into the kitchen. The great electric range and storage cabinet, off to one side, was used as a cupboard and working space for the preparation of meals. Her mother said it was wonderful, before a bomb fell over at Westport and then there wasn't any more electricity.

Kenie'd always thought vaguely that it wasn't scrapped because they hoped that some day there might be electricity again. But she was not sure.

"Stay close to the house, Kenie," said her mother, as she put breakfast before her. "I may need you. Some of the neighbors are coming over to your father and we'll have to offer refreshments."

Kenie said mildly, "Does Tom know yet?"

Her mother looked at her sharply.

"What do you mean by that, Kenie?"

"Aren't they coming over to tell father that Tom has to stop messing with science? I told him not to get so confidential with that revolting Mr. Wedderson. I'll bet he's the one who passed the word that Tom was experimenting."

Her mother pressed her lips together.

"Kenie—"

"He's a deepie," said Kenie scornfully. "Oh, I know, Mother! Deepies are just displaced persons, and some of them are quite nice. They are people who've never settled down or who are afraid to settle down even if people would let them. They think if they keep moving, they'll be safe. 'Fraidy-cats! But some deepies are snoopers, too, and you know it!"

"Kenie!" said her mother. "Mr. Wedderson wants to marry your Aunt Sarah! He's quite a good blacksmith, he says, and with a family connection so he'd be allowed to settle down here—"

Kenie started to stuff her mouth full, and remembered that she was growing up, and took a dainty mouthful instead. She said with a vast calmness:

"Darling Mother, you don't fool me. You don't like him any more than I do. You're just as afraid he's a snooper. And with Roland—"

Her mother went white. Kenie's heart turned one complete somersault. Then it was true! Roland was back, and hiding out! Her mother knew it, as well as Cissie! Kenie's

hand shook with the thrill as she gulped her milk in outward composure.

"Don't worry, Mother," she said calmly. "I won't say that to anyone else. But I notice things. I'm thirteen, now."

"I don't know where you get silly ideas about Roland," her mother began. But there were footsteps in the hall and she stopped short. She went on in an even, unhurried tone, "I think that if you took over the new calf this morning, since your father is so busy— Good morning, Sarah!"

Kenie's Aunt Sarah came into the kitchen. Kenie spoke to her politely. Aunt Sarah looked thrilled and haggard and defiant and sorrowful all at once, with a hint of tragedy queen thrown in. Kenie used to feel sorry for her because she'd never gotten married—Kenie intended to marry Bub when they both grew up—but Mr. Wedderson had ended her sympathy. He couldn't be anybody's ideal! He was untidy with a hint of greasiness. He wore thick eyeglasses and a smug air which wasn't suitable to a deepie, and he petted Kenie. With the pretense of treating her as a child, he patted her. Kenie frankly despised him—with an uneasy feeling underneath.

"Good morning, Martha," said Aunt Sarah. "Where is John? I simply must have a talk with him! Mr. Wedderson is coming—"

Kenie's mother said vaguely, "He's running the tractor, Sarah. I think he's been asking the neighbors if they object—"

"What have they to do with it?" demanded Aunt Sarah sharply. "My brother John is a leading citizen! If I choose to marry, why should the neighbors have anything to say?"

"You know how it is," said Kenie's mother soothingly. "People resent newcomers settling—"

"Would John send his own sister wandering?" demanded Aunt Sarah fiercely. "Must I wander through the woods and forests to be with the man I love, when he is a good blacksmith and one is needed here?"

Kenie choked on her milk. Aunt Sarah always managed to mess things up when she tried to be dramatic. Her mother said:

"Kenie! The calf—"

"Yes, Mother," said Kenie.

SHE DRAINED THE MUG AND MANAGED NOT TO GIGGLE UNTIL she got out of doors. Then she went down to the barn. It was a good barn, very old and with the wires for electric lights still in place. There were iron stalls for the cows and there had been an electric milking machine. It would be nice to have electricity to do things for you, Kenie reflected.

She milked an anxious cow who was bitterly indignant because her calf was muzzled. She led the calf into another stall and set to work to teach him to drink. It was rather fun, but she felt all churned up inside herself.

Roland was nice. He'd been gone for two years, now, because of course, when he practically said he was a scientist he couldn't stay around. It wouldn't have mattered before things happened and the big cities were either abandoned or destroyed, and before the railroads stopped running, and all that. But since the world had got to be as it was, scientists weren't good neighbors. Everybody knew that. When scientists set to work to find out things, sooner or later a bomb fell from the sky. Then there was an empty place three or four miles across where people had lived, and things wouldn't grow there for a long time because the ground was all baked to a bricky, glassy kind of stuff that Kenie had never seen but had heard about. Only eight years ago a bomb had fallen on a locality only fifty miles away. And people said it was because there was a scientist there.

It wasn't his fault directly, though. It was because of the deepies. There were always deepies coming around—bright-eyed, usually skinny people who worked a while and got a store of food and moved on. Lots of deepies were very

respectable and nice, but there were some snoopers among them, and if a snooper found out that there was a scientist around, somehow or other they got word to whoever had planes and bombs—and then a bomb fell. So one must always be careful not to say anything nice about science. Bub was especially bitter because one mustn't even have electricity, and he was making a generator down in a secret cellar he'd dug. *He* was going to have electricity and keep it a secret.

The trouble with Roland was that he talked. As long as he just kept machinery in repair and made funny stuff that made welding easier, he was all right. He was crazy about Cissie, too, and she about him. But one day somebody said that people were better off nowadays than back when cities had millions of people in them, and Roland got mad. Right in front of everybody he said that people lived like pigs, now, compared to the old days. Running tractors on wood-gas and burning tallow lamps wasn't his idea of living, he said.

Science had made a world fit to live in, and fools had smashed it, Roland said. And then he declared defiantly that some day science would come back and the world would be better than ever, with electricity and airplanes and great cities and universities and books and television everywhere. And he said it where everybody could hear him!

Deepies were listening, so the neighbors had to act at once. They tried him right on the spot for advocating science, after what it had done to the world, and they ordered him to leave the locality and said they'd hang him if he came back. And they made sure all the deepies knew it. Kenie's own father was the sternest of Roland's judges, though he liked Roland a lot. Cissie'd cried for weeks, too, because she'd been going to marry him. But of course being ordered away from home made Roland a deepie, and nobody would let a deepie settle anywhere. Everybody was afraid that almost any deepie might be a snooper, reporting

to whoever had bombs and planes. So naturally Cissie couldn't marry Roland.

Teaching the calf to drink, Kenie's anticipations rose. Roland's return was exciting. And Mr. Wedderson wanting to marry Aunt Sarah. He was a deepie who pretended to be enormously smitten with Aunt Sarah's charms. Now she was hounding Kenie's father to stand sponsor for him and get him permission to settle down here. Otherwise, of course, she'd have to go off and be a deepie, too, if she married him. But Kenie was scornfully sure that Mr. Wedderson was a snooper, and if he found out that Roland was back. . . .

That was something to shiver about! Cissie'd seen Roland. Kenie knew it. She used to be in love with him and still must be or she wouldn't have risked seeing him.

There was a trampling of many hoofs in front of the house. The far-away tractor stopped. Kenie looked out of the barn and saw her father walking across the fields. She heard Tom's television set still squawking. When he got it to work, it only brought silly things like talks on farming and how to keep well. But her father said that whoever was visicasting was very brave. They might be safe if they talked only about crop rotation and sanitation, but he warned Tom to tell him if they ever started to 'cast about science. Tom probably wouldn't tell him, though. Tom was always mooning around, trying out things and trying to find old books with science in them, but not talking.

Kenie watched, wide-eyed, as the neighbors rode up to the house. They were going to remind father that there were nearly five thousand people in this locality, and they couldn't have their lives jeopardized by a boy working on science. Tom could either give up his experiments or leave. They didn't want any bombs falling from a seemingly empty sky.

There was a rustling in the barn. There was Cissie; she

put her arm around Kenie and hugged her a little. That wasn't unheard of, but it was unusual. Kenie wriggled.

"They've come to talk to father about Tom, Cissie!" Kenie was thrilled. "It's going to be awful! Maybe he'll get mad—"

"He won't," said Cissie. "He promised me he wouldn't."

They heard their father's voice inside the house. He was calling Tom. Then a great stillness settled on everything. The neighbors were gathered in the front parlor. They'd be grim. Just as grim as when they told Roland to leave or be hanged. Tom would be white and stricken. But their father would do what he could. He'd probably tell how Tom helped him in metal recovery—smelting down iron rust for fresh metal to make things that had to be made new. He'd been the first one to do that, with charcoal from the woods for fuel. The neighbors respected Kenie's father, and they wouldn't be mean. Just firm. Anyhow, they knew how Kenie's father felt about science. He'd been the first one to say that Roland had to go away, even though Roland and Cissie were planning to get married.

"Darling," said Cissie, and she hugged Kenie. "You like me, don't you? I want to tell you something."

"About Roland?" asked Kenie quickly.

Cissie seemed not to realize what she meant.

"Partly," she said softly. "But not altogether. I'm not sorry about Roland, you know. There used to be a wonderful world, and it got spoiled. But there's going to be a wonderful world again, and Roland will help to make it. That's worth while, isn't it?"

"The world's all right now," said Kenie blithely. "It's fun. But it might be nice to have electricity. Bub says so."

Cissie laughed a little.

"That's what I want to tell you. Not about electricity, but about Bub. I used to watch you tagging after him, and now he tags after you, Kenie. And as your older sister—"

Kenie said matter-of-factly, "Bub's going to marry me when we grow up. He doesn't know it yet, but I can make him do almost anything I want to."

Cissie's arm tightened about her.

"I—just want to say something serious, for once," she said quite gravely. "It's nice, loving someone, Kenie. And if you—grow up and marry Bub—you won't want to regret it. If he wants to be like everybody else, he'll be safe and so will you. But if he doesn't, Kenie—let him be different! Like Roland. Make him be careful, of course! Make him be terribly careful! But it will be worth it if he—risks his life and yours, too, to try to build back to a better world than the one that got smashed. Even for a little thing like electricity! Remember it, Kenie! Please!"

Kenie almost started to tell her that Bub was already building an electric generator in his secret cellar—Cissie could be trusted—but just then Mr. Wedderson came in view. He was marching toward the house, and he was fat and smug and revolting.

"That," said Kenie scornfully, "is Aunt Sarah's ideal! She wants us to call him Uncle! He'll want me to sit on his lap! I despise him!"

Cissie drew a quick breath. She looked oddly at Kenie, as if what she'd just said was a very special admonition that she might not be able to give again, but Kenie was sticking out her tongue at the waddling, stocky figure. Then she turned.

"We'd better go to the house," she said resentfully. "Mother's going to serve refreshments. I'd like to put a bug in Mr. Wedderson's mug. Or something worse!"

CISSIE FOLLOWED SILENTLY. THEIR MOTHER WAS MOVING about the kitchen. She nodded when they came in.

"Just in time," she told them. "You take in the coffee, Cissie, and Kenie, you carry the cakes."

Cissie was grown-up and calm, and Kenie envied her a little. Her own elbows seemed to get in the way going through doors. But she got to the parlor without mishap. Then she thrilled.

It was dreadful in there. Her brother Tom stood ashen-faced at one side of the room. The neighbors were unsmiling and grim. Not unkindly, of course. That made it worse. Kenie saw twin wet streaks on Tom's cheeks. He was seventeen, but the tears had come when he met the unalterable ultimatum of the neighbors and found that his own father backed it.

"It ain't," said a heavy voice doggedly, "that we're against anybody doin' what they want to, Tom. You got a life to live. If you want to go off and study science, you got a right to an' we ain't stoppin' you. But we got our families to think of. Where there's science and people know of it, bombs fall. You can go, an' you'll have no spite go with you. But you can't come back. You'll do a lot better by your family and friends if you stay amongst us an' be a good neighbor—"

Tom's hands were clenched tightly. He was the very picture of stunned grief. But suddenly he said in a choked voice:

"I'll bet it was Mr. Wedderson who told you! He started talking about science! He s-seemed to know a lot and I g-got interested and t-told him too much—"

The faces in the parlor hardened. There were thumpings outside. Kenie's mother went to the door. Cissie moved among the neighbors, offering them dandelion-root coffee. Kenie's mother said:

"Why, yes, Mr. Wedderson! Quite a gathering! Come in!"

Eyes turned to the door. Mr. Wedderson entered. His eyes glittered behind their thick lenses. He swaggered a little.

"Gentlemen," he said pompously, "as a mere poor deepie, I have come to do you a service. Did you know that a plane landed near here two days ago?"

It had been quiet in the parlor, before. The only sounds had been the small clickings of the coffee mugs. But then the stillness became absolute. Kenie's breath stopped. A plane landed here! That was science at its worst! She had never seen a plane in her life. They were deadly. Bub said they could have electricity again if it wasn't for snoopers, but nothing was more sure to bring a bomb from empty sky than a plane. . . .

"It has not taken off," added Mr. Wedderson blandly. "It is still here. I have seen it. Does it surprise you?"

Kenie saw the faces of the neighbors. Every one was stony. A plane landed here—and known to a deepie! A bomb might fall at any instant. It might be falling now. . . . For a moment Kenie tried to imagine a bomb falling. She tried to picture this house, the barn, the fields yonder and the new-ploughed land, all gone and nothing but glassy, baked-hard emptiness in its place. She tried to imagine herself, Kenie, completely obliterated. But her imagination boggled at the last. She could not imagine a world without Kenie in it. She found herself licking her lips.

"We know nothing of it!" said her father fiercely. "You gentlemen have your horses here! We'll see if this is true! And if it is, Mr. Wedderson, you'll see what we do when people bring science into this locality!"

Mr. Wedderson said, blinking in a sort of smug meekness, "I had hoped to form a family connection and be allowed to settle here, but even we deepies do not like localities where science is favored. Here, even the young boys—"

"Tom!" said Kenie's father harshly. "Saddle three horses. One for Mr. Wedderson. Right away!"

Tom stumbled from the room. Kenie boiled. Mr. Wedderson had persuaded Tom to talk about science, and then

told the neighbors on him! Now he told about a plane landing, and mentioned what deepies would think about it. And if deepies knew about it, sooner or later a snooper would know! He was threatening! He was telling them they'd better be nice to him! It was things like this that made people not let anybody stay in a locality unless he had kinfolk and relatives who'd share any danger he brought on the rest.

"Come, Kenie," said Cissie in her ear.

Kenie followed to the kitchen and shook with a murderous rage.

"I hate him!" she said furiously. "He told on Tom! If he's ever my uncle I'll—I'll—"

Cissie pushed her firmly out of doors. She followed. But her tone was shaky rather than indignant as she said:

"You mustn't talk like that, Kenie! Aunt Sarah thinks she's in love with him! If she heard you—"

Kenie grumbled, "You were in love with Roland, but it didn't make you crazy!"

"That," said Cissie quietly, "was real. Not just desperation. She isn't like—you and Bub, either, is she?"

"Huh!" said Kenie. "I can make Bub do almost anything I want!"

Tom rode blindly past them, leading two horses. One for his father and one for Mr. Wedderson. Tom was seventeen, and Kenie normally admired him with a trace of female condescension. But even she could see something close to dignity in his grief-stricken look.

"Poor Tom!" said Cissie.

Her voice was soft enough, but her eyes were oddly hard as she looked back at the house. There was a clattering of hoofs and the neighbors rode off with Mr. Wedderson in their midst. He said a plane had landed—and a plane was sure to bring a bomb. He was going to show them where it was. Most deepies would simply run. There was something—

Kenie watched breathlessly. She would have liked to go, but she was a girl, and if they found out who had landed the plane there'd be a hanging. A sudden thought struck her. Roland! Suppose it was Roland who came in the plane! Suppose her father helped to hang Roland because he was a scientist and he'd come back after being warned not to. . . .

Kenie jerked her head to stare at Cissie. If it was Roland, Cissie knew it. She knew that they were going to hunt for whoever had landed the plane. Cissie looked quite pale, though entirely composed. Entirely. She looked startlingly grown up.

There was a yell, and a gangling horse jumped the fence behind the barn. Bub waved to Kenie. He always arrived that way. He was sixteen. And Kenie squealed at sight of him and dashed to meet him. Speculations were unimportant now. She poured out an almost incoherent account of the morning's happenings, from the formal warning to Tom, to Mr. Wedderson's notification of the incredible fact that a plane had landed near-by and they might all be blown up any second.

Bub simply wheeled his horse about, his lips set. Kenie jumped in front of him.

"You've got to take me!" she cried fiercely. "I told you about it! You've got to take me! You won't dare show yourself anyhow—"

He thrust down a bony hand. She caught it and scrambled up. He dug his heels into the horse's sides and they went off at a shambling gallop, Kenie astride behind him and clinging to his waist. She was filled with an ecstasy amounting almost to delirium. This was excitement! She and Bub trailing the neighbors on the way to destroy an airplane! Perhaps to hang Roland! Nothing so deliciously thrilling had ever happened in the world before!

Bub said tragically, "All my life I've wanted to see a

plane, and the only chance I'll ever get is to see the neighbors smash one!"

Kenie was abashed by such grief, but nothing could make her unhappy while such thrilling events went forward. They sighted the cavalcade a long distance ahead. They trailed it. It swung aside into the woods. Bub dared close up until he could see the thrashing of branches as the horsemen forced their way through low-hanging trees.

A LONG TIME LATER THE CAVALCADE HALTED. KENIE COULD feel the tension in Bub's body. He reined aside.

"Come on!" he said feverishly. "We'll hide the horse and sneak up to see before it's all smashed—"

It was a matter only of seconds before he and Kenie were dashing, hand in hand, from one thick patch of brushwood to another to get where they could see what impended.

It was Kenie who jerked him aside and pointed.

"There!"

They saw perfectly through a gap among the trees. There were the horses, stamping and snuffling in an uneasy group. The men advanced silently toward a silvery white object on the ground. The plane wasn't big, and somehow it looked awkward. It looked as if it had been built of inadequate materials, by men who'd made ingenuity take the place of equipment. There were little pipes sticking out of it astern. There were fins—not wings—and there was a folded-up contrivance which Kenie guessed excitedly was a helicopter screw. She'd seen pictures.

"Rocket-drive," said Bub in a broken, mourning whisper. "Atmospheric rocket, Kenie. Not like the ones men went to the evening star with, once. But, oh, isn't it beautiful!"

It wasn't. Kenie stared with all her eyes, but to her it was not beautiful. It was merely extraordinarily thrilling. Her eyes went to the human figures. Mr. Wedderson looked

brisk and shrewd and very different from the way he usually did. He stood back while the others went grimly to the plane and pulled open its door and went in. They went over it in every possible fashion, looking for some clue to who had brought it. Kenie's father said harshly:

"Anyhow, we can pile brush on it and set it afire!"

Then he stopped. Mr. Wedderson stood composedly with something like a little switch in his hand, only it had a cup on it and he held that to his mouth. He seemed to be talking into it.

There was a dreadful stillness. Then Mr. Wedderson grinned.

"This," he told the neighbors, still holding the cup near his mouth, "is a radio and I am talking to the people who have planes and bombs. They can hear everything I say. They do not want the plane destroyed. So you will not destroy the plane."

Men made a concerted small noise like a growl.

"I brought you here and had you go into it and handle it," said Mr. Wedderson with an infuriating smugness, "because it was possible that whoever left it had mined it—set explosives to destroy meddlers. But you are not destroyed. So I shall fly it to where I came from, and we shall examine it. Our radar said that it was even faster than our planes! But you will let me take it because your whole community will be bombed within minutes if you do not."

He grinned at them. Enragingly. But there was absolute dead silence save for the stamping and snorting of the horses. Mr. Wedderson walked over to the plane. The neighbors made way for him, their hands clenched. He got in and touched something. The folded-up thing reached up and expanded. It began to move, at first slowly and then more swiftly. A little puff of vapor came from one of the pipes at the stern.

All this in dead silence.

The plane shifted itself around bodily. It slid forward over fallen leaves until it was no longer under a tree, but under open sky. Mr. Wedderson grinned at the neighbors.

"You are very docile," he said blandly, "so I have reported that you need not be bombed. And your funny sister"—he looked at Kenie's father—"was very amusing. Tell her I laugh."

The whirring thing speeded up. The plane rose, and hovered, and rose swiftly again. It danced lightly up above the treetops.

Up and up and up. . . . It was a bare speck when vapor streamed from behind it.

It moved forward. The blurred disk of the lift-screw vanished suddenly and it was merely a mote which moved so fast that the eye lost trace of it. Then it was gone.

Bub was crying almost happily, "B-beautiful!" he gasped. "Oh, b-beautiful! B-but he took it away. . . ."

Then he sobbed. And then Kenie's father loomed up sternly. He'd seen her. He opened his mouth to ask how she'd gotten there, and saw Bub. He said nothing.

He waved his hand, and Tom came numbly over with the three horses from home.

They went to Bub's tethered horse. Kenie mounted the now spare animal. They went back toward home. The neighbors were riding off singly, every man's face like stone.

"And now," said Kenie's father tiredly, "we ought to hang Roland."

Then Tom spoke thickly. "I'm—I'm sorry, Dad," he said, "but if—if this is—what you have to do—not to have bombs fall, I—I'm going away. Maybe I'll only be a deepie, but—if there's science anywhere on earth—"

Bub gulped and said uncertainly, "I—guess I'll go too, Tom."

For an instant Kenie was fiercely proud of her brother and of Bub. She, too, felt the bitter scorn of youth for the

compromises older people make for the sake of youth. But then she realized that their going away would mean they'd be like Roland.

They couldn't come back. They'd be hanged, if they did.

She made no sound. She rode on stoically, a small figure in shorts and jumper, with her hair hanging in a pigtail down her back. But tears flowed down her cheeks. She licked them furtively from the corners of her mouth.

"Eh? Desperate?" said her father. Then he grunted. "I forgot. You boys have thought science was play. It's not. You had to learn a lesson, and I think Tom has. You'll never talk too much to a deepie again, Tom!"

"I'm—going to be one," said Tom, doggedly.

"Being careful gets to be a habit," said Kenie's father, dryly. "It's one you'd better learn, Tom. But Roland won't be hung. Of course! We'll all say no—all the neighbors. But actually he's going to be married. To Cissie. Kenie's to be bridesmaid. It will all happen after supper tonight. They'll be off before morning."

Then he added, "Roland flew that plane here."

Kenie's eyes opened wide. She felt a complete topsyturviness in all the world. She blinked incredulously up at her father.

"The idea," said her father deliberately, "is that the people who've dropped bombs have had things their way too long. If they find we can hit back, they'll pull in their horns a bit. We're planning to use electricity again. They have to have a lesson."

KENIE RODE ON IN A DREAM. SHE HEARD HER FATHER'S VOICE. Tom and Bub babbled questions—eager, thirsty questions. Kenie heard her father say, "... don't have to rebuild the old generators. Simpler ways to make electricity have turned up ..." and "couldn't conquer anybody with bombs, of course ..." and incomprehensible things like, "... of

course all the neighbors have known all along, but we've had to be careful. . . ."

But Kenie was wrestling with a desperate problem of her own.

She barely heard Bub say in a tone of anguish:

"But he carried off the plane!" And then her father again, in a tone she'd never heard before—amused without any laughter in it:

"What do you think Roland flew it here for?"

Kenie's problem was unsolvable. They were coming out of the woods, and she turned appealingly to her father, but the boys had his attention. She couldn't get it. He said quietly:

"There's no secret about the bombs, but you can't fight a war with them, and who wants a war, anyhow? We want electricity—to start with. So Roland flew that plane until he knew a radar beam had touched it, and noted its speed, so they'd want to capture it instead of simply blowing it up. Then he landed it. It was risky, but it had to be done. Fortunately, it worked."

They were on the road toward home. The boys begged simultaneously:

"Was there a bomb in the plane? To go off when—"

"The plane," said Kenie's father softly, "was a bomb. Which will go off when they investigate its high-speed drive. When they look at it. That'll be in the middle of their workshops and laboratories, wherever they may be. There may not be many of them left.

"But anyhow there will be two hundred localities like ours all starting to use electricity on the same day, and they won't quite dare to bomb any of them because then they'll know we can now strike back."

The two boys rocked and whooped in their saddles. They shouted. Kenie's plaintive, "But what am I going to do?" went unheard.

They reached home, and as they dismounted in the barnyard there was a momentary feeling of insecurity underfoot. The ground seemed to tremble just a little. The barn-joists creaked and groaned. Then everything was still again. Kenie's father nodded as young faces turned quickly to him.

"Probably," he said softly. "Quite likely that was it. A few hundred miles away. They'll never know how we did it, but they won't risk trying to find out by bombing us for trying to use electricity again!"

Aloud, he said in a tired, natural voice, "Tom, I'm going to ask you to put up the horses."

Tom moved joyfully to obey. Bub leaped to help.

Kenie caught hold of her father's hand.

A great feat had been accomplished and the world had moved a step nearer to something more spacious and more sane. Universities and cities and television were closer.

Dread was now pushed a little farther back. The new climb of humanity was really begun.

But Kenie had a terrific problem all her own.

"Daddy!" she wailed desperately. "What can I do? You say I'm going to be Cissie's bridesmaid! And I haven't a thing to wear!"

One beautiful woman, and two invisible men.

THE SHADOW AND THE FLASH

by Jack London

WHEN I LOOK BACK, I REALIZE WHAT A PECULIAR FRIENDSHIP it was. First, there was Lloyd Inwood, tall, slender, and finely knit, nervous and dark. And then Paul Tichlorne, tall, slender, and finely knit, nervous and blond. Each was the replica of the other in everything except color. Lloyd's eyes were black; Paul's were blue. Under stress of excitement, the blood coursed olive in the face of Lloyd, crimson in the face of Paul. But outside this matter of coloring they were as like as two peas. Both were high-strung, prone to excessive tension and endurance, and they lived at concert pitch.

But there was a trio involved in this remarkable friendship, and the third was short, and fat, and chunky, and lazy, and, loath to say, it was I. Paul and Lloyd seemed born to rivalry with each other, and I to be peacemaker between them. We grew up together, the three of us, and often have I received the angry blows each intended for the other. They were always competing, striving to outdo each other, and when entered upon some such struggle there was no limit either to their endeavors or passions.

This intense spirit of rivalry obtained in their studies and their games. If Paul memorized one canto of "Marmion," Lloyd memorized two cantos, Paul came back with three, and Lloyd again with four, till each knew the whole poem by heart. I remember an incident that occurred at the swimming hole—an incident tragically significant of the life-struggle between them. The boys had a game of diving to the bottom of a ten-foot pool and holding on by submerged roots to see who could stay under the longest. Paul and Lloyd allowed themselves to be bantered into making the descent together. When I saw their faces, set and determined, disappear in the water as they sank swiftly down, I felt a foreboding of something dreadful.

The moments sped, the ripples died away, the face of the pool grew placid and untroubled, and neither black nor golden head broke surface in quest of air. We above grew anxious. The longest record of the longest-winded boy had been exceeded, and still there was no sign. Air bubbles trickled slowly upward, showing that the breath had been expelled from their lungs, and after that the bubbles ceased to trickle upward. Each second became interminable, and, unable longer to endure the suspense, I plunged into the water.

I found them down at the bottom, clutching tight to the roots, their heads not a foot apart, their eyes wide open, each glaring fixedly at the other. They were suffering frightful torment, writhing and twisting in the pangs of voluntary suffocation; for neither would let go and acknowledge himself beaten. I tried to break Paul's hold on the root, but he resisted me fiercely. Then I lost my breath and came to the surface, badly scared. I quickly explained the situation, and half a dozen of us went down and by main strength tore them loose. By the time we got them out, both were unconscious, and it was only after much barrel-rolling and rubbing and pounding that they finally came to their senses. They would have drowned there, had no one rescued them.

When Paul Tichlorn entered college, he let it be generally understood that he was going in for the social sciences. Lloyd Inwood, entering at the same time, elected to take the same course. But Paul had had it secretly in mind all the time to study the natural sciences, specializing on chemistry, and at the last moment he switched over. Though Lloyd had already arranged his year's work and attended the first lectures, he at once followed Paul's lead and went in for the natural sciences and especially for chemistry.

Their rivalry soon became a noted thing throughout the university. Each was a spur to the other, and they went into chemistry deeper than did ever students before—so deep, in fact, that before they took their sheepskins they could have stumped any chemistry or "cow college" professor in the institution, save "old" Moss, head of the department, and even him they puzzled and edified more than once. Lloyd's discovery of the "death Bacillus" of the sea toad, and his experiments on it with potassium cyanide, sent his name and that of his university ringing round the world; nor was Paul a whit behind when he succeeded in producing laboratory colloids exhibiting amoeba-like activities, and when he cast new light upon the processes of fertilization through his startling experiments with simple sodium chlorides and magnesium solutions on low forms of marine life.

It was in their undergraduate days, however, in the midst of their profoundest plunges into the mysteries of organic chemistry, that Doris Van Benschoten entered into their lives. Lloyd met her first, but within twenty-four hours Paul saw to it that he also made her acquaintance. Of course, they fell in love with her, and she became the only thing in life worth living for.

They wooed her with equal ardor and fire, and so intense became their struggle for her that half the student-body took to wagering wildly on the result. Even "old" Moss, one day, after an astounding demonstration in his private

laboratory by Paul, was guilty, to the extent of a month's salary, of backing him to become the bridegroom of Doris Van Benschoten.

In the end she solved the problem in her own way, to everybody's satisfaction except Paul's and Lloyd's. Getting them together, she said that she really could not choose between them because she loved them both equally well; and that, unfortunately, since polyandry was not permitted in the United States she would be compelled to forego the honor and happiness of marrying either of them. Each blamed the other for this lamentable outcome, and the bitterness between them grew more bitter.

BUT THINGS CAME TO A HEAD SOON ENOUGH. IT WAS AT MY home, after they had taken their degrees and dropped out of the world's sight, that the beginning of the end came to pass. Both were men of means, with little inclination and no necessity for professional life. My friendship and their mutual animosity were the two things that linked them in any way together. While they were very often at my place, they made it a fastidious point to avoid each other on such visits, though it was inevitable, under the circumstances, that they should come upon each other occasionally.

On the day I have in recollection, Paul Tichlorne had been mooning all morning in my study over a current scientific review. This left me free to my own affairs, and I was out among my roses when Lloyd Inwood arrived. Clipping and pruning and tacking the climbers on the porch, with my mouth full of nails, and Lloyd following me about and lending a hand now and again, we fell to discussing the mythical race of invisible people, that strange and vagrant people the traditions of which have come down to us. Lloyd warmed to the talk in his nervous, jerky fashion, and was soon interrogating the physical properties and possi-

bilities of invisibility. A perfectly black object, he contended, would elude and defy the acutest vision.

"Color is a sensation," he was saying. "It has no objective reality. Without light, we can see neither colors nor objects themselves. All objects are black in the dark, and in the dark it is impossible to see them. If no light strikes upon them, then no light is flung back from them to the eye, and so we have no vision-evidence of their being."

"But we see black objects in daylight," I objected.

"Very true," he went on warmly. "And that is because they are not perfectly black. Were they perfectly black, absolutely black, as it were, we could not see them—yes, not in the blaze of a thousand suns could we see them! And so I say; with the right pigments, properly compounded, an absolutely black paint could be produced which would render invisible whatever it was applied to."

"It would be a remarkable discovery," I said noncommittally, for the whole thing seemed too fantastic for anything but speculative purposes.

"Remarkable!" Lloyd slapped me on the shoulder. "I should say so! Why, old chap, to coat myself with such a paint would be to put the world at my feet. The secrets of kings and courts would be mine, the machinations of diplomats and politicians, the play of stock-gamblers, the plans of trusts and corporations. I could keep my hand on the inner pulse of things and become the greatest power in the world. And I—" He broke off shortly, then added, "Well, I have begun my experiments, and I don't mind telling you that I'm right in line for it."

A laugh from the doorway startled us. Paul Tichlorne was standing there, a smile of mockery on his lips.

"You forget, my dear Lloyd," he said.

"Forget what?"

"You forget," Paul went on— "ah, you forget the shadow."

I saw Lloyd's face drop, but he answered sneeringly, "I can carry a sunshade, you know." Then he turned suddenly and fiercely upon him. "Look here, Paul, you'll keep out of this if you know what's good for you."

A rupture seemed imminent, but Paul laughed good-naturedly. "I wouldn't lay fingers on your dirty pigments. Succeed beyond your most sanguine expectations, yet you will always fetch up against the shadow. You can't get away from it. Now I shall go on the very opposite tack. In the very nature of my proposition the shadow will be eliminated—"

"Transparency!" ejaculated Lloyd, instantly. "But it can't be achieved."

"Oh, no; of course not." And Paul shrugged his shoulders and strolled off.

This was the beginning of it. Both men attacked the problem with all the tremendous energy for which they were noted, and with a rancor and bitterness that made me tremble for the success of either. Each trusted me to the utmost, and in the long weeks of experimentation that followed I was made a party to both sides, listening to their theorizings and witnessing their demonstrations. Never, by word or sign, did I convey to either the slightest hint of the other's progress, and they respected me for the seal which I always put upon my lips.

Lloyd Inwood, after prolonged and unintermittent application, when the tension upon his mind and body became too great to bear, had a strange way of obtaining relief. He attended prize fights. It was at one of these brutal exhibitions, to which he had dragged me in order to tell his latest results, that his theory received striking confirmation.

"Do you see that red-whiskered man?" he asked, pointing across the ring to the fifth tier of seats on the opposite side. "And do you see the next man to him, the one in the white hat? Well, there is quite a gap between them, is there not?"

"Certainly," I answered. "They are a seat apart. The gap is the unoccupied seat."

He leaned over to me and spoke seriously. "Between the red-whiskered man and the white-hatted man sits Ben Wasson. You have heard me speak of him. He is the cleverest pugilist of his weight in the country. He is also a Caribbean Negro, full-blooded, and the blackest in the United States. He has on a black overcoat buttoned up. I saw him when he came in and took that seat. As soon as he sat down he disappeared. Watch closely; he may smile."

I was for crossing over to verify Lloyd's statement, but he restrained me. "Wait," he said.

I waited and watched, till the red-whiskered man turned his head as though addressing the unoccupied seat; and then, in that empty space, I saw the rolling whites of a pair of eyes and the white double-crescent of two rows of teeth, and for the instant I could make out a Negro's face. But with the passing of the smile his visibility passed, and the chair seemed vacant as before.

"Were he perfectly black, you could sit alongside him and not see him," Lloyd said; and I confess the illustration was apt enough to make me well-nigh convinced.

I VISITED LLOYD'S LABORATORY A NUMBER OF TIMES AFTER that, and found him always deep in his search after the absolute black. His experiments covered all sorts of pigments, such as lamp-blacks, tars, carbonized vegetable matters, soots of oils and fats, and the various carbonized animal substances.

"White light is composed of the seven primary colors," he argued to me. "But it is itself, of itself, invisible. Only by being reflected from objects do it and the objects become visible. But only that portion of it that is reflected becomes visible. For instance, here is a blue tobacco-box. The white light strikes against it, and, with one exception, all its component colors—violet, indigo, green, yellow, orange, and

red—are absorbed. The one exception is blue. It is not absorbed, but reflected. Wherefore the tobacco-box gives us a sensation of blueness. We do not see the other colors because they are absorbed. We see only the blue. For the same reason grass is green. The green waves of white light are thrown upon our eyes.”

“When we paint our houses, we do not apply color to them,” he said at another time. “What we do is to apply certain substances that have the property of absorbing from white light all the colors except those that we would have our houses appear. When a substance reflects all the colors to the eye, it seems to us white. When it absorbs all the colors, it is black. But, as I said before, we have as yet no perfect black. All the colors are not absorbed. The perfect black, guarding against high lights, will be utterly and absolutely invisible. Look at that, for example.”

He pointed to the palette lying on his work-table. Different shades of black pigments were brushed on it. One, in particular, I could hardly see. It gave my eyes a blurring sensation, and I rubbed them and looked again.

“That,” he said impressively, “is the blackest black you or any mortal man ever looked upon. But just you wait, and I’ll have a black so black that no mortal man will be able to look upon it—and see it!”

On the other hand, I used to find Paul Tichlome plunged as deeply into the study of light polarization, diffraction, and interference, single and double refraction and all manner of strange organic compounds.

“Transparency: a state or quality of body which permits all rays of light to pass through,” he defined for me. “That is what I am seeking. Lloyd blunders up against the shadow with his perfect opaqueness. But I escape it. A transparent body casts no shadow; neither does it reflect light-waves—that is, the perfectly transparent does not. So, avoiding high lights, not only will such a body cast no shadow, but, since it reflects no light, it will also be invisible.”

We were standing by the window at another time. Paul was engaged in polishing a number of lenses, which were ranged along the sill. Suddenly, after a pause in the conversation, he said, "Oh! I've dropped a lens. Stick your head out, old man, and see where it went to."

Out I started to thrust my head, but a sharp blow on the forehead caused me to recoil. I rubbed my bruised brow and gazed with reproachful inquiry at Paul, who was laughing in gleeful, boyish fashion.

"Well?" he said.

"Well?" I echoed.

"Why don't you investigate?" he demanded. And investigate I did. Before thrusting out my head, my senses, active, had told me there was nothing there, that nothing intervened between me and out-of-doors, that the aperture of the window opening was utterly empty. I stretched forth my hand and felt a hard object, smooth and cool and flat, which my touch, out of its experience, told me to be glass. I looked again, but could see positively nothing.

"White quartzose sand," Paul rattled off, "sodic carbonate, slaked lime, cullet, manganese peroxide— there you have it, the finest French plate glass, made by the great St. Gobain Company, who made the finest plate glass in the world, and this is the finest piece they ever made. It cost a king's ransom. But look at it! You can't see it. You don't know it's there till you run your head against it.

"Eh, old boy! That's merely an object-lesson—certain elements, in themselves opaque, yet so compounded as to give a resultant body which is transparent. But that is a matter of inorganic chemistry, you say. Very true. But I dare to assert, standing here on my two feet, that in the organic I can duplicate whatever occurs in the inorganic.

"Here!" He held a test-tube between me and the light, and I noted the cloudy or muddy liquid it contained. He emptied the contents of another test-tube into it, and almost instantly it became clear and sparkling.

"Or here!" With quick, nervous movements among his array of test-tubes, he turned a white solution to a wine color, and a light yellow solution to a dark brown. He dropped a piece of litmus paper into an acid, when it changed instantly to red, and on floating it in an alkali it turned as quickly to blue.

"The litmus paper is still the litmus paper," he enunciated in the formal manner of the lecturer. "I have not changed it into something else. Then what did I do? I merely changed the arrangement of its molecules. Where, at first, it absorbed all colors from the light but red, its molecular structure was so changed that it absorbed red and all colors except blue. And so it goes, *ad infinitum*. Now, what I propose to do is this."

He paused for a space.

"I propose to seek—yes, and to find—the proper reagents, which, acting upon the living organism, will bring about molecular changes analogous to those you have just witnessed. But these reagents, which I shall find, and for that matter, upon which I already have my hands, will not turn the living body to blue or red or black, but they will turn it to transparency. All light will pass through it. It will be invisible. It will cast no shadow."

A few weeks later I went hunting with Paul. He had been promising me for some time that I should have the pleasure of shooting over a wonderful dog—the most wonderful dog, in fact, that ever man shot over, so he averred, and continued to aver till my curiosity was aroused. But on the morning in question I was disappointed, for there was no dog in evidence.

"Don't see him about," Paul remarked, unconcernedly, and we set off across the fields.

I COULD NOT IMAGINE, AT THE TIME, WHAT WAS AILING ME, but I had a feeling of some impending and deadly illness. My nerves were all awry, and, from the astounding tricks

they played me, my senses seemed to have run riot. Strange sounds disturbed me. At times I heard the swish-swish of grass being shoved aside, and once the patter of feet across a patch of stony ground.

"Did you hear anything, Paul?" I asked once.

But he shook his head, and thrust his feet steadily forward.

While climbing a fence, I heard the low, eager whine of a dog, apparently from within a couple of feet of me; but on looking about me I saw nothing.

I dropped to the ground, limp and trembling.

"Paul," I said, "we had better return to the house. I am afraid I am going to be sick."

"Nonsense, old man," he answered. "The sunshine has gone to your head like wine. You'll be all right. It's wonderful weather."

But, passing along a narrow path through a clump of cottonwoods, some object brushed against my legs and I stumbled and nearly fell. I looked with sudden anxiety at Paul.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Tripping over your own feet?"

I kept my tongue between my teeth and plodded on, though sore perplexed and thoroughly satisfied that some acute and mysterious malady had attacked my nerves. So far my eyes had escaped; but, when we got to the open fields again, even my vision went back on me. Strange flashes of varicolored, rainbow light began to appear and disappear on the path before me. Still, I managed to keep myself in hand, till the varicolored lights persisted for a space of fully twenty seconds, dancing and flashing in continuous play. Then I sat down, weak and shaky.

"It's all up with me," I gasped, covering my eyes with my hands. "It has attacked my eyes. Paul, take me home."

But Paul laughed long and loud. "What did I tell you?—the most wonderful dog, eh? Well, what do you think?"

He turned partly from me and began to whistle. I heard the patter of feet, the panting of a heated animal, and the unmistakable yelp of a dog. Then Paul stooped down and apparently fondled the empty air.

"Here! Give me your fist."

And he rubbed my hand over the cold nose and jowls of a dog. A dog it certainly was, with the shape and the smooth, short coat of a pointer.

Suffice to say, I speedily recovered my spirits and control. Paul put a collar about the animal's neck and tied his handkerchief to its tail. And then there was demonstrated to us the remarkable sight of an empty collar and a waving handkerchief cavorting over the fields. It was something to see that collar and handkerchief pin a bevy of quail in a clump of locusts and remain rigid and immovable till we had flushed the birds.

Now and again the dog emitted the varicolored light-flashes I have mentioned. The one thing, Paul explained, which he had not anticipated and which he doubted could be overcome.

"They're a large family," he said, "these sun dogs, wind dogs, rainbows, halos, and parhelia. They are produced by refraction of light from mineral and ice crystals, from mist, rain, spray, and no end of things; and I am afraid they are the penalty I must pay for transparency. I escaped Lloyd's shadow only to fetch up against the rainbow flash."

A couple of days later, before the entrance to Paul's laboratory, I encountered a terrible stench. So overpowering was it that it was easy to discover the source—a mass of putrescent matter on the doorstep which in general outlines resembled a dog.

Paul was startled when he investigated my find. It was his invisible dog, or rather, what had been his invisible dog, for it was now plainly visible. It had been playing about but a few minutes before in all health and strength. Closer

examination revealed that the skull had been crushed by some heavy blow. While it was strange that the animal should have been killed, the inexplicable thing was that it should decay so quickly.

"The reagents I injected into its system were harmless," Paul explained. "Yet they were powerful, and it appears that when death comes they force practically instantaneous disintegration. Remarkable! Most remarkable! Well, the only thing is not to die. They do not harm so long as one lives. But I do wonder who smashed in that dog's head."

Light, however, was thrown upon this when a frightened housemaid brought the news that Gaffer Bedshaw had that very morning, not more than an hour back, gone violently insane, and was strapped down at home, in the huntsman's lodge, where he raved of a battle with a ferocious and gigantic beast that he had encountered in the Tichlorne pasture. He claimed that the thing, whatever it was, was invisible, that with his own eyes he had seen that it was invisible; wherefore his tearful wife and daughters shook their heads, and wherefore he but waxed the more violent, and the gardener and the coachman tightened the straps by another hole.

Nor, while Paul Tichlorne was thus successfully mastering the problem of invisibility, was Lloyd Inwood a whit behind. I went over in answer to a message of his to come and see how he was getting on. Now his laboratory was in an isolated situation in the midst of his vast grounds. It was built in a pleasant little glade, surrounded on all sides by a dense forest growth, and was to be reached by way of a winding and erratic path. But I had travelled that path so often as to know every foot of it. Imagine my surprise when I came upon the glade and found no laboratory! The quaint shed structure with its red sandstone chimney was not. Nor did it look as if it ever had been. There were no signs of ruin, or *débris*—nothing.

I STARTED TO WALK ACROSS WHAT HAD ONCE BEEN THE SITE of the laboratory. "This," I said to myself, "should be where the step went up to the door." Barely were the words out of my mouth when I stubbed my toe on some obstacle, pitched forward, and butted my head into something that felt very much like a door. I reached out my hand. It was a door. I found the knob and turned it. And at once, as the door swung inward on its hinges, the whole interior of the laboratory impinged upon my vision.

Greeting Lloyd, I closed the door and backed up the path a few paces. I could see nothing of the building. Returning and opening the door, at once all the furniture and every detail of the interior were visible. It was indeed startling, the sudden transition from void to light and form and color.

"What do you think of it, eh?" Lloyd asked, wringing my hand. "I slapped a couple of coats of absolute black on the outside yesterday afternoon to see how it worked. How's your head? You bumped it pretty solidly, I imagine."

"Never mind that," he interrupted my congratulations. "I've something better for you to do."

While he talked he began to strip, and when he stood naked before me he thrust a pot and brush into my hand and said, "Here, give me a coat of this."

It was an oily, shellac-like stuff, which spread quickly and easily over the skin and dried immediately.

"Merely preliminary and precautionary," he explained when I had finished; "but now for the real stuff."

I picked up another pot he indicated, and glanced inside, but could see nothing.

"It's empty," I said.

"Stick your finger in it."

I obeyed, and was aware of a sensation of cool moistness. On withdrawing my hand I glanced at the forefinger, the one I had immersed, but it had disappeared. I moved it, and knew from the alternate tension and relaxation of the

muscles that I moved it, but it defied my sense of sight. To all appearances I had been shorn of a finger; nor could I get any visual impression of it till I extended it under the skylight and saw its shadow plainly blotted on the floor.

Lloyd chuckled. "Now spread it on, and keep your eyes open."

I dipped the brush into the seemingly empty pot, and gave him a long stroke across his chest. With the passage of the brush the living flesh disappeared from beneath. I covered his right leg, and he was a one-legged man defying all laws of gravitation. And so, stroke by stroke, member by member, I painted Lloyd Inwood into nothingness. It was a creepy experience, and I was glad when nothing remained in sight but his burning black eyes, poised apparently unsupported in mid-air.

"I have a refined and harmless solution for them," he said. "A fine spray with an air-brush, and presto! I am not."

This deftly accomplished, he said, "Now I shall move about, and you tell me what sensations you experience."

"In the first place, I cannot see you," I said, and I could hear his gleeful laugh from the midst of the emptiness. "Of course," I continued, "you cannot escape your shadow, but that was to be expected. When you pass between my eye and an object, the object disappears, but so unusual and incomprehensible is its disappearance that it seems to me as though my eyes had blurred. When you move rapidly, I experience a bewildering succession of blurs. The blurring sensation makes my eyes ache and my brain tired."

"Have you any other warnings of my presence?" he asked.

"No, and yes," I answered. "When you are near me I have feelings similar to those produced by dank warehouses, gloomy crypts, and deep mines. And as sailors feel the loom of the land on dark nights, so I think I feel the loom of your body. But it is all very vague and intangible."

Long we talked that last morning in his laboratory; and when I turned to go, he put his unseen hand in mine with nervous grip, and said, "Now I shall conquer the world!" And I could not dare to tell him of Paul Tichlome's equal success.

At home I found a note from Paul, asking me to come up immediately, and it was high noon when I came spinning up the driveway on my bicycle. Paul called me from the tennis court, and I dismounted and went over. But the court was empty. As I stood there, gaping open-mouthed, a tennis ball struck me on the arm, and another whizzed past my ear.

For aught I could see of my assailant, they came whirling at me from out of space, and right well was I peppered with them. But when the balls already flung at me began to come back for the second whack, I realized the situation. Seizing a racquet and keeping my eyes open, I quickly saw a rainbow flash appearing and disappearing and darting over the ground. I took out after it, and when I laid the racquet upon it for a half-dozen stout blows, Paul's voice rang out:

"Enough! Enough! Oh! Ouch! Stop! You're landing on my naked skin, you know! Ow! O-w-w! I'll be good! I'll be good! I only wanted you to see my metamorphosis," he said ruefully, and I imagined that he was rubbing his hurts.

A few minutes later we were playing tennis—a handicap on my part, for I could have no knowledge of his position save when all the angles between himself, the sun, and me, were in proper conjunction. Then he flashed, and only then. But the flashes were more brilliant than the rainbow—purest blue, most delicate violet, brightest yellow, and all the intermediary shades, with the scintillant brilliancy of the diamond, dazzling, blinding, iridescent.

But in the midst of our play I felt a sudden cold chill, reminding me of deep mines and gloomy crypts, such a chill as I had experienced that very morning. The next

moment, close to the net, I saw a ball rebound in mid-air and empty space, and at the same instant, a score of feet away, Paul Tichlorne emitted a rainbow flash. It could not be he from whom the ball rebounded, and with sickening dread I realized that Lloyd Inwood had come upon the scene. To make sure, I looked for his shadow, and there it was, a shapeless blotch the size of his body (the sun was overhead), moving along the ground. I remembered his threat, and felt sure that all the long years of rivalry were about to culminate in an uncanny battle.

I cried a warning to Paul, and heard a snarl as of a wild beast, and an answering snarl. I saw the dark blotch move swiftly across the court, and a brilliant burst of vari-colored light moving with equal swiftness to meet it; and then shadow and flash came together and there was the sound of unseen blows. The net went down before my frightened eyes. I sprang toward the fighters, crying:

"For God's sake!"

But their locked bodies smote against my knees, and I was overthrown.

"You keep out of this, old man!" I heard the voice of Lloyd Inwood from out of the emptiness. And then Paul's voice crying, "Yes, we've had enough of peace-making."

From the sound of their voices I knew they had separated. I could not locate Paul, and so approached the shadow that represented Lloyd. But from the other side came a stunning blow on the point of my jaw, and I heard Paul scream angrily, "Now will you keep away?"

Then they came together again, the impact of their blows, their groans and gasps, and the swift flashings and shadow-movings telling plainly of the deadliness of the struggle.

I shouted for help, and Gaffer Bedshaw came running into the court. I could see, as he approached, that he was looking at me strangely, but he collided with the combatants and was hurled headlong to the ground. With des-

pairing shriek and a cry of "O Lord, I've got 'em!" he sprang to his feet and tore madly out of the court.

I could do nothing, so I sat up, fascinated and powerless, and watched the struggle. The noonday sun beat down with dazzling brightness on the naked tennis court. And it was naked. All I could see was the blotch of shadow and the rainbow flashes, the dust rising from the invisible feet, the earth tearing up from beneath the straining foot-grips, and the wire screen bulge once or twice as their bodies hurled against it. That was all, and after a time even that ceased. There were no more flashes, and the shadow had become long and stationary; and I remembered their set boyish faces when they clung to the roots in the deep coolness of the pool.

They found me an hour afterward. Some inkling of what had happened got to the servants and they quitted the Tichlome service in a body. Gaffer Bedshaw never recovered from the second shock he received, and is confined in a madhouse, hopelessly incurable. The secrets of their marvelous discoveries died with Paul and Lloyd, both laboratories being destroyed by grief-stricken relatives. As for myself, I no longer care for chemical research, and science is a taboo topic in my household. I have returned to my roses. Nature's colors are good enough for me.

The Martians were the least of his worries.

SPOKESMAN FOR TERRA

by Hugh Raymond

THE MARTIAN DELEGATE WITH THE UNPRONOUNCEABLE NAME raised one of his six prehensile arms for silence. Immediately, the hubbub filling the interior of the great hall subsided. All eyes—including the three or four hundred possessed by the twelve Martians—turned toward the dais.

"My friends," he began, lisping in a thin voice that taxed the powerful amplifiers straining to carry it more than a few feet beyond the edge of the platform, "today is a highly significant one in the history of both the Earth and Mars. After long discussion, a trade agreement is to be signed, on the one hand by us representatives of the All-Martian Directorate, on the other by the delegates of the United States of Earth. Too long have our planets been separated from each other. Too long has bickering about profits, tariffs, and trade-rates kept our two races apart. Today begins the Epoch of Plenty, wherein Earth and Mars shall contribute to each other of their best, both economic and cultural. In return for our ancient art, you of Earth will give us music; for our architectural heritage, your greatest works of literature; for our synthetic food

and liquors, your natural grains, fruits and meats. Together our planets shall live and work in harmony."

With a flourish of his upraised tentacle, the Martian finished his talk. Amidst thunderous applause he stalked majestically to the council table, where he poised a solid gold fountain pen above the elaborately engraved trade treaty.

Scarcely had he bent forward, preparatory to inscribing his mark when a commotion at the back of the hall interrupted the proceedings. An usher came running down the center aisle.

"Your Excellencies!" he shouted. "There's a horrible-looking creature outside in a fish-bowl who demands representation at this Council!"

As if to punctuate this explosion of words, the great doors burst open and a weird-looking structure rolled into the room, carried on the backs of four gigantic sea-turtles. It was indeed much as the usher had described. Within a large fish-bowl-like tank floated a huge squid which pompously raised itself out of the water with the aid of several slimy, ropy arms and gazed at the further end of the hall.

"Who's in command here?" it oozed noisily, in a voice that sounded like a crocodile singing Wagner.

A tall Earthman stepped forth from the group behind the table. He advanced as far as he could without fainting from the stench, and bowed.

"No one is in command here. This is the Inter-planetary Conference for the Adjustment of Trade. Who are you?"

The great eyes roved boredly about.

"Democracy, huh?" The creature turned round abruptly and said something uncomplimentary to its attendants who were furiously busy mopping up the sloshing residue that poured down the sides of the tank.

"I'm here to prevent a great miscarriage of justice. I understand," it continued, leaning forward aggressively,

"that some of you things are prepared to sign away the rights to certain resources of this planet. I have no particular bone to pick with *that* funny-lookin' contraption," he said, pointing with complete disregard of etiquette at the chief Martian delegate, "because he's the party of the second part. But, as an Earth-creature, I protest against the signing of this treaty on the grounds that confiscation without representation is tyranny!"

The Earthman put one hand to his throat.

"You're an Earth-creature?" he asked squeakily. "But who are you and whom do you represent?"

The squid dipped back into its tank for a noggin of water before replying. It resumed its belligerent attitude and cocked one of its eyes.

"We won't bother about who I am, but I represent the United Undersea Kingdoms and Peoples. Our territory stretches from the South to the North Poles under all seas and oceans. We also have jurisdiction over the interior of the Earth wherever water has accumulated and we claim by right of prior occupancy all creeks, ponds, lakes and rivers over 40 feet in depth. We undersea people haven't bothered getting in touch with you," it paused and chuckled softly with a hideous slapping noise, "... you surface things, until now because you don't interest us. But we got wind of this deal you're trying to put through and we want to put a stop to it or at least come to some agreement."

"Just what do you want?"

The squid wrapped an arm around the lower part of its body like a man clutching his chin with one hand, and considered a moment.

"We'll be satisfied," it replied finally, "if you'll let us in on some trade in return for the large quantities of water you've planned to export to Mars. I know that this sort of puts a crimp into you surface things' plans. But justice is justice. We demand our rights."

The group on the platform conferred excitedly. Legal books were brought out and long minutes consumed in bitter wrangling. Finally the Martian delegate nudged the chief Earth representative under the ribs.

"Better let him have his way," he lisped and winked about twenty of his eyes. "Let him sign the treaty. 'There's more than one way to hook a squid,' as our long-dead ancestors used to say when Mars had oceans."

Blandly the Earthman stepped forward once more and again bowed.

"If you will be so kind as to step . . . er . . . come up to the platform, I am sure that we can adjust all differences. It merely requires adding a subclause to the definition of the party of the first part." He paused and smiled genially, rubbing his hands. "Business is business."

With a satisfied smirk, the squid settled back into its tank with a dolorous splash and braced itself for the journey. Abruptly its motive power began to push it forward. Splashing slimy and odorous sea-water over the expensive red-plush carpets, the turtles managed to haul the Plenipotentiary Representative of the United Undersea Kingdoms and Peoples to the platform.

The Earthman delegate took out his fountain pen. "Sign on the dotted line," he said, handing it gingerly to the squid, and gestured toward the table. The squid raised itself once more and posed, pompously.

Harmony reigned within the hall and the faces of the delegates present were wreathed in smiles. The prospects of a golden flood rolling in from the hitherto-thought-to-be-worthless depths expanded their souls and filled them with liquid happiness.

"Ahem!" coughed the Plenipotentiary Representative and bent forward to sign the treaty, holding on to the sides of his tank with a few extra arms.

Suddenly, just as the point of the pen touched the paper, a great wind blew up within the hall and whirled delegates,

papers, red-plush carpet, P.R.U.U.K.P. and motive power into a tangled heap. Howling mournfully, the tornado rushed madly from wall to wall and quickly reduced the dignified gathering to a tattered, writhing mess. Windows blew outwards on all sides.

Frightened eyes stared upward, as directly in the center of the great room, a misty mass began to coalesce in great, whirling streams of vapor and grey cloud.

"So sorry to have inconvenienced you solid things," whispered a ghostly, icy-cold voice that cut the air like a knife, "but as Accredited Delegate of the Amalgamated Atmospheric Association of Earth's Attenuated Entities, I really must insist . . ."

Dead men don't talk . . . but if they will write letters . . . ?

HE WAS ASKING AFTER YOU

by Margery Allingham

DORNFORD KILLED FELLOWES SOMEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA.

Apart from the fact that it was a reprehensible sort of thing to do anyway, it was particularly unpleasant because they were friends and it was done for gain.

I knew them both. They and my brother George had been to a prep school together and had gone on to Layer in the same year.

Dornford was a little chap with protruding, pale-blue eyes and a greater capacity for terror than any man I ever knew. He took medicine finally and, although he did get his degrees, never practised because he was not capable of it.

His brief periods of locum work were histories of disaster. Fear was ingrained in him, including a passionate terror of poverty, which was unfortunate, because his private means were less than fifty pounds a year.

Fellowes was his exact opposite. He was a great heavy person, dark-skinned and powerful, and he had a way of going out after the thing he wanted which was positively frightening because of its energy.

He had about six hundred a year of his own and leaned towards an adventurous career.

Why he put up with Dornford no one ever really knew. My own opinion is that Dornford was put in his care at the prep school and looking after the terrified little creature became a habit with him.

Anyway, after they left school, Dornford was always dragging along behind Fellowes, sponging on him a little but too indeterminate a personality to be a serious nuisance.

Finally Fellowes actually grew to like him, or at any rate to depend upon him for company. All the same, how they came to go into the Australian bush together is one of those minor miracles which always seem to be occurring in the face of the psychologists.

Fellowes suddenly developed an interest in primitive tribal customs. He wanted to investigate them for himself, and he took Dornford with him, first because he happened to be staying with him at the time the expedition was planned, and secondly because he thought he might conceivably be useful minding the medicine chest.

They set out from Adelaide one fine day and Fellowes never came back.

He died of snake-bite.

When he returned alone Dornford explained that he had not the necessary serum with him, and that despite heroic efforts, his "poor friend had passed away."

There was considerable scandal at the time, largely due to a truly horrible story which the bearers brought back with them. It described Fellowes calling to his friend in his agony and Dornford sitting with his hands over his ears and his eyes closed while the beads of sweat rolled down his face.

After this someone who ought to have known thought he remembered that Dornford did have the serum with him, and altogether there was so much talk that he was lucky to scuttle back home to England without an inquiry.

There was trouble over here too, when it turned out that before starting on the expedition Fellowes and Dornford had solemnly made wills in each other's favour.

Dornford's story was that Fellowes had known it was going to be dangerous and had insisted on the precaution "in case." No one believed him, but no one wanted an open scandal, and Fellowes' relatives were wealthy people.

Nearly everyone cut Dornford, though. He did not seem to care. He netted his inheritance and came to live in the village next to ours, which was unnecessary of him since there are so many other villages.

We used to see him about in our market town and, since it is ridiculous to quarrel with a neighbor, we kept up a reserved acquaintance with him.

The first letter came to him from Melbourne. Jenkinson, who had been at the Varsity with the two of them and who had kept up a dilatory correspondence for some years, wrote one of his rare letters. It was a straggling epistle of the "do you remember—?" variety favoured by the lonely Englishman abroad.

One paragraph so rattled Dornford that he called on my brother to show it to him.

"By the way, I met old Bucky Fellowes in the street here today. He said he was prospecting, whatever that may mean. He was asking after you."

Dornford was a bit green when he pointed to the final sentence and his pale eyes bulged horribly.

"Must have been some other chap, mustn't it?" he said. "Jenkinson was a muddle-minded ass, wasn't he?"

"Yes," we said dubiously, remembering him. "Yes, perhaps he was."

Dornford went back to his olde worlde cottage reassured.

The second letter came from Colombo. Dornford did not show it to us for some days and when at last he did

he was so nervous that he giggled hysterically all the time he talked.

"It's from Mrs. Wentworth," he said. "The wife of a Colonel my father used to know."

We read it in silence. The postscript was interesting.

"P.S.—We met such an interesting man on board ship. He seems to be an old friend of yours—a Mr. Buchanan Fellowes. He was asking after you."

"Odd co-coincidence, isn't it?" giggled Dornford. "T-two people making a silly mistake like that? We buried Bucky, you know; buried him deep. It was under a great spreading tuberous plant. The branches were like snakes. I-I can see them now."

He was rather beastly and George took him away and gave him a drink.

There was peace after this for nearly two months. Dornford had a little car and we saw him about in it once or twice. He still looked a bit pallid, but then he was never a healthy type.

The third letter arrived one very hot June evening. We had a tennis party on, and when Dornford rang my brother he refused to go over immediately, although he promised to drop in later in the evening. Long before the appointed hour, however, Dornford had arrived at our house. He hid in the study and George had to leave his game and go in to him.

Because I was curious I wandered along myself some minutes later to find them both staring at a sheet of flimsy paper. Dornford looked as though he had been very sick and even George was disturbed.

The letter was from Dornford's uncle. He was on a cruise in the Mediterranean and had written from Port Said.

"How small the world is!

"Walking along a foreign street, surrounded by every sort of nationality, caste and creed, who should I meet but a friend of yours. He recognized me from seeing me at a Speech Day at Layer more years ago than I care to remember.

"We exchanged cards—or rather I gave him mine. He was temporarily without, having been some time away from home. His name was Buchanan Fellowes. Wasn't that friend of yours who died in Australia a Fellowes too? I did not like to ask him if it was a relative. He was asking after you."

We soothed Dornford as best we could, but it was not easy.

"Bucky must have had a brother," said George without conviction.

Dornford looked at him with a lop-sided smile and eyes blank with fear.

"He was the only son of his mother, and his father was d-d-dead," he said.

We let him go home.

Naturally we did not forget him. There had been a dreadful note of urgency common to each letter which left itself firmly fixed in one's mind.

George and I went over to the cottage the following morning, and spent an hour or so doing our clumsy best to cheer Dornford up.

"It's a hoax," I said, trying to sound convincing. "Someone's trying to scare you . . . someone you knew in Australia."

My voice trailed away as the miserable little creature dropped his face into his hands. George grimaced at me angrily, and we stood helplessly together looking around the prim little room furnished with the fake antiques and the little bits of Birmingham brass. It was one of those cottages in which the front door leads directly into the

main room, so that when the postman brought the second delivery the letter fell directly on to the mat at our feet.

Dornford, who had put down his hands at the sound of the knock, sat staring at the grey envelope on the floor without attempting to pick it up. He was shaking all over, and his small insignificant face was utterly without expression.

I found to my astonishment that I was a little afraid of the letter myself. It was George who retrieved it.

"I should read it," he said, throwing it over to Dornford. "You're getting jumpy and inclined to dramatise the thing. This may have nothing to do with the business at all."

Dornford took the letter with fingers which curled.

"It's from—my—old nurse," he said. "She's a dear old—old—g-girl. I believe she's g-genuinely fond of me."

He was tearing the envelope to ribbons in his efforts to get it open, but the sight of the old-fashioned spidery writing seemed to have cheered him considerably.

"She—she lives at Southampton," he remarked absently.

"Southampton?" I echoed sharply, and wished I had bitten my tongue out.

Dornford goggled at me. "Southampton," he whispered. "Southampton. Oh my God, that's where he'd land. Read it, George. Read it aloud."

It was an uncomfortable moment, and George took the sheets of paper and cleared his throat rather noisily before he began. I have never heard him read so badly.

It was a very ordinary affectionate note until halfway down the second page, when the passage we had all expected occurred.

"I must tell you, Mr. Johnny; who do you think I met in the street this morning but young Mr. Bucky Fellowes. He seemed very pleased to see me, but would not come in, although of course I

asked him to. I must say he did not look at all well, in fact I was surprised to see him up and about when he looked so queer. But he tells me it's not a healthy part at all where he's been, so I expect that's it. He was asking after you."

Dornford tottered over to George's side and looked over his shoulder.

"Yesterday's date," he said huskily. "Yesterday in Southampton. To-day—where?"

We were terribly afraid he was going out of his mind. He barricaded himself in the cottage, in spite of our protestations, and built a fire and crouched over it, although it was July. He was terribly cold, he said.

George did his best with him.

"Look here, Dornford," he said at last in a determined effort to hang on to sanity at all costs, "there must be a perfectly logical explanation for all this. I'll go down to Southampton tonight and see the old lady. Either she's made a mistake, or she's had the story put up to her. I say, why don't you come with me?"

Dornford was too terrified to set foot outside the house, however, and in the end George did not go either, for the fifth letter came by the evening post. It was from a girl we all knew, and there is no need to give her name. Only one paragraph mattered.

"I saw Bucky Fellowes in Bond Street this morning. It was marvellous to see the old man again after all these years. He has altered terribly, of course, but a stretch at home will put him right.

"I was so surprised to see him (some idiot told me he was dead), that I am afraid I may have been a little offhand with him. You know how one is if one's flustered. If you see him, give him all my

love and tell him to look me up. I've never forgotten him. He was asking after you."

Dornford had one more letter. It came while George was with him on the following day. It was a note from Andrews, landlord of The Feathers. It came by hand, and was to the point.

"Dear Sir,—There is a gentleman here asking for your address. His name is B. Fellowes, Esq. Would you be wishful for me to send him up? Yours faithfully, B. Andrews, prop."

Dornford began to gibber, and to soothe him George went back to the The Feathers with the bearer to interview the practical joker. He was not there. Andrews had left him in the parlour while he reconnoitered and could only suppose that he must have "slipped out unbeknownst." He was a grey sort of gentleman, he said.

We never saw Dornford again, at least not alive. He was lying on his face on his own hearthrug when George got back. Old Meadows, our local M.D., who did the P.M., said his heart had simply stopped.

We were all very shocked, of course, but not deeply grieved or brokenhearted. Dornford was not a lovable soul in life, and death did not make him any more attractive. He was buried in the village cemetery. A more quiet, unobtrusive ceremony was never performed. There was not even an announcement in the local paper, let alone London papers.

There Dornford's story ends, except for one little thing which was curious. Two days after the funeral I had a note from Maisie Fielding, my scatter-brained fashion-artist friend. She was over from her home in Paris for one of her

brief London visits. After a well-nigh undecipherable letter about nothing at all she added a postscript:

“Going down the Haymarket, my dear, who do you think I’ve just seen?—clinging together as usual. Bucky Fellowes and that awful little John Dornford. Bucky was in front, striding along with his friend clutching his coat tails. It was no use trying to stop them. They seemed to be in a terrible hurry. Heaven knows where they were going.”

*Beauty and beast—a little girl and a monster—with
a difference!*

STRANGE PLAYFELLOW

by Isaac Asimov

"NINETY-EIGHT—NINETY-NINE—ONE HUNDRED."

Gloria withdrew her chubby little forearm from before her eyes and stood for a moment, wrinkling her nose and blinking in the sunlight. Then, she gazed about her and withdrew a few cautious steps from the tree against which she had been leaning.

She craned her neck to investigate the possibilities of a clump of bushes. The quiet was profound except for the incessant buzzing of insects and the occasional chirrup of some hardy bird, braving the midday sun.

Gloria pouted. "I'll bet he went inside the house, and I've told him a million times that that's not fair." With tiny lips pressed together tightly and a severe frown crinkling her forehead, she moved determinedly towards the two-story building on the other side of the fence.

Too late, she heard a rustling sound behind her, followed by the distinctive and rhythmic clump-clump of Robbie's heavy feet. She whirled about to see her traitorous companion emerge from hiding and make for the "home" tree at full speed.

Gloria shrieked in dismay. "Wait, Robbie! That wasn't fair, Robbie! You promised you wouldn't run before I found you." Her little feet could make no headway at all against Robbie's giant strides. Then, within ten feet of "home," Robbie's pace suddenly slowed to the merest of crawls, and Gloria with one final burst of wild speed touched the welcome bark of "home" first.

Gleefully, she turned on the faithful Robbie. "Robbie can't run," she shouted at the top of her eight-year-old voice. "I can beat him any day. He's a terrible runner!"

Robbie didn't answer—because he couldn't. In spite of all science could do, it was still impossible to equip robots with phonographic attachments of sufficient complexity—not without sacrificing mobility. Consequently, he contented himself with snatching her up in the air and whirling her about till she begged to be put down again.

"Anyway, Robbie, it's my turn to hide now," she insisted seriously, "because you've got longer legs and you promised not to run till I found you."

Robbie nodded his head and obediently faced the tree. A thin, metal film descended over his glowing eyes and from within his body came a steady metallic clicking—for all the world like a metronome counting off the seconds.

"Don't peek now—and don't skip any numbers," and Gloria scurried for cover.

At the hundredth second, up went the eyelids, and the glowing red of Robbie's eyes swept the prospect. They rested for a moment on a bit of colorful gingham that protruded from behind a boulder. Thereupon one tentacle slapped against his gleaming metal chest with a resounding clang and another pointed straight at the boulder. Gloria emerged sulkily.

"You peeked!" she exclaimed with gross unfairness. "Besides I'm tired of playing hide-and-seek. I want a ride."

But Robbie was hurt at the unjust accusation, so he

seated himself carefully and shook his head ponderously from side to side.

Gloria changed her tone to one of gentle coaxing immediately. "Come on, Robbie. I didn't mean it about the peeking. Give me a ride. If you don't, I'm going to cry," and her face twisted into an appalling position.

Hard-hearted Robbie paid scant attention to this dreadful prospect, and Gloria found it necessary to play her trump card.

"If you don't," she exclaimed warmly, "I won't tell you any more fairy tales, so there!"

Robbie gave in immediately and unconditionally and nodded his head vigorously until the metal of his neck hummed. Carefully, he raised the little girl and placed her on his broad, flat shoulders.

Gloria's threatened tears vanished immediately and she crowed with delight. Robbie's metal skin, kept at the constant temperature of seventy degrees by the high resistance coils within, felt nice and comfortable, and the beautifully loud sound her shoes made as they bumped rhythmically against his chest was enchanting.

"I knew you'd let me ride for the fairy tales, Robbie," she giggled. "I knew it. She grasped him about the head and began bouncing up and down.

"Faster, Robbie, faster," and the robot increased his speed until the vibration forced out Gloria's happy laughter in convulsive jerks. Clear across the field he sped, to the patch of tall grass on the other side, where he stopped with a suddenness that evoked a shriek from his flushed rider, and tumbled her onto the soft, natural carpet.

Gloria gasped and panted and gave voice to intermittent whispered exclamations of "That was nice!"

Robbie waited until she had caught her breath and then lifted a tentacle with which he gently pulled her hair—a sign that he wished her attention.

"What do you want, Robbie?" she asked roguishly, pretending an artless perplexity that fooled the wise Robbie not at all. He only pulled one golden curl the harder.

"Oh, I know! You want a story." Robbie nodded rapidly. "Which one?" Robbie curled one tentacular finger into a semi-circle. "But I've told you Cinderella a million times. Aren't you tired of it?" The semi-circle persisted.

"Oh, well." Gloria composed herself, ran over the details of the tale in her mind, and began.

"Are you ready? Well—once upon a time there was a beautiful little girl whose name was Ella. And she had a terribly cruel step-mother and two very ugly and very cruel step-sisters and—"

Gloria was reaching the very climax of the tale when the interruption came.

"Gloria!"

"Mama's calling me," said Gloria, not quite happily. "Carry me back to the house, Robbie."

Robbie obeyed with alacrity. Gloria's mother was a source of uneasiness to him.

"I've shouted myself hoarse, Gloria," Mrs. Weston said severely. "Where were you?"

"I was with Robbie," quavered Gloria. "I was telling him Cinderella, and I forgot it was dinnertime."

"Well, it's a pity Robbie forgot, too." Then, as if that reminded her of the robot's presence, she whirled towards him. "You may go, Robbie. She doesn't need you now." Then, brutally, "And don't come back till I call you."

Robbie turned to go, but hesitated as Gloria cried out in his defense. "Let him stay, Mama, please let him stay. I want to finish Cinderella for him."

"Gloria!"

"Honest and truly, Mama, he'll stay so quiet, you won't even know he's here. Won't you, Robbie?"

Robbie nodded his massive head up and down once, in manifest fear of the woman before him.

"Gloria, if you don't stop this at once, you shan't see Robbie for a whole week."

The girl's eyes fell. "All right! But Cinderella is his favorite story!"

The robot left with a disconsolate step and Gloria choked back a sob.

George Weston wasn't pleased when his wife walked in. After ten years of married life, he still was so unutterably foolish as to love her, and there was no question that he was always glad to see her—still Sunday afternoons just after dinner were sacred to him and his idea of solid comfort was to be left in utter solitude for two or three hours. Consequently, he fixed his eye firmly on the latest report of the Douglas expedition to the Moon (which looked as if it might actually succeed) and pretended she wasn't there.

Mrs. Weston waited patiently for two minutes, then impatiently for two more, and finally broke the silence.

"George!"

"Hmpph!"

"George, I say! Will you put down that paper and look at me?"

The paper rustled to the floor and Weston turned a weary face towards his wife, "What is it, dear?"

"You know what it is, George. It's Gloria and that terrible machine."

"What terrible machine?"

"Now don't pretend you don't know what I'm talking about. It's that robot Gloria calls Robbie. He doesn't leave her for a moment."

"Well, why should he? He's not supposed to. And he certainly isn't a terrible machine. He's the best darn robot money can buy and Lord knows he set me back half a year's income. He's worth it, too—darn sight cleverer, he is, than half my office staff."

He made a move to pick up the paper again, but his wife was quicker and snatched it away.

"You listen to me, George. I won't have my daughter entrusted to a machine—and I don't care how clever it is. A child just isn't made to be guarded by a thing of metal."

"Dear! A robot is infinitely more to be trusted than a human nurse-maid. Robbie was constructed for only one purpose—to be the companion of a little child. His entire 'mentality' has been created for the purpose. He just can't help being faithful and loving and kind. He's a machine—made so."

"Yes, but something might go wrong. Some—some—" Mrs. Weston was a bit hazy about the insides of a robot—"some little jigger will come loose and the awful thing will go berserk and—and—" She couldn't bring herself to complete the quite obvious thought.

"Nonsense," Weston denied. "You're jumping at shadows, Grace. Pretend Robbie's a dog. I've seen hundreds of children no less crazy about their pets."

"A dog is different. George, we must get rid of that horrible thing. You can easily sell it back to the company."

"That's out, Grace, and I don't want to hear of it again. You'd better stop reading 'Frankenstein'—if that's what you've been doing."

And with that he walked out of the room in a huff.

And yet he loved his wife—and what was worse, his wife knew it. George Weston, after all, was only a man, and his wife made full use of every art and wile which a clumsier and more scrupulous sex has learned from time immemorial to fear.

Ten times in the ensuing week, he would cry, "Robbie stays—and that's final!" and each time it was weaker and accompanied by a louder and more agonized groan.

Came the day, at last, when Weston approached his daughter guiltily and suggested a "beautiful" visivox show in the village.

Gloria clapped her hands happily. "Can Robbie go?"

"No, dear," and how his conscience did twinge, "they won't allow robots at the visivox—and besides you can tell him all about it when you get home." He stumbled over the last few words and decided within himself that he made a terribly poor liar.

Gloria came back from town bubbling over with enthusiasm, for the visivox had been a gorgeous spectacle indeed, and the antics of the famous comic, Francis Frin, amid the fierce "leopard-men of the Moon" had evoked delightfully hysterical bursts of laughter.

She ran into the house joyfully and stopped suddenly at the sight of a beautiful collie which regarded her out of serious brown eyes as it wagged its tail on the porch.

"Oh, what a nice dog." Gloria approached cautiously and patted it. "Is it for me, Daddy?"

Weston cleared his throat miserably and wondered whether the substitution would do any good. "Yes, dear!"

"Oh—! Thank you very much, Daddy." Then, turning precipitously, she ran down the basement steps, shouting as she went, "Oh Robbie! Come and see what Daddy's brought me, Robbie!"

In a minute she returned, a frightened little girl. "Mama, Robbie isn't in his room. Where is he?" There was no answer, and George Weston coughed and suddenly seemed to be extremely interested in an aimlessly drifting cloud. Gloria's voice quavered on the verge of tears. "Where's Robbie, Mama?"

Mrs. Weston sat down and drew her daughter gently to her. "Don't feel bad, Gloria. Robbie has—gone away."

"Gone away? Where? Where's he gone away, Mama?"

"No one knows, darling. He just walked away. We've looked and we've looked and we've looked for him, but we can't find him."

"You mean I'll never see him again?" Her eyes were round in horror.

"We may find him some day, and meanwhile, you can play with your nice new doggie. Look at him! His name is Lightning and he can—"

But Gloria's eyelids had overflowed. "I don't want the nasty dog—I want Robbie. I want you to find me Robbie." Her feelings became too deep for words, and she spluttered into a shrill wail.

Her mother groaned in defeat and left Gloria to her sorrow.

"Let her have her cry out," she told her husband. "Childish griefs are never lasting. In a few days, she'll forget that awful robot ever existed."

But time proved Mrs. Weston a bit too optimistic. To be sure, Gloria ceased crying, but she ceased smiling too, and the passing days seemed but to increase the inner hurt. Gradually, her attitude of passive unhappiness wore Mrs. Weston down, and all that kept her from yielding was the impossibility of admitting defeat to her husband.

Then, one evening, she flounced into the living room, sat down, folded her arms and looked boiling mad.

Her husband stretched his neck in order to see her over his newspaper, "What now, Grace?"

"It's that child, George. I had to send back the dog today. Gloria positively couldn't stand the sight of him. She's driving me into a nervous breakdown."

Weston laid down the paper and a hopeful gleam entered his eye. "Maybe—maybe we ought to get Robbie back. It might be done, you know. I can get in touch with—"

"No!" she replied grimly. "I won't hear of it. We're not giving up that easily. My child shall not be brought up by a robot if it takes years to break her of it. What Gloria needs is a change of environment. We're going to take her to New York."

"Oh, Lord," groaned the lesser half, "back to the frying pavements."

"You'll have to," was the unshaken response. "Gloria has lost five pounds in the last month and my little girl's health is more important to me than your comfort."

"It's a pity you didn't think of your little girl's health before you deprived her of her pet robot," he muttered—but to himself.

Gloria displayed immediate signs of improvement when told of the impending trip to the city. She began to smile, and to eat with something of her former appetite.

Mrs. Weston lost no opportunity to triumph over her still skeptical husband.

"You see, George, she chatters away as if she hadn't a care in the world. It's just as I told you—all we need to do is substitute other interests."

"Hmpph," was the skeptical response. "I hope so."

In high good-humor, the family drove down to the airport and entered the waiting liner.

"Come, Gloria," called Mrs. Weston, "I've saved you a seat near the window so you can watch the scenery."

"Yes, Mama," was Gloria's unenthusiastic rejoinder. She turned to her mother with a sudden mysterious air of secret knowledge.

"I know why we're going to the city, Mama."

"Do you?" Mrs. Weston was puzzled. "Why, dear?"

"You didn't tell me because you wanted it to be a surprise, but I know." For a moment she was lost in admiration at her own acute penetration, and then she laughed gaily. "We're going to New York so we can find Robbie, aren't we?"

Mrs. Weston maintained her composure, but she found her temper rather bent.

"Maybe," she retorted tartly. "Now sit and be still, for heaven's sake."

New York City, in this good year of 1982, is quite a place for an eight-year-old girl. Gloria's parents made the most of it.

Gloria was taken to the top of the half-mile-tall Roosevelt Building, to gaze down in awe upon the jagged panorama of rooftops, far off to where they blended into the fields of Long Island and New Jersey. They visited the zoos where Gloria stared in delicious fright at the "real live lion" (rather disappointed that the keepers fed him raw steaks, instead of human beings, as she had expected), and asked insistently and peremptorily to see "the whale."

The various museums came in for their share of attention, together with the parks and the beaches and the aquarium.

She was taken halfway up the Hudson in an excursion steamer fitted out in the delicious old-fashioned style of the "gay twenties." She traveled into the stratosphere on an exhibition trip, where the sky turned deep purple and the stars came out and the misty earth below looked like a huge concave bowl. Down under the waters of the Long Island Sound, she was taken in a glass-walled sub-sea vessel, where in a green and wavering world, quaint and curious sea-things ogled her and wiggled slowly to and fro.

In fact, when the month had nearly sped the Westons were convinced that everything conceivable had been done to take Gloria's mind once and for all off the departed Robbie—but they were not quite sure they had succeeded.

It was the episode at the Museum of Science and Industry, though, that finally convinced Mrs. Weston. She was standing totally absorbed in the exploits of a powerful electro-magnet when she suddenly became aware of the fact that Gloria was no longer with her. Initial panic gave way to calm decision and, enlisting the aid of three attendants, the Westons began a careful search.

Gloria's disappearance was simply enough explained. A huge sign on the third floor said, "This Way to see the Talking Robot." Having spelled it out to herself and having noticed that her parents did not seem to wish to

move in the proper direction, she determined to see it for herself.

The "Talking Robot" as a scientific achievement left much to be desired. It sprawled its unwieldy mass of wires and coils through twenty-five square yards, and every robotic function had been subordinated to the vital attribute of speech. It worked—and was in this respect quite a victory—but as yet, it could translate only the simpler and more concrete thoughts into words. Certainly, it was not half so clever as Robbie in Gloria's opinion.

Gloria watched it silently for a while, waiting for the two or three who watched with her to depart. Then, when she stood there alone for the moment, she asked hurriedly, "Have you seen Robbie, Mr. Robot, sir?" She was not quite sure how polite one must be to a robot that could talk.

There was an oily whir of gears, and a metallically timbred voice boomed out in words that lacked accent and intonation, "Who—is—Robbie?"

"He's a robot, Mr. Robot, sir. Just like you, you know, only he can't talk, of course."

"A—robot—like—me?"

"Yes, Mr. Robot, sir."

But the talking robot's only response to this was an erratic splutter and occasional incoherent sound. The conception of other robots like him had stalled his "thinking" engine, for he had not the mental complexity to grasp the idea.

Gloria was still waiting, with carefully concealed impatience, for the machine's answer when she heard the cry behind her of "There she is," and recognized that cry as her mother's.

"What are you doing here, you bad girl?" cried Mrs. Weston, anxiety dissolving at once into anger. "Do you know you frightened your Mama and Daddy almost to death? Why did you run away?"

"I only came to see the talking robot, Mama. I thought he might know where Robbie was because they're both robots." And then, as the thought of Robbie was brought forcefully home to her, she burst into a sudden storm of tears. "And oh, Mama, I do want to see Robbie again. I miss him like anything."

Her mother gave forth a strangled cry, more than half a sob, and cried to her husband, "Come home, George. This is more than I can stand."

That night, George Weston left on a mysterious errand, and the next morning he approached his wife with something that looked suspiciously like smug complacency.

"I've got an idea, Grace."

"About what?" was the gloomy, uninterested query.

"About Gloria."

"Well, go ahead. I might as well listen to you. Nothing I've done seems to have been any good. But remember, I will not consent to buying back that awful robot."

"Of course not. That's understood. However, here's what I've been thinking. The whole trouble with Gloria is that she thinks of Robbie as a person and not as a machine. Naturally, she can't forget him. Now if we managed to convince her that Robbie was nothing more than a mess of steel and copper in the form of sheets and wires with electricity its juice of life, how long would this aberration last?"

Mrs. Weston frowned in thought. "It sounds good, but how are you going to do it?"

"Simple. Where do you suppose I was last night? I persuaded old Finmark of the Finmark Robot Corporation to arrange for a complete tour of his premises tomorrow. The three of us will go, and by the time we're through, Gloria will have it drilled into her that a robot is not alive."

His wife's eyes widened. "Why, George, how did you manage to think of that?" There was a gleam of determina-

tion in Mrs. Weston's eye. "Gloria is not going to miss a step of the process. We'll settle this once and for all!"

Mr. Struthers was a conscientious General Manager and naturally inclined to be a bit talkative: The combination resulted in a tour that was fully explained—perhaps even over-abundantly explained—at every step. In spite of this, Mrs. Weston was not bored. Indeed, she stopped him several times and begged him to repeat his statements in simpler language so that Gloria might understand. Under the influence of this appreciation of his narrative powers, Mr. Struthers explained genially and became even more communicative—if possible.

Weston, himself, displayed an odd impatience, nevertheless—an almost angry impatience.

"Pardon me, Struthers," he broke in suddenly, in the midst of a lecture on the photo-electric cell, "I understand you have a section of the factory where only robot labor is employed?"

"Eh? Oh, yes! Yes, indeed!" He smiled at Mrs. Weston. "A vicious circle in a way—robots creating more robots. However we don't intend to make a general practice of it. You see," he tapped his pince-nez on one palm, "the robot—"

"Yes, yes, Struthers—may we see it? It would be a most interesting experience."

"Yes! Yes, of course." Mr. Struthers replaced his pince-nez in one convulsive movement and gave vent to a soft cough of discomfiture. "Follow me, please."

He was comparatively quiet, while leading the three through a long corridor and down a flight of stairs. Then, when they had entered a large well-lit room that buzzed with metallic activity, the sluices opened and the flood of explanation poured forth again.

"There you are," he said in part, and with quite a bit of pride in his voice. "Robots only! Five men act as overseers

and they don't even stay in the room. In five years, ever since we began this project, not a single accident has occurred. Of course, very few robots here are intelligent—"

The General Manager's voice had long died to a rather soothing murmur in Gloria's ears. The whole trip seemed rather dull and pointless to her, though there were many robots in sight. None was even remotely like Robbie and she surveyed them all with open contempt.

Her glance fell upon six or seven robots busily engaged about a round table halfway across the room. Her eyes widened in incredulous surprise. One of the robots looked like—looked like—

"Robbie!" Her shriek pierced the air, and one of the robots about the table faltered and dropped the tool he was holding. Gloria went almost mad with joy. Squeezing through the railing before either parent could stop her, she dropped lightly to the floor a few feet below and ran toward her Robbie, arms waving and hair flying.

And the three horrified adults, as they stood frozen in their tracks, saw what the excited little girl did not see—a huge, lumbering tractor rolling blindly down its track.

It took a split second for Weston to come to his senses, but that split second meant everything, for Gloria could not be overtaken. Although Weston vaulted the railing in a wild attempt, he knew it was hopeless. Mr. Struthers signalled wildly to the overseers to stop the tractor, but the overseers were only human and it took time to act.

Robbie acted immediately and with precision.

With metal legs eating up the space between himself and his little mistress, he charged down from the opposite direction. Everything then happened at once. With one sweep of an arm, Robbie snatched up Gloria, slackening his speed not one iota, and consequently knocking every bit of breath out of her. Weston, not quite comprehending all that was happening, felt rather than saw Robbie brush past him, and he came to a sudden, bewildered halt. The

tractor intersected Gloria's path half a second after Robbie, rolled on ten feet further and came to a grinding, long-drawn-out halt.

Gloria finally regained her breath, submitted to a series of passionate hugs on the part of both parents, and turned eagerly towards Robbie. As far as she was concerned, nothing had happened except that she had found her robot.

Mrs. Weston regained her composure rather quickly, aided by a sudden suspicion that struck her. She turned to her husband, and, despite her disheveled and undignified appearance, managed to look quite formidable. "You engineered this, didn't you?"

George Watson swabbed at a hot, perspiring forehead with his handkerchief. His hand was none too steady, and his lips curved with a tremulous and exceedingly weak smile. "But Grace, I had no idea the reunion would be so violent."

Weston watched her keenly and ventured a further remark, "Anyway, you can't deny Robbie has saved her life. You can't send him away now."

His wife thought it over. It was a bit difficult to keep up her anger. She turned towards Gloria and Robbie and watched them abstractedly for a moment. Gloria had a grip about the robot's neck that would have asphyxiated any creature but one of metal, and was prattling nonsense in half-hysterical frenzy. Robbie's chome-steel arms (capable of bending a bar of steel two inches in diameter into a pretzel) wound about the little girl gently and lovingly, and his eyes glowed a deep, deep red.

Mrs. Weston's anger faded still further and she became almost genial.

"Well," she breathed at last, smiling in spite of herself, "I guess Robbie can stay with us until he rusts, for all I care."

A secret weapon, really hush-hush . . . and nobody knew how potent it was.

BROOKLYN PROJECT

by William Tenn

THE GLEAMING BOWLS OF LIGHT SET IN THE CREAMY CEILING dulled when the huge, circular door at the back of the booth opened. They returned to white brilliance as the chubby man in the severe black jumper swung the door shut behind him and dogged it down again.

Twelve reporters of both sexes exhaled very loudly as he sauntered to the front of the booth and turned his back to the semi-opaque screen stretching across it. Then they all rose in deference to the cheerful custom of standing whenever a security official of the government was in the room.

He smiled pleasantly, waved at them and scratched his nose with a wad of mimeographed papers. His nose was large and it seemed to give added presence to his person. "Sit down, ladies and gentlemen, do sit down. We have no official fol-de-rol in the Brooklyn Project. I am your guide, as you might say, for the duration of this experiment—the acting secretary to the executive assistant on press relations. My name is not important. Please pass these among you."

They each took one of the mimeographed sheets and passed the rest on. Leaning back in the metal bucket-seats, they tried to make themselves comfortable. Their host squinted through the heavy screen and up at the wall clock which had one slowly revolving hand. He patted his black garment jovially where it was tight around the middle.

"To business. In a few moments, man's first large-scale excursion into time will begin. Not by humans, but with the aid of a photographic and recording device which will bring us incalculably rich data on the past. With this experiment, the Brooklyn Project justifies ten billion dollars and over eight years of scientific development; it shows the validity not merely of a new method of investigation, but of a weapon which will make our glorious country even more secure, a weapon which our enemies may justifiably dread.

"Let me caution you, first, not to attempt the taking of notes even if you have been able to smuggle pens and pencils through Security. Your stories will be written entirely from memory. You all have a copy of the Security Code with the latest additions as well as a pamphlet referring specifically to Brooklyn Project regulations. The sheets you have just received provide you with the required lead for your story; they also contain suggestions as to treatment and coloring. Beyond that—so long as you stay within the framework of the documents mentioned—you are entirely free to write your stories in your own variously original ways. The press, ladies and gentlemen, must remain untouched and uncontaminated by government control. Now, any questions?"

THE TWELVE REPORTERS LOOKED AT THE FLOOR. FIVE OF them began reading from their sheets. The paper rustled noisily.

"What, no questions? Surely there must be more interest than this in a project which has broken the last possible

frontier—the fourth dimension, time. Come now, you are the representatives of the nation's curiosity—you must have questions. Bradley, you look doubtful. What's bothering you? I assure you, Bradley, that I don't bite."

They all laughed and grinned at each other.

Bradley half-rose and pointed at the screen. "Why does it have to be so thick? I'm not the slightest bit interested in finding out how chronar works, but all we can see from here is a greyed and blurry picture of men dragging apparatus around on the floor. And why does the clock only have one hand?"

"A good question," the acting secretary said. His large nose seemed to glow. "A very good question. First, the clock has but one hand, because, after all, Bradley, this is an experiment in Time, and Security feels that the time of the experiment itself may, through some unfortunate combination of information leakage and foreign correlation—in short, a clue might be needlessly exposed. It is sufficient to know that when the hand points to the red dot, the experiment will begin. The screen is translucent and the scene below somewhat blurry for the same reason—camouflage of detail and adjustment. I am empowered to inform you that the details of the apparatus are—uh, very significant. Any other questions? Culpepper? Culpepper of Consolidated, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. Consolidated News Service. Our readers are very curious about that incident of the Federation of Chronar Scientists. Of course, they have no respect or pity for them—the way they acted and all—but just what did they mean by saying that this experiment was dangerous because of insufficient data? And that fellow, Dr. Shayson, their president, do you know if he'll be shot?"

The man in black pulled at his nose and paraded before them thoughtfully. "I must confess that I find the views of the Federation of Chronar Scientists—or the federation of *chronic sighers*, as we at Pike's Peak prefer to call them—

are a trifle too exotic for my tastes; I rarely bother with weighing the opinions of a traitor in any case. Shayson himself may or may not have incurred the death penalty for revealing the nature of the work with which he was entrusted. On the other hand, he—uh, may not or may have. That is all I can say about him for reasons of security."

Reasons of security. At mention of the dread phrase, every reporter straightened against the hard back of his chair. Culpepper's face lost its pinkness in favor of a glossy white. They can't consider the part about Shayson a leading question, he thought desperately. But I shouldn't have cracked about that damned federation!

Culpepper lowered his eyes and tried to look as ashamed of the vicious idiots as he possibly could. He hoped the acting secretary to the executive assistant on press relations would notice his horror.

THE CLOCK BEGAN TICKING VERY LOUDLY. ITS HAND WAS NOW only one-fourth of an arc from the red dot at the top. Down on the floor of the immense laboratory, activity had stopped. All of the seemingly tiny men were clustered around two great spheres of shining metal resting against each other. Most of them were watching dials and switchboards intently; a few, their tasks completed, chatted with the circle of black-jumpered Security guards.

"We are almost ready to begin Operation Periscope. Operation Periscope, of course, because we are, in a sense, extending a periscope into the past—a periscope which will take pictures and record events of various periods ranging from fifteen thousand years to four billion years ago. We felt that in view of the various critical circumstances attending this experiment—international, scientific—a more fitting title would be Operation Crossroads. Unfortunately, that title has been—uh, preempted."

Everyone tried to look as innocent of the nature of that

other experiment as years of staring at locked library shelves would permit.

"No matter. I will now give you a brief background in chronar practice as cleared by Brooklyn Project Security. Yes, Bradley?"

Bradley again got partly out of his seat. "I was wondering—we know there has been a Manhattan Project, a Long Island Project, a Westchester Project and now a Brooklyn Project? Has there ever been a Bronx Project? I come from the Bronx; you know, civic pride."

"Quite. Very understandable. However, if there is a Bronx Project you may be assured that until its work has been successfully completed, the only individuals outside of it who will know of its existence are the President and the Secretary of Security. If—if, I say—there is such an institution, the world will learn of it with the same shattering suddenness that it learned of the Westchester Project. I don't think that the world will soon forget that."

He chuckled in recollection and Culpepper echoed him a bit louder than the rest. The clock's hand was close to the red mark.

"Yes, the Westchester Project and now this; our nation shall yet be secure! Do you realize what a magnificent weapon chronar places in our democratic hands? To examine only one aspect—consider what happened to the Coney Island and Flatbush Subprojects (the events are mentioned in those sheets you've received) before the uses of chronar were fully appreciated.

"It was not yet known in those first experiments that Newton's third law of motion—action equalling reaction—held for time as well as it did for the other three dimensions of space. When the first chronar was excited backwards into time for the length of a ninth of a second, the entire laboratory was propelled into the future for a like period and returned in an—uh, unrecognizable condition. That fact, by the way, has prevented excursions into the future.

The equipment seems to suffer amazing alterations and no human could survive them. But do you realize what we could do to an enemy by virtue of that property alone? Sending an adequate mass of chronar into the past while it is adjacent to a hostile nation would force that nation into the future—all of it simultaneously—a future from which it would return populated only with corpses!”

He glanced down, placed his hands behind his back and teetered on his heels. “That is why you see two spheres on the floor. Only one of them, the ball on the right, is equipped with chronar. The other is a dummy, matching the other’s mass perfectly and serving as a counterbalance. When the chronar is excited, it will plunge four billion years into our past and take photographs of an earth that was still a half-liquid, partly gaseous mass solidifying rapidly in a somewhat inchoate solar system.

“At the same time, the dummy will be propelled four billion years into the future, from whence it will return much changed but for reasons we don’t completely understand. They will strike each other at what is to us now and bounce off again to approximately half the chronological distance of the first trip, where our chronar apparatus will record data of an almost solid planet, plagued by earthquakes and possibly holding forms of sublife in the manner of certain complex molecules.

“After each collision, the chronar will return roughly half the number of years covered before, automatically gathering information each time. The geological and historical periods we expect it to touch are listed from I to XXV in your sheets; there will be more than twenty-five, naturally, before both balls come to rest, but scientists feel that all periods after that number will be touched for such a short while as to be unproductive of photographs and other material. Remember, at the end, the balls will be doing little more than throbbing in place before coming to rest, so that even though they still ricochet centuries on either side of

the present, it will be almost unnoticeable. A question, I see."

The thin woman in grey tweeds beside Culpepper got to her feet. "I—I know this is irrelevant," she began, "but I haven't been able to introduce my question into the discussion at any pertinent moment. Mr. Secretary—"

"Acting secretary," the chubby little man in the black suit told her genially. "I'm only the acting secretary. Go on."

"Well, I want to say—Mr. Secretary, is there any way at all that our post-experimental examination time may be reduced? Two years is a very long time to spend inside Pike's Peak simply out of fear that one of us may have seen enough and be unpatriotic enough to be dangerous to the nation. Once our stories have passed the censors, it seems to me that we could be allowed to return to our homes after a safety period of, say, three months. I have two small children and there are others here—"

"Speak for yourself, Mrs. Bryant!" the man from Security roared. "It is Mrs. Bryant, isn't it? Mrs. Bryant of the Women's Magazine Syndicate? Mrs. Alexis Bryant." He seemed to be making minute pencil notes across his brain.

MRS. BRYANT SAT DOWN BESIDE CULPEPPER AGAIN, CLUTCHING her copy of the amended Security Code, the special pamphlet on the Brooklyn Project and the thin mimeographed sheet of paper very close to her breast. Culpepper moved hard against the opposite arm of his chair. Why did everything have to happen to him? Then, to make matters worse, the crazy woman looked tearfully at him as if expecting sympathy. Culpepper stared across the booth and crossed his legs.

"You must remain within the jurisdiction of the Brooklyn Project because that is the only way that Security can be certain that no important information leakage will occur before the apparatus has changed beyond your present

recognition of it. You didn't have to come, Mrs. Bryant—you volunteered. You all volunteered. After your editors had designated you as their choices for covering this experiment, you all had the peculiarly democratic privilege of refusing. None of you did. You recognized that to refuse this unusual honor would have shown you incapable of thinking in terms of National Security, would have, in fact, implied a criticism of the Security Code itself from the standpoint of the usual two-year examination time. And now this! For someone who had hitherto been thought as able and trustworthy as yourself, Mrs. Bryant, to emerge at this late hour with such a request makes me, why it," the little man's voice dropped to a whisper, "—it almost makes me doubt the effectiveness of our security screening methods."

Culpepper nodded angry affirmation at Mrs. Bryant who was biting her lips and trying to show a tremendous interest in the activities on the laboratory floor.

"The question was irrelevant. Highly irrelevant. It took up time which I had intended to devote to a more detailed discussion of the popular aspects of chronar and its possible uses in industry. But Mrs. Bryant must have her little feminine outburst. It makes no difference to Mrs. Bryant that our nation is daily surrounded by more and more hostility, more and more danger. These things matter not in the slightest to Mrs. Bryant. All she is concerned with are the two years of her life that her country asks her to surrender so that the future of her own children may be more secure."

The acting secretary smoothed his black jumper and became calmer. Tension in the booth decreased.

"Activation will occur at any moment now, so I will briefly touch upon those most interesting periods which the chronar will record for us and from which we expect the most useful data. I and II, of course, since they are the periods at which the earth was forming into its present

shape. Then III, the Pre-Cambrian Period of the Proterozoic, one billion years ago, the first era in which we find distinct records of life—crustaceans and algae for the most part. VI, a hundred twenty-five million years in the past, covers the Middle Jurassic of the Mesozoic. This excursion into the so-called “Age of Reptiles” may provide us with photographs of dinosaurs and solve the old riddle of their coloring, as well as photographs, if we are fortunate, of the first appearance of mammals and birds. Finally, VIII and IX, the Oligocene and Miocene Epochs of the Tertiary Period, mark the emergence of man’s earliest ancestors. Unfortunately, the chronar will be oscillating back and forth so rapidly by that time that the chance of any decent recording—”

A GONG SOUNDED. THE HAND OF THE CLOCK TOUCHED THE RED mark. Five of the technicians below pulled switches and, almost before the journalists could lean forward, the two spheres were no longer visible through the heavy plastic screen. Their places were empty.

“The chronar has begun its journey to four billion years in the past! Ladies and gentlemen, an historic moment—a profoundly historic moment! It will not return for a little while; I shall use the time in pointing up and exposing the fallacies of the—ah, *federation of chronic sighers!*”

Nervous laughter rippled at the acting secretary to the executive assistant on press relations. The twelve journalists settled down to hearing the ridiculous ideas torn apart.

“As you know, one of the fears entertained about travel to the past was that the most innocent-seeming acts would cause cataclysmic changes in the present. You are probably familiar with the fantasy in its most currently popular form—if Hitler had been killed in 1930, he would not have forced scientists in Germany and later occupied countries

to emigrate, this nation might not have had the atomic bomb, thus no third atomic war, and Australia would still be above the Pacific.

"The traitorous Shayson and his illegal federation extended this hypothesis to include much more detailed and minor acts such as shifting a molecule of hydrogen that in our past really was never shifted.

"At the time of the first experiment at the Coney Island Subproject, when the chronar was sent back for one-ninth of a second, a dozen different laboratories checked through every device imaginable, searched carefully for any conceivable change. There were none! Government officials concluded that the time stream was a rigid affair, past, present and future, and nothing in it could be altered. But Shayson and his cohorts were not satisfied, they—"

I. Four billion years ago. The chronar floated in a cloudlet of silicon dioxide above the boiling earth and languidly collected its data with automatically operating instruments. The vapor it had displaced condensed and fell in great, shining drops.

"—insisted that we should do no further experimenting until we had checked the mathematical aspects of the problem yet again. They went so far as to state that it was possible that if changes occurred we would not notice them, that no instruments imaginable could detect them. They said that we would accept these changes as things that had always existed. Well! This at a time when our country—and theirs, ladies and gentlemen of the press, theirs, too—was in greater danger than ever. Can you—"

Words failed him. He walked up and down the booth, shaking his head. All the reporters on the long, wooden bench shook their heads with him in sympathy.

There was another gong. The two dull spheres appeared

briefly, clanged against each other and ricocheted off into opposite chronological directions.

"There you are." The government official waved his arms at the transparent laboratory floor above them. "The first oscillation has been completed; has anything changed? Isn't everything the same? But the dissidents would maintain that alterations have occurred and we haven't noticed them. With such faith-based, unscientific viewpoints, there can be no argument. People like these—"

II. Two billion years ago. The great ball clicked its photographs of the fiery, erupting ground below. Some red-hot crusts rattled off its sides. Five or six thousand complex molecules lost their basic structure as they impinged against it. A hundred didn't.

"—will labor thirty hours a day out of thirty-three to convince you that black isn't white, that we have seven moons instead of two. They are especially dangerous—"

A long, muted note as the apparatus collided with itself. The warm orange of the corner lights brightened as it started out again.

"—because of their learning, because they are looked to for guidance in better ways of vegetation." The government official was slithering up and down rapidly now, gesturing with all of his pseudo-pods. "We are faced with a very difficult problem, at present—"

III. One billion years ago. The primitive triple tribolite the machine had destroyed when it materialized began drifting down wetly.

"—a very difficult problem. The question before us: should we *shllk* or shouldn't we *shllk*?" He was hardly speaking English now; in fact, for some time, he hadn't

been speaking at all. He had been stating his thoughts by slapping one pseudopod against the other—as he always had . . .

IV. A half-billion years ago. Many different kinds of bacteria died as the water changed temperature slightly.

“This, then, is no time for half-measures. If we can reproduce well enough—”

V. Two hundred fifty million years ago. VI. A hundred twenty-five million years ago.

“—to satisfy the Five Who Spiral, we have—”

VII. Sixty-two million years. VIII. Thirty-one million. IX. Fifteen million. X. Seven and a half million.

“—spared all attainable virtue. Then—”

XI. XII. XIII. XIV. XV. XVI. XVII. XVIII. XIX. Bong—bong—bong bongbongbongongongngngngggg . . .

“—we are indeed ready for refraction. And that, I tell you, is good enough for those who billow and those who snap. But those who billow will be proven wrong as always, for in the snapping is the rolling and in the rolling is only truth. There need be no change merely because of a sodden cilia. The apparatus has rested at last in the fractional conveyance; shall we view it subtly?”

They all agreed, and their bloated purpled bodies dissolved into liquid and flowed up and around to the apparatus. When they reached its four square blocks, now no longer shrilling mechanically, they rose, solidified and regained their slime-washed forms.

"See," cried the thing that had been the acting secretary to the executive assistant on press relations. "See, no matter how subtly! Those who billow were wrong: we haven't changed." He extended fifteen purple blobs triumphantly. "Nothing has changed!"

... as others see us ...

INTERVIEW WITH A LEMMING

by James Thurber

THE WEARY SCIENTIST, TRAMPING THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS of northern Europe in the winter weather, dropped his knapsack and prepared to sit on a rock.

"Careful, brother," said a voice.

"Sorry," murmured the scientist, noting with some surprise that a lemming which he had been about to sit on had addressed him. "It is a source of considerable astonishment to me," said the scientist, sitting down beside the lemming, "that you are capable of speech."

"You human beings are always astonished," said the lemming, "when any other animal can do anything you can. Yet there are many things animals can do that you cannot, such as stridulate, or chirr, to name just one. To stridulate, or chirr, one of the minor achievements of the cricket, your species is dependent on the intestines of the sheep and the hair of the horse."

"We are a dependent animal," admitted the scientist.

"You are an amazing animal," said the lemming.

"We have always considered you rather amazing, too," said the scientist. "You are perhaps the most mysterious of creatures."

"If we are going to indulge in adjectives beginning with 'm,'" said the lemming, sharply, "let me apply a few to your species—murderous, maladjusted, maleficent, malicious and muffle-headed."

"You find our behavior as difficult to understand as we do yours?"

"You, as you would say, said it," said the lemming. "You kill, you mangle, you torture, you imprison, you starve each other. You cover the nurturing earth with cement, you cut down elm trees to put up institutions for people driven insane by the cutting down of elm trees, you—"

"You could go on all night like that," said the scientist, "listing our sins and our shames."

"I could go on all night and up to four o'clock tomorrow afternoon," said the lemming. "It just happens that I have made a lifelong study of the self-styled higher animal. Except for one thing, I know all there is to know about you, and a singularly dreary, dolorous and distasteful store of information it is, too, to use only adjectives beginning with 'd.'"

"You say you have made a lifelong study of my species—" began the scientist.

"Indeed I have," broke in the lemming. "I know that you are cruel, cunning and carnivorous, sly, sensual and selfish, greedy, gullible and guileful—"

"Pray don't wear yourself out," said the scientist, quietly. "It may interest you to know that I have made a lifelong study of lemmings, just as you have made a lifelong study of people. Like you, I have found but one thing about my subject which I do not understand."

"And what is that?" asked the lemming.

"I don't understand," said the scientist, "why you lemmings all rush down to the sea and drown yourselves."

"How curious," said the lemming. "The one thing I don't understand is why you human beings don't."

You'd think the Martians would get excited about the first space ship from Earth . . .

MARS IS HEAVEN!

by Ray Bradbury

THE SHIP CAME DOWN FROM SPACE. IT CAME DOWN FROM THE stars and the black velocities, and the shining movements and the silent gulfs of space. It was a new ship, the only one of its kind, it had fire in its belly and men in its body, and it moved with clean silence, fiery and hot. In it were seventeen men, including a captain. A crowd had gathered at the New York tarmac and shouted and waved their hands up into the sunlight, and the rocket had jerked up, bloomed out great flowers of heat and color, and run away into space on the first voyage to Mars!

Now it was decelerating with metal efficiency in the upper zones of Martian atmosphere. It was still a thing of beauty and strength. It had shorn through meteor streams, it had moved in the majestic black midnight waters of space like a pale sea leviathan, it had passed the sickly, pocked mass of the ancient moon, and thrown itself onward into one nothingness following another. The men within it had been battered, thrown about, sickened, made well again, scarred, made pale, flushed, each in his turn. One man had died after a fall, but now seventeen of the original

eighteen with their eyes clear in their heads and their faces pressed to the thick glass ports of the rocket, were watching Mars swing up under them.

"Mars! Mars! Good old Mars, here we are!" cried Navigator Lustig.

"Good old Mars!" said Samuel Hinkston, archaeologist.

"Well," said Captain John Black.

The ship landed softly on a lawn of green grass. Outside, upon the lawn, stood an iron deer. Further up the lawn, a tall brown Victorian house sat in the quiet sunlight, all covered with scrolls and rococo, its windows made of blue and pink and yellow and green colored glass. Upon the porch were hairy geraniums and an old swing which was hooked into the porch ceiling and which now swung back and forth, back and forth, in a little breeze. At the top of the house, was a cupola with diamond, leaded-glass windows, and a dunce-cap roof! Through the front window you could see an ancient piano with yellow keys and a piece of music titled BEAUTIFUL OHIO sitting on the music rest.

Around the rocket in four directions spread the little town, green and motionless in the Martian spring. There were white houses and red brick ones, and tall elm trees blowing in the wind, and tall maples and horse chestnuts. And church steeples with golden bells silent in them.

The men in the rocket looked out and saw this. Then they looked at one another and then they looked out again. They held on to each other's elbows, suddenly unable to breathe, it seemed. Their faces grew pale and they blinked constantly, running from glass port to glass port of the ship.

"I'll be damned," whispered Lustig, rubbing his face with his numb fingers, his eyes wet. "I'll be damned, damned, damned."

"It can't be, it just can't be," said Samuel Hinkston.

"Lord," said Captain John Black.

There was a call from the chemist. "Sir, the atmosphere is fine for breathing, sir."

Black turned slowly. "Are you sure?"

"No doubt of it, sir."

"Then we'll go out," said Lustig.

"Lord, yes," said Samuel Hinkston.

"Hold on," said Captain John Black. "Just a moment. Nobody gave any orders."

"But, sir—"

"Sir, nothing. How do we know what this is?"

"We know what it is, sir," said the chemist. "It's a small town with good air in it, sir."

"And it's a small town the like of Earth towns," said Samuel Hinkston, the archaeologist. "Incredible. It can't be, but it is."

Captain John Black looked at him, idly. "Do you think that the civilizations of two planets can progress at the same rate and evolve in the same way, Hinkston?"

"I wouldn't have thought so, sir."

Captain Black stood by the port. "Look out there. The geraniums. A specialized plant. That specific variety has only been known on Earth for fifty years. Think of the thousands of years of time it takes to evolve plants. Then tell me if it is logical that the Martians should have: one, leaded-glass windows; two, cupolas; three, porch swings; four, an instrument that looks like a piano and probably is a piano; and, five, if you look closely, if a Martian composer would have published a piece of music titled, strangely enough, BEAUTIFUL OHIO. All of which means that we have an Ohio River here on Mars!"

"It is quite strange, sir."

"Strange, hell, it's absolutely impossible, and I suspect the whole bloody shooting setup. Something's screwy here, and I'm not leaving the ship until I know what it is."

"Oh, sir," said Lustig.

"Darn it," said Samuel Hinkston. "Sir, I want to investigate this at first hand. It may be that there are similar patterns of thought, movement, civilization on every planet in our system. We may be on the threshold of the great psychological and metaphysical discovery in our time, sir, don't you think?"

"I'm willing to wait a moment," said Captain John Black.

"It may be, sir, that we are looking upon a phenomenon that, for the first time, would absolutely prove the existence of a God, sir."

"There are many people who are of good faith without such proof, Mr. Hinkston."

"I'm one myself, sir. But certainly a thing like this, out there," said Hinkston, "could not occur without divine intervention, sir. It fills me with such terror and elation I don't know whether to laugh or cry, sir."

"Do neither, then, until we know what we're up against."

"Up against, sir?" inquired Lustig. "I see that we're up against nothing, sir. It's a good quiet, green town, much like the one I was born in, and I like the looks of it."

"When were you born, Lustig?"

"In 1910, sir."

"That makes you fifty years old, now, doesn't it?"

"This being 1960, yes, sir."

"And you, Hinkston?"

"1920, sir. In Illinois. And this looks swell to me, sir."

"This couldn't be Heaven," said the Captain, ironically. "Though, I must admit, it looks peaceful and cool, and pretty much like Green Bluff, where I was born, in 1915." He looked at the chemist. "The air's all right, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, tell you what we'll do. Lustig, you and Hinkston and I will fetch ourselves out to look this town over. The other fourteen men will stay aboard ship. If any-

thing untoward happens, lift the ship and get the hell out, do you hear what I say, Craner?"

"Yes, sir. The hell out we'll go, sir. Leaving you?"

"A loss of three men's better than a whole ship. If something bad happens get back to Earth and warn the next Rocket, that's Lingle's Rocket, I think, which will be completed and ready to take off sometime around next Christmas, what he has to meet up with. If there's something hostile about Mars we certainly want the next expedition to be well armed."

"So are we, sir. We've got a regular arsenal with us."

"Tell the men to stand by the guns, then, as Lustig and Hinkston and I go out."

"Right, sir."

"Come along, Lustig, Hinkston."

The three men walked together, down through the levels of the ship.

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SPRING DAY. A ROBIN SAT ON A BLOSSOMING apple tree and sang continuously. Showers of petal snow sifted down when the wind touched the apple tree, and the blossom smell drifted upon the air. Somewhere in the town, somebody was playing the piano and the music came and went, came and went, softly, drowsily. The song was BEAUTIFUL DREAMER. Somewhere else, a phonograph, scratchy and faded, was hissing out a record of ROAMIN' IN THE GLOAMIN', sung by Harry Lauder.

The three men stood outside the ship. The port closed behind them. At every window, a face pressed, looking out. The large metal guns pointed this way and that, ready.

Now the phonograph record being played was:

"Oh give me a June night
The moonlight and you—"

Lustig began to tremble. Samuel Hinkston did likewise. Hinkston's voice was so feeble and uneven that the cap-

tain had to ask him to repeat what he had said. "I said, sir, that I think I have solved this, all of this, sir!"

"And what is the solution, Hinkston?"

The soft wind blew. The sky was serene and quiet and somewhere a stream of water ran through the cool caverns and tree-shadings of a ravine. Somewhere a horse and wagon trotted and rolled by, bumping.

"Sir, it must be, it has to be, this is the only solution! Rocket travel began to Mars in the years before the first World War, sir!"

The captain stared at his archaeologist. "No!"

"But, yes, sir! You must admit, look at all of this! How else to explain it, the houses, the lawns, the iron deer, the flowers, the pianos, the music!"

"Hinkston, Hinkston, oh," and the captain put his hand to his face, shaking his head, his hand shaking now, his lips blue.

"Sir, listen to me." Hinkston took his elbow, persuasively and looked up into the captain's face, pleading. "Say that there were some people in the year 1905, perhaps, who hated wars and wanted to get away from Earth and they got together, some scientists, in secret, and built a rocket and came out here to Mars."

"No, no, Hinkston."

"Why not? The world was a different place in 1905, they could have kept it a secret much more easily."

"But the work, Hinkston, the work of building a complex thing like a rocket, oh, no, no." The captain looked at his shoes, looked at his hands, looked at the houses, and then at Hinkston.

"And they came up here, and naturally the houses they built were similar to Earth houses because they brought the cultural architecture with them, and here it is!"

"And they've lived here all these years?" said the captain.

"In peace and quiet, sir, yes. Maybe they made a few trips, enough to bring enough people here for one small

town, and then stopped, for fear of being discovered. That's why the town seems so old-fashioned. I don't see a thing, myself, that is older than the year 1927, do you?"

"No, frankly, I don't, Hinkston."

"These are our people, sir. This is an American city; it's definitely not European!"

"That—that's right, too, Hinkston."

"Or maybe, just maybe, sir, rocket travel is older than we think. Perhaps it started in some part of the world hundreds of years ago, was discovered and kept secret by a small number of men, and they came to Mars, with only occasional visits to Earth over the centuries."

"You make it sound almost reasonable."

"It is, sir. It has to be. We have the proof here before us, all we have to do now, is find some people and verify it!"

"You're right there, of course. We can't just stand here and talk. Did you bring your gun?"

"Yes, but we won't need it."

"We'll see about it. Come along, we'll ring that doorbell and see if anyone is home."

Their boots were deadened of all sound in the thick green grass. It smelled of a fresh mowing. In spite of himself, Captain John Black felt a great peace come over him. It had been thirty years since he had been in a small town, and the buzzing of spring bees on the air lulled and quieted him, and the fresh look of things was a balm to the soul.

THEY SET FOOT UPON THE PORCH. HOLLOW ECHOES SOUNDED from under the boards as they walked across the porch and stood before the screen door. Inside, they could see a bead curtain hung across the hall entry, and a crystal chandelier and a Maxfield Parrish painting framed on one wall over a comfortable Morris chair. The house smelled old, and of the attic, and infinitely comfortable. You could hear the tinkle of ice rattling in a lemonade pitcher. In a distant

kitchen, because of the heat of the day, someone was preparing a soft, lemon drink. Someone was humming under his breath, high and sweet.

Captain John Black rang the bell.

FOOTSTEPS, DAINY AND THIN, CAME ALONG THE HALL AND A kind-faced lady of some forty years, dressed in the sort of dress you might expect in the year 1909, peered out at them.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

"Beg your pardon," said Captain Black, uncertainly. "But we're looking for, that is, could you help us, I mean." He stopped. She looked out at him with dark wondering eyes.

"If you're selling something," she said, "I'm much too busy and I haven't time." She turned to go.

"No, wait," he cried, bewilderedly. "What town is this?"

She looked him up and down as if he were crazy, "What do you mean, what town is it? How could you be in a town and not know what town it was?"

The captain looked as if he wanted to go sit under a shady apple tree. "I beg your pardon," he said. "But we're strangers here. We're from Earth, and we want to know how this town got here and how you got here."

"Are you census takers?" she asked.

"No," he said.

"What do you want then?" she demanded.

"Well," said the captain.

"Well?" she asked.

"How long has this town been here?" he wondered.

"It was built in 1868," she snapped at them. "Is this a game?"

"No, not a game," cried the captain. "Oh, God," he said. "Look here. We're from Earth!"

"From where?" she said.

"From Earth!" he said.

"Where's that?" she said.

"From Earth," he cried.

"Out of the ground, do you mean?" she wondered.

"No, from the planet Earth!" he almost shouted. "Here," he insisted, "come out on the porch and I'll show you."

"No," she said, "I won't come out there, you are all evidently quite mad from the sun."

Lustig and Hinkston stood behind the captain. Hinkston now spoke up. "Missus," he said. "We came in a flying ship across space, among the stars. We came from the third planet from the sun, Earth, to this planet, which is Mars. Now do you understand, Missus?"

"Mad from the sun," she said, taking hold of the door. "Go away now, before I call my husband who's upstairs taking a nap, and he'll beat you all with his fists."

"But—" said Hinkston. "This is Mars, is it not?"

"This," explained the woman, as if she were addressing a child, "is Green Lake, Wisconsin, on the continent of America, surrounded by the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, on a place called the world, or sometimes, the Earth, go away now, goodbye!"

She slammed the door.

The three men stood before the door with their hands up in the air toward it, as if pleading with her to open it once more.

They looked at one another.

"Let's knock the door down," said Lustig.

"We can't," sighed the captain.

"Why not?"

"She didn't do anything bad, did she? We're the strangers here. This is private property. Good God, Hinkston!" He went and sat down on the porchstep and started to get sick.

"What, sir?"

"Did, did it ever strike you, that maybe we got ourselves, ourselves somehow, some way, fouled up. And, by accident, came back and landed on Earth!"

"Oh, sir, oh, sir, oh oh, sir." And Hinkston sat down numbly and thought about it.

Lustig stood up in the sunlight. "How could we have done that?"

"I don't know, I don't know, just let me think."

Hinkston said, "But we checked every mile of the way, and we saw Mars and our chronometers said so many miles gone, and we went past the moon and out, out into space and here we are, on Mars. I'm sure we're on Mars, sir."

Lustig said, "But, suppose, just suppose that, by accident, in space, in time, or something, we landed on a planet in space, in another time. Suppose this is Earth, thirty or fifty years ago? Maybe we got lost in the dimensions, do you think?"

"Oh, go away, Lustig."

"Are the men in the ship keeping an eye on us, Hinkston?"

"At their guns, sir."

Lustig went to the door, rang the bell. When the door opened again, he asked, "What year is this?"

"1926, of course!" cried the woman, furiously, and slammed the door again.

"Did you hear that?" Lustig ran back to them, wildly. "She said 1926! We have gone back in time! This is Earth!"

LUSTIG SAT DOWN AND THE THREE MEN LET THE WONDER AND terror of the thought afflict them. Their hands stirred fitfully on their knees. The wind blew, nodding the locks of hair on their heads.

The captain stood up, brushing off his pants. "I never thought it would be like this. I didn't ask for a thing like this. It's too much. It scares the hell out of me. How can a thing like this happen? I wish we had brought Einstein with us."

"Will anybody in the whole town believe us?" wondered

Hinkston. "Are we playing around with something dangerous? Time, I mean. Shouldn't we just take off and go home?"

"No. Not until we know what's doing here. We'll try another house. Let's walk down the block."

They walked three houses down to a little white cottage under an oak tree. "I like to be as logical as I can get," said the captain. "And I don't think we've put our finger on it yet." He nodded at the town. "How does this sound to you, Hinkston? Suppose, as you said originally, that rocket travel occurred years ago. And when the Earth people had lived here a number of years they began to get homesick for earth. First a mild neurosis about it, then a full-fledged psychosis. Then, threatened insanity. What would you do, as a psychiatrist, if faced with such a problem?"

Hinkston thought. "Well. I think I'd rearrange the civilization on Mars so it resembled Earth more and more each day. If there was any way of reproducing every plant, every road and every lake, and even an ocean, I would do so. Then I would, by some vast crowd hypnosis, theoretically anyway, convince everyone in a town this size that this really was Earth, not Mars at all."

"Good enough, Hinkston. I think we're on the right track now. That woman in that house back there, just *thinks* she's living on Earth. It protects her sanity. She and all the others in this town are the patients of the greatest experiment in migration and hypnosis you will ever lay your eyes on in your life."

"That's it, sir!" cried Lustig.

"Right, sir!" said Hinkston.

"Well," the captain sighed. "Now we're getting somewhere. I feel better. It all sounds a bit more logical now. This talk about time and going back and forth and traveling in time turns my stomach upside down. But, *this way*—" He actually smiled for the first time in a month. "Well. It looks as if we'll be fairly welcome here."

"Oh, will we, sir?" said Lustig. "After all, like the Pilgrims, these people came here to escape Earth. Maybe they won't be too happy to see us, sir. Maybe they'll try to drive us out or kill us?"

"We have superior weapons if that should happen. Anyway, all we can do is try. This next house now. Up we go."

But they had hardly crossed the lawn when Lustig stopped and looked off across the town, down the quiet, dreaming afternoon street. "Sir," he said.

"What is it, Lustig?" asked the captain.

"Oh, sir, sir, what I see, what I do see now before me, oh, oh—" said Lustig, and he began to cry. His fingers came up, twisting and trembling, and his face was all wonder and joy and incredulity. He sounded as if any moment he might go quite insane with happiness. He looked down the street and he began to run, stumbling, awkwardly, falling, picking himself up, and running on. "Oh God, God, thank you, God! Thank you!"

The captain and Hinkston stood as if unable to move.

Hinkston said, "What's wrong with him, captain?"

"Don't let him get away!" The captain broke into a run.

Now Lustig was running at full speed, shouting. He turned into a yard halfway down the little shady side street and leaped up upon the porch of a large green house with an iron rooster on the roof.

He was beating upon the door, shouting and hollering and crying, when Hinkston and the captain ran up and stood in the yard.

The door opened. Lustig yanked the screen wide and in a high wail of discovery and happiness, cried out, "Grandma! Grandpa!"

Two old people stood in the doorway, their faces lighting up.

"Albert!" Their voices piped and they rushed out to embrace him and pat him on the back and move around him. "Albert, oh, Albert, it's been so many years! How you've

grown, boy, and how big you are, boy, oh, Albert boy, how are you!"

"Grandma, Grandpa!" sobbed Albert Lustig. "It's so good to see you! You look fine, fine! Oh, fine!" He held them, turned them, kissed them, hugged them, cried on them, held them out again, blinked at the little old people. The sun was in the sky, the wind blew, the grass was green, the screen door stood open.

"Come in, lad, come in, there's lemonade for you, fresh, lots of it!"

"Grandma, Grandpa, it's good to see you! I've got friends down here! Here!" Lustig turned and waved wildly at the captain and Hinkston who, all during the adventure on the porch, had stood in the shade of a tree, holding onto each other. "Captain, captain, come up, come up, I want you to meet my grandfolks!"

"Howdy, howdy," said the folks. "Come up, come on in, there's plenty for all. Any friend of Albert's is ours, too! Don't stand there with your mouths open! Come on, come on!"

IN THE LIVING ROOM OF THE OLD HOUSE IT WAS COOL AND A grandfather clock ticked high and long and bronzed in one corner. There were soft pillows on large couches and walls filled with books and a rug cut in a thick rose pattern and antimacassars pinned to furniture, and lemonade in the hand, sweating, and cool on the thirsty tongue.

"Here's to our health." Grandma tipped her glass to her porcelain teeth.

"How long you been here, Grandma?" said Lustig.

"A good many years," she said, tartly. "Ever since we died."

"Ever since you what?" asked Captain John Black, putting his drink down.

"Oh, yes," Lustig looked at his captain. "They've been dead thirty years."

"And you sit there, calmly!" cried the captain.

"Tush," said the old woman, and winked glitteringly at John Black. "Who are we to question what happens? Here we are. What's life, anyways? Who does what for why and where? All we know is here we are, alive again, and no questions asked. A second chance." She toddled over and held out her thin wrist to Captain John Black. "Feel." He felt. "Solid, ain't it?" she asked. He nodded. "You hear my voice, don't you?" she inquired. Yes, he did. "Well, then," she said, in triumph. "Why go around questioning?"

"Well," said the captain. "It's simply that we never thought we'd find a thing like this on Mars."

"And now you've found it. I dare say there's lots on every planet that'll show you God's infinite ways."

"Is this Heaven?" asked Hinkston.

"Nonsense, no. It's a world and we get a second chance. Nobody told us why. But then nobody told us why we were on Earth, either. That other Earth, I mean. The one you came from. How do we know there wasn't another before that one?"

"A good question," said the captain.

Lustig kept smiling at his grandfolks. "Gosh, it's good to see you. Gosh, it's good."

The captain stood up and slapped his hand on his leg in an off-hand fashion. "We've got to be going. It's been nice. Thank you for the drinks."

"You'll be back, of course," said the grandfolks.

"What?" The captain's eyes were distant.

"You'll be back. For supper tonight, Albert and yourself, captain, and Mr. Hinkston?"

"We'll try to make it. Thank you. There's so much to be done. My men are waiting for me, back at the—"

He stopped. He turned and looked toward the door, startled.

Far away, in the sunlight, there was a sound of voices, a crowd, a shouting and a great hello.

"What's that?" asked Hinkston.

"We'll soon find out!" And Captain John Black was out the front door abruptly, jolting across the green lawn and into the street of the Martian town.

He stood looking at the ship. The ports were open and his crew was streaming out, waving their hands. A crowd of people had gathered and in and through and among these people the members of the crew were running, talking, laughing, shaking hands. People did little dances. People swarmed. The rocket lay empty and abandoned.

A brass band exploded in the sunlight, flinging off a gay tune from upraised tubas and trumpets. There was a bang of drums and a shrill of fifes. Little girls with golden hair jumped up and down. Little boys shouted, "Hooray!" And fat men passed around ten-cent cigars. The mayor of the town made a speech. Then, each member of the crew with a mother on one arm, a father or sister on the other, was spirited off down the street, into little cottages or big mansions and doors slammed shut.

The wind rose in the clear spring sky and all was silent. The brass band had banged off around a corner leaving the rocket to shine and dazzle alone in the sunlight.

"Abandoned," cried the captain. "Abandoned the ship, they did! I'll have their skins, by God! Their skins! They had orders!"

"Sir," said Lustig, "don't be too hard on them. Those were all old relatives and friends."

"That's no excuse!"

"Think how they felt, captain, seeing familiar faces outside the ship!"

"They had their orders, damn it!"

"But how would you have felt, captain?"

"I would have obeyed orders! I would have—" The captain's mouth remained open.

STRIDING ALONG THE SIDEWALK UNDER THE MARTIAN SUN, tall, smiling, eyes blue, face tan, came a young man of some twenty-six years.

"John!" the man cried, and broke into a run.

"What?" said Captain John Black. He swayed.

"John, you old beggar you!"

The man ran up and gripped his hand and slapped him on the back.

"It's you," said John Black.

"Of course, who'd you think it was!"

"Edward!" The captain appealed now to Lustig and Hinkston, holding the stranger's hand. "This is my brother Edward. Ed, meet my men, Lustig, Hinkston! My brother!"

They tugged at each other's hands and arms and then finally embraced. "Ed!" "John, you old bum, you!" "You're looking fine, Ed, but, Ed what is this? You haven't changed over the years, you died I remember, when you were twenty-six, and I was nineteen, oh God, so many years ago, and here you are, and, Lord, what goes on, what goes on?"

Edward Black gave him a brotherly knock on the chin. "Mom's waiting," he said.

"Mom?"

"And Dad, too."

"And Dad?" The captain almost fell to earth as if hit upon the chest with a mighty weapon. He walked stiffly and awkwardly, out of coordination. He stuttered and whispered and talked only one or two words at a time. "Mom alive? Dad? Where?"

"At the old house on Oak Knoll Avenue."

"The old house." The captain stared in delighted amaze. "Did you hear that, Lustig, Hinkston? Oak Knoll. Old, old house. Mom. Dad. Lord!"

"I know it's hard for you to believe."

"But alive. Real."

"Don't I feel real?" The strong arm, the firm grip, the white smile. The light, curling hair.

Hinkston was gone. He had seen his own house down the street and was running for it. Lustig was grinning. "Now you understand, sir, what happened to everybody on the ship. They couldn't help themselves."

"Yes. Yes," said the captain, eyes shut. "Yes." He put out his hand. "When I open my eyes, you'll be gone." He opened his eyes. "You're still here. God, Edward, you look fine!"

"Come along, lunch is waiting for you. I told Mom."

Lustig said, "Sir, I'll be with my grandfolks if you want me."

"What? Oh, fine, Lustig. Later, then."

Edward grabbed his arm and marched him. "You need support."

"I do. My knees, all funny. My stomach, loose. God."

"There's the house. Remember it?"

"Remember it? Hell! I bet I can beat you to the front porch!"

They ran. The wind roared over Captain John Black's ears. The earth roared under his feet. He saw the golden figure of Edward Black pull ahead of him in the amazing dream of reality. He saw the house rush forward, the door open, the screen swing back. "Beat you!" cried Edward, bounding up the steps. "I'm an old man," panted the captain, "and you're still young. But, then, you always beat me, I remember!"

In the doorway. Mom, pink and plump and bright. And behind her, pepper grey, Dad, with his pipe in his hand.

"Mom, Dad!"

He ran up the steps like a kid, to meet them.

IT WAS A FINE LONG AFTERNOON. THEY FINISHED LUNCH AND they sat in the living room and he told them all about his rocket and his being captain and they nodded and smiled upon him and Mother was just the same, and Dad bit the end off a cigar and lighted it up in his old fashion. Mom

brought in some iced tea in the middle of the afternoon. Then, there was a big turkey dinner at night and time flowing on. When the drumsticks were sucked clean and lay brittle upon the plates, the captain leaned back in his chair and exhaled his deep contentment. Dad poured him a small glass of dry sherry. It was seven-thirty in the evening. Night was in all the trees and coloring the sky, and the lamps were halos of dim light in the gentle house. From all the other houses down the streets came sounds of music, pianos playing, laughter.

Mom put a record on the victrola and she and Captain John Black had a dance. She was wearing the same perfume he remembered from the summer when she and Dad had been killed in the train accident. She was very real in his arms as they danced lightly to the music. He was so very happy that he wanted to cry. "It's not every day," she said, "that you get a second chance to live," she said.

"I'll wake in the morning," said the captain. "And I'll be in my rocket in space, and all this will be gone."

"No, no, don't think that," she cried, softly, pleadingly. "We're here. Don't question. God is good to us. Let's be happy."

"Sorry, Mom."

The record ended with a circular hissing.

"You're tired, son," said Dad. He waved his pipe. "You and Ed go on upstairs. Your old bedroom is waiting for you."

"The old one?"

"The brass bed and all," laughed Edward.

"But I should report my men in!"

"Why?" Mother was logical.

"Why? Well, I don't know. No reason, I guess. No, none at all. What's the difference?" He shook his head. "I'm not being very logical these days."

"Good night, son." She kissed his cheek.

"Night, Mom."

"Sleep tight, son." Dad shook his hand.

"Same to you, Pop."

"It's good to have you home."

"It's good to be home."

He left the room with its cigar smoke and perfume and books and gentle light and ascended the stairs, talking, talking, with Edward. Edward pushed a door open and there was the yellow brass bed and the old banners from college days and a very musty racoon coat which he petted with strange, muted affection. "It's too much," he said, faintly. "Like an assault. Like being in a thunder shower without an umbrella. I'm soaked to the skin with emotion. It's like someone shot me with a load of buckshot. I'm perforated. I'm numb. I'm tired."

"A night's sleep between cool clean sheets for you, my bucko." Edward slapped wide the snowy linens and flounced the pillows. Then he put up a window and let the night-blooming jasmine float in. There was moonlight and the sound of distant dancing and whispering.

"So this is Mars," said the captain, undressing.

"So this is Mars." Edward undressed in idle, leisurely moves, drawing his shirt off over his head, revealing golden shoulders and the good muscular neck.

The lights were out, they were into bed, side by side, as in the days, how many decades ago? The captain lolled and was nourished by the night wind pushing the lace curtains out upon the dark room air. Among the trees, upon a lawn, someone had cranked up a portable phonograph and now it was playing, softly, "I'll be loving you, always, with a love that's true, always."

The thought of Anna came to his mind. "Is Anna here?"

His brother, lying straight out in the moonlight from the window, waited and then said, "Yes. She's out of town. But she'll be here in the morning."

The captain shut his eyes. "I want to see Anna very much."

The room was square and quiet except for their breathing. "Good night, Ed."

A pause. "Good night, John."

He lay peacefully, letting his thoughts float. For the first time the stress of the day was moved aside, all of the excitement was calmed. He could think logically now. It had all been emotion. The bands playing, the sight of familiar faces, the sick pounding of your heart. But—now . . .

How? He thought. How was all this made? And why? For what purpose? Out of the goodness of some kind God? Was God, then, really that fine and thoughtful of his children? How and why and what for?

He thought of the various theories advanced in the first heat of the afternoon by Hinkston and Lustig. He let all kinds of new theories drop in lazy pebbles down through his mind, as through a dark water, now, turning, throwing out dull flashes of white light. Mars. Earth. Mom. Dad. Edward. Mars. Martians.

Who had lived here a thousand years ago on Mars? Martians? Or had this always been like this? Martians. He repeated the word quietly, inwardly.

He laughed out loud, almost. He had the most ridiculous theory, all of a sudden. It gave him a kind of a chilled feeling. It was really nothing to think of, of course. Highly improbable. Silly. Forget it. Ridiculous.

BUT, HE THOUGHT, JUST SUPPOSE. JUST SUPPOSE, NOW, THAT there were Martians living on Mars and they saw our ship coming and saw us inside our ship and hated us. Suppose, now, just for the hell of it, that they wanted to destroy us, as invaders, as unwanted ones, and they wanted to do it in a very clever way, so that we would be taken off guard. Well, what would be the best weapon that a Martian could use against Earthmen with atom weapons?

The answer was interesting. Telepathy, hypnosis, memory and imagination.

Suppose all these houses weren't real at all, this bed not real, but only figments of my own imagination, given substance by telepathy and hypnosis by the Martians.

Suppose these houses are really some other shape, a Martian shape, but, by playing on my desires and wants, these Martians have made this seem like my old home town, my old house, to lull me out of my suspicions. What better way to fool a man, by his own emotions? Using his own mother and father as bait.

And suppose those two people in the next room, asleep, are not my mother and father at all. But two Martians, incredibly brilliant, with the ability to keep me under this dreaming hypnosis all of the time.

And that brass band, today? What a fiendishly clever plan it would be. First, fool Lustig, then fool Hinkston, then gather a crowd around the rocket ship and wave. And all the men in the ship, seeing mothers, aunts, uncles, sweethearts dead ten, twenty years ago, naturally, disregarding orders, would rush out and abandon the ship. What more natural? What more unsuspecting? What more simple? A man doesn't ask too many questions when his mother is suddenly brought back to life; he's much too happy. And the brass band played and everybody was taken off to private homes. And here we all are, tonight, in various houses, in various beds, with no weapons to protect us, and the rocket lies in the moonlight, empty. And wouldn't it be horrible and terrifying to discover that all of this was part of some great clever plan by the Martians to divide and conquer us, and kill us. Some time during the night, perhaps, my brother here on this bed, will change form, melt, shift, and become a one-eyed, green and yellow-toothed Martian. It would be very simple for him just to turn over in bed and put a knife into my heart. And in all those other houses down the street, a dozen other brothers or fathers suddenly melting away and taking out

knives and doing things to the unsuspecting, sleeping men of Earth.

His hands were shaking under the covers. His body was cold. Suddenly it was not a theory. Suddenly he was very afraid. He lifted himself in bed and listened. The night was very quiet. The music had stopped. The wind had died. His "brother" lay sleeping beside him.

Very carefully he lifted the sheets, rolled them back. He slipped from bed and was walking softly across the room when his brother's voice said, "Where are you going?"

"What?"

His brother's voice was quite cold. "I said, where do you think you're going?"

"For a drink of water."

"But you're not thirsty."

"Yes, yes, I am."

"No, you're not."

Captain John Black broke and ran across the room. He screamed. He screamed twice.

He never reached the door.

IN THE MORNING, THE BRASS BAND PLAYED A MOURNFUL dirge. From every house in the street came little solemn processions bearing long boxes and along the sun-filled street, weeping and changing, came the grandmas and grandfathers and mothers and sisters and brothers, walking to the churchyard, where there were open holes dug freshly and new tombstones installed. Seventeen holes in all, and seventeen tombstones. Three of the tombstones said, CAPTAIN JOHN BLACK, ALBERT LUSTIG, and SAMUEL HINKSTON.

The mayor made a little sad speech, his face sometimes looking like the mayor, sometimes looking like something else.

Mother and father Black were there, with brother Ed-

ward, and they cried, their faces melting now from a familiar face into something else.

Grandpa and Grandma Lustig were there, weeping, their faces also shifting like wax, shivering as a thing does in waves of heat on a summer day.

The coffins were lowered. Somebody murmured about "the unexpected and sudden deaths of seventeen fine men during the night—"

Earth was shoveled in on the coffin tops.

After the funeral the brass band slammed and banged back into town and the crowd stood around and waved and shouted as the rocket was torn to pieces and strewn about and blown up.

He went to his own funeral . . . and found out where he really belonged.

WHO IS CHARLES AVISON?

by Edison Tesla Marshall

NO ONE KNEW WHAT WAS GOING ON BEHIND THE HIGH BOARD fence at the Avison place. It was too difficult to climb. Besides, Avison's stolid neighbors were reluctant to show so much curiosity.

But a few boys lived in the neighborhood who were not troubled by such a sense of decorum. The tallest of them boosted another of the "gang" until a pair of round eyes gazed between the pickets. However, the report that the spy made to the other boys—and later to his parents—was certainly far from enlightening.

He had seen the big house, of course, with its trim lawns and walks. And also he had seen another building that had been erected since the fence. It was built much like a garage, but didn't quite look like a garage either. Protruding from it was the queerest thing—almost like a huge egg of blue steel, with slabs of heavy glass, and many encircling bands of iron.

It was some time after this that another boy, returning in the late dusk from his milk delivery, had a story to tell that no one had ever quite believed. As he talked his face

flushed and his eyes widened. He said that something almost spherical in shape, dark except for lighted windows, had rolled up into the air above the fence, straight up unwaveringly, and had kept on going!

The boy had watched it till the haze of evening shut it from his sight, until it vanished among the early stars.

"You imagined it, my son," said his father. But his mother noticed that her husband was perplexed.

"No, I didn't! I saw it as plain as I see you."

"Well," concluded the father, "we'll probably know what it was in the morning. "But, dear," he added, turning to his wife, "that Avison is quite a scientist. The delivery boy wandered into the wrong door at the Avison place one day, and he told me he went into the uncanniest-looking room he ever saw. A laboratory of some kind it was, with big machines of porcelain and steel and copper."

"And you know he wrote some sort of a scientific article just when he got out of college," supplemented his wife. "It caused quite a sensation among the scientists."

"That's right. It was about gravity, wasn't it? Let's see; that was four years ago. I had almost forgotten. He's a smart young chap all right."

"But why doesn't he go into business?" the woman protested. "He's been engaged for almost a year now to that Cole girl, you know, and if something should happen to him—"

"Oh, well, he's probably pretty careful. And you're sure you didn't imagine it, son, or dream it?"

"I'm sure, Dad!" replied the boy.

Nor had the boy dreamed or imagined it. For, if Charles Avison had wished, he could have surprised the scientific world even more. But he chose to wait.

It was true he had been engaged to Agnes Cole for twelve months. In truth, she was mightily afraid of an accident to the young scientist. Even Avison had confessed to the danger in this latest experiment of his.

The afternoon before the Vulcan ascended, Avison had spent with Agnes. They had a long talk, in which he told her much of his plan, but little of the danger. But there was a chance, he said, that he would not be at hand to marry her on the June day they'd selected.

She tried to dissuade him.

"I must go," he said. "You can't imagine how much it means. But I'm sure nothing will happen. Oh, I'll come back all right! My trial flight was a wonderful success."

His great, dark eyes glowed at the thought of it.

"Goodby, dearest!"

They kissed and she cried.

Then from the porch of her home she saw the strange, dark bubble of a thing float away into the skies.

A few nights later the farmers, thirty miles from Avison's home, might have observed a few spots of light hovering in the air over the wide field of a deserted farm. They might have discerned the light spots dart back and forth, then down, then up a way, and then descend to earth. But it is not recorded that any man was awake to see.

Charles Avison unscrewed the round door of the Vulcan and crept out. Instantly the light died from its windows. At first he could not stand, but staggered twice and fell in a heap under the curved side of the machine. He lay a little while, then flashed his light about and into the door of a great, deserted barn, in front of which his machine had alighted.

He climbed to his feet and steadied himself. After a little while he thrust his shoulder against the dark sphere and rolled it as silently as a great snowball into the high doorway. Then he glanced at his watch.

"Not far from morning," he said.

He walked unsteadily toward the road.

Avison congratulated himself on his nearness to home. A few hours before, when he awakened from unconscious-

ness, he had been over water. He had risen from the bottom of the sphere, where he had fallen, with swimming head and drumming ears, and, getting his bearings, had guided the machine toward home. His light was failing when he was still thirty miles away, however, so he had thought it safer to descend.

His experiment had been a success!

But his ears still rang, and he walked drunkenly. He sat down in a fence corner to await daylight. He saw the stars—his companions, he called them—begin to dim as a wide ribbon of grayish blue showed above the eastern horizon. He saw this ribbon widen still more, and soon he could detect the lines of his hands. At his feet were flowers, wet with dew.

Avison lighted a cigar. He could hardly see the smoke in the bluish dawn. But before the fire in it became too warm for his fingers it was daylight.

He arose and looked about. He knew the place—he had driven along the road many times in his car. He knew the great barn where he had housed the Vulcan, the long line of straggly telephone poles, the spinelike row of poplars beside the creek. Just thirty miles to home and Agnes! He would start to walk to the nearest railway station. Some friend in a car would probably pick him up.

But somehow—Avison did not know how or what or why—something, everything did not seem natural. He could not be mistaken in the place; the trees, the farms, the houses, even the fence posts were familiar. But that queer, haunting feeling of unfamiliarity remained; he could not shake it off. It must be that he had not yet completely recovered from his fainting.

He started along the road. He laughed when he saw a deep rut that had once broken a spring of his car. Here was the muddy spot where a tiny creek seeped across the highway. Here was the bridge, with its familiar hole where Octavius, his favorite horse, always shied.

The ringing in his ears had gone now; he walked perfectly straight. His head no longer swam. But the feeling of alienation was as marked as ever.

Avison became a little frightened, even though he knew the road perfectly. He tested his knowledge. Soon he would arrive at the crossroads, where the lane turned off toward the old Fair Grounds. Yes! He came to the place just where he thought it would be.

But why was it that everything was the same and yet different? He knew even the ruts of the road and the crack in the telephone post where the lightning had once struck. He knew the quiet fields of grain, the pretty farm homes, the horses in the fields. Yet he felt—he knew it now—that something was terribly different.

He saw the farmers on their way to the dairy barns. He heard the windmills creaking, and the call of the hired men as they hitched their teams to the farming implements. The world about him was commonplace and ordinary, just as always on a late spring morning in the country. But he could not shake off the feeling of illusion.

He tried to; he tried to think of other things. He whistled and smoked again, but found it useless.

He heard an automobile behind him. An open car, bearing only a driver, came up to him. The car stopped as Avison waved his arm.

"Can you give me a lift?" the scientist called.

"Sure."

Avison took a seat beside the driver, and looked at him searchingly.

"You're Johnston, aren't you?" he asked as the car started.

"Yes, but I don't remember you," the other man said.

"My name is Avison—Charles Avison."

Johnston looked at him quickly.

"Are you Charles Avison?" he asked. "I've heard of you many times."

He stretched out a gloved hand and found his companion's thin, long-fingered one.

"We can't be far from Smithford, can we?" Avison asked.

Smithford was a little town only a few miles from his home.

"About fifteen miles," replied the driver. "And what are you doing along this road at this hour, may I ask?"

"Taking a morning walk," replied Avison.

The road was becoming more familiar. He knew many of the names that he saw on the mail boxes. He knew the dog that barked from the gateway of a farmhouse—a dog that had always barked at him. Yet he was still perplexed and bewildered by the lingering sensation of unfamiliarity.

After ten miles the automobile slowed.

"I have to turn here," said Johnston. "Which way are you going?"

"Straight on, I guess; and thank you."

Avison hopped out of the slowly moving car, and started again down the dusty road, wondering why Johnston didn't recognize him.

He came to a farmhouse — one where he had often stopped for a meal while hunting quail—and turned in at the gate, hungry for a warm breakfast again. He knew the dog that came to meet him, and patted its furry head, but failed to receive any greeting from the animal. The old woman at the doorway did not recognize him.

He told her what he wanted, and she led him to the kitchen. He washed in a basin at the back and looked at himself in the glass.

Of course, that was the reason! He had needed a shave very badly on the day of his ascent, and he had been five days—at least—in the air. Now a black growth covered his cheeks and chin, and beneath the beard his face was much thinner. The bones protruded. Great, dark bags hung

beneath his eyes. No wonder he remained unknown to Johnston and the woman.

His white, hollow cheeks and wide, black eyes, in contrast to the black growth of hair, shocked him. Who would have thought that the days in the air could have been such a physical strain?

How long had he been in the air? He began to wonder what had occurred in that brief period of unconsciousness just before he descended. And had it been so brief? His watch had said 3:40 just before he fainted, and 4:35 just after he awakened. But had it been one hour or twenty-five?

During the meal, he asked but one question, and to the old woman it seemed a most peculiar one.

"What's the date?"

"Twenty-fourth," she replied, looking at him queerly. Avison had gone up on the sixteenth. He had been two days unconscious!

And still the brooding strangeness perplexed and bewildered him.

Again he was out on the road. He picked up another ride soon, and when he came to Smithford, he took off the grease-stained clothes he had worn on the air journey. He laughed at himself in the suit he had just bought. In bad need of a hair cut and shave, and in different clothes, he wondered if Agnes would know him.

The small town was at the end of his walk. He could take the train from there to his home. He walked down about the town. Although he was well known there and many people looked at him interestedly, none came up to speak to him. He laughed to himself over the fact that even an old friend did not know him.

The train—the slow old train in which he had so often ridden—pulled in an hour later. By now it was noon; the Avison place was scarcely a half-hour's ride away. He remembered the worn-out plush on the seat of the cars, the

conductor who punched his ticket. But always something was not quite the same.

"The trip has affected my mind," he said at last.

He could almost scream at the harassment of it all. He could not analyze or place his finger on the difference, but it was there, it was everywhere! The change of circumstance brooded in him and haunted him and made him grip his hands. His eyes widened at the thought of it.

Was he asleep? Or hurt?

Or dead?—*Dead!* Anything was possible to him now.

What if he were dead?

Then he laughed at himself for being a fool. The laugh was hysterical; the trainman eyed him suspiciously. He pinched himself on the arm, and the hurt was real. But something had changed him, or changed the world in which he lived.

The train stopped at last at Avison's own town, at the outskirts of which stood his own house. Agnes lived here, too. Half frightened, Avison wondered whether Agnes would know him.

"But it would be good fun if she didn't!"

So he dropped into a second-hand store and traded his trim cap for an old, battered hat. This he pulled down over his eyes, and started down the quiet street. Some boys stared at him as he passed, but no one spoke in recognition. A dog that he knew slunk away from him.

Even the town was different!

Yes! The stores and the people and the fountains and the sparrows in the streets and the signs were all the same in every physical particular. Yet there had been some kind of change, and Avison swore at himself.

At a street-corner he saw a group of men talking quietly. Although they glanced at him, they did not speak to him. And yet he knew every one of them!

As he passed he heard his name mentioned. He paused a minute as if to stare across the street.

"I knew it would happen some time," old Felix Barnes was saying. "I've told him so a hundred times. But he would go on making experiments. It's a good thing his mother isn't alive. It would about kill her."

"And they say Agnes Cole is just prostrated," said another of the group.

Agnes Cole! Avison listened more attentively.

"The funeral procession ought to start soon," said another.

A ghastly feeling of sickness rose in Avison. He clenched his hands.

"How did it happen, anyway? Does anybody know?" asked a youth. "I just got back to town, and this is the first I've heard of it."

From under his arm Barnes drew a folded newspaper, which he opened slowly.

"Here's the account—as much as any one knows," he explained. "Avison went up on the sixteenth for a four-day trip according to Miss Cole. He had some scheme for beating gravity, mind you. Think of that—beating gravity!"

"Poor fellow!" murmured the youth.

"Well, they found his machine wrecked to pieces just outside of town yesterday. Every bone in his body was broken. I heard the crash myself when the machine fell."

Panic-stricken, Avison turned away. He pinched himself again. His eyes were wide, he knew. His scalp twitched. At a newsstand he bought a paper, and feverishly read of his own death.

The machine, said the account, was broken to pieces. The name plate, on which appeared the word

Vulcan

had been found, however.

Wildly, Avison grasped at every possibility that came to his mind. Coincidence, of course. But what a devilish one! Some aviator had been killed, so badly crushed that even

his own family had mistaken his identity. Avison must hurry out to his home and tell his family that he lived. He must tell Agnes, too.

But was he alive?

He cursed himself as a fool for letting the question come to his mind. But what did he know of the region and state of death? His eyes widened even more at the thought of it.

But it couldn't be that—it couldn't! He pricked his chest with a pin. Then he pricked his hand till he brought blood.

He came in sight of the old church where he had gone to Sunday school as a boy, and where his father had gone before him, the old ivy-grown church, with its sleepy belfry and its quiet lawn. Out in front were many carriages and automobiles. The sound of singing came up to him—a funeral dirge.

Avison hung back. He was afraid to go on to that church.

What if the body in the coffin should be his?

He cursed himself again, and slowly went on. But he must see the dead man before the coffin was closed! He began to walk swiftly.

He climbed the steps and entered the church doors. It was filled with his own friends. The sexton looked at him, but did not recognize him. Timidly he sat down, just beside an acquaintance. The man was weeping quietly.

The service was nearing its close when Avison entered. Almost at once the white-haired old parson said that those who wished might look again at the body.

The people stood up, the young scientist with them. Agnes in black, her face tearstained, was in front. Near her stood his sister, weeping. He dared not approach them. There was his uncle—all of his cousins. Slowly and wearily the train of people began to walk past the long black coffin. Avison followed them.

"What if it is?" he whispered. "What if it is?"

He gripped himself and resolved to keep his control. He walked slowly up.

And the pall-bearers saw a young man at the end of the line—one who looked familiar, and yet whom they thought they did not know, one who needed a shave and wore a ridiculous suit of clothes—clench his hands until the nails nearly tore the flesh, and turn as white as the flowers banked about the coffin.

Avison rushed to the open air. Then he pressed his hands to his lips to suppress a scream.

"It is I!" he moaned. *"It is my own body!"*

And winding away out of the town, the funeral procession started for the graveyard.

Considering everything, Avison kept his self-control well. He resolved that he would not go insane. That there had been some monstrous coincidence. That the smooth face in the coffin was not his own. This resolve was the only thing that preserved his sanity.

That day passed, and that night, and still the young man did not sleep. He had secured a room in the hotel, and he tried to forget, in the smoke of many strong cigars. That a ghost could smoke cigars! In the morning he slept a little.

His beard was longer than ever, and this, together with the thinness of his face, disguised him perfectly. At ten he caught a train for a near-by city. There he could think it out, away from Agnes and his mourning relatives, to whom he felt a deadly fear of identifying himself.

In the city he secured a hotel room, and again tried to think. He was baffled, bewildered, afraid. The strangeness of everything remained, but not in such a marked degree as in his home town.

"A coincidence," he kept repeating. "It must be! It can't be anything else!"

After a few days he began to think of his science again.

What if he were taken for dead? He himself knew now that he was alive and well. He ate heartily at the hotel grill; he saw an occasional movie.

But he could not go back to the Avison place nor to Agnes—at least until the memory of the familiar face in the coffin had faded from the minds of those at home. He shut it out of his own mind.

Then he thought of his machine out in the great deserted barn. They had found the wreck of the dead man's machine, and machines do not have ghosts. He felt more himself every day. Finally he remembered that an observatory in connection with a great university was situated just outside the city. So one day he had his beard and mustache trimmed, put on a large pair of dark glasses, and went out to talk to the head of the astronomy department.

"I am Vunden, of Heidelberg," he told Gray, the old astronomer, "and I would like a position. The money part of it is of no importance to me."

This did not surprise Gray. He knew many men on the faculty who worked only for the love of it. He questioned the young man, whose knowledge of the stars he found amazing. So Gray procured "Vunden" a position on a low salary, and Avison went to work again at his old love.

But it came about that he was not long at the observatory. A few weeks after he obtained his position there came an eclipse of the sun. That noon, as Avison stared into the eyepiece of the telescope, he saw for an instant at the edge of the dark rim of the moon a new planet. The significance of it struck Avison squarely between the eyes.

He sat back, staring into space for a few seconds, then started up with raised arms. Gray, the old astronomer, found him laughing and crying hysterically.

"What's the matter, Vunden?" he demanded.

"Matter? Great Heavens!" began Avison excitedly. Then he calmed himself. "I have made the greatest discovery in

the scientific world. I have made two of them, in fact! But this one is the greatest in the history of astronomy! Look through the telescope!"

"What is it?" questioned Gray as he adjusted the glass.

"Look!" Avison rasped.

Gray glanced a moment at the tiny orb. The moon hid it as he watched.

"A new planet!" The old man was staggered. "Why has it never been seen before?"

Avison's face flamed.

"I can tell you why! It is in perpetual eclipse by the sun just opposite from us. The once or twice a year it is not eclipsed, probably on account of the ellipse of the earth's course around the sun, it is too near the sun to be seen. Don't you understand? Don't you?"

"But why—"

"Oh. I will tell you everything, soon. But first tell me this: Along the twentieth of May was there a kind of meteoric disturbance—a comet?"

"How came you not to notice that? A meteor swept very near the earth. But tell me—"

"No. Let me go. I won't explain now. I can't. But I will write to you in a day or so."

Then as he hurried out: "To think that I should find out the truth at last!"

It was only a day or so later that Vunden disappeared as if from the face of the earth. But a mimeograph copy of a strange letter came to every great scientist in the nation. And one letter, the original, came to one recipient who was not a scientist at all—Agnes Cole.

It made many a gray-haired astronomer shake his head unbelievably. But Agnes understood. The communication read:

To Agnes and to the Scientific Men of the World:

I do not expect you to believe what I have written here, but I only ask that you investigate and you will then learn that what I say is true. And I, Charles David Avison, of There, not of Here—but an equal in mind, ability, and genius of the Charles David Avison who died for science, Here, of whom you already know—I swear to you that it is the truth.

If you do not believe, it is no matter. For even now I feel that perhaps I am doing wrong to add to the knowledge of the world wherein I do not belong.

Understand first that there are two earth worlds. In order that you may not confuse them, I will call the one in which I now am Here. The other is There.

Both were thrown off from the sun as spiral nebula at the same instant. Here went in one direction, and There the other. Both being of the same size, gravity overcame the centrifugal force at exactly the same distance in space from the sun.

The two cooled the same time, of course, their oceans formed coincidentally, and the first germs of life appeared upon There at the identical instant that they appeared Here.

I have already told you enough to enable you to understand what occurred. There is no fate or chance in life—everything is cause and effect, effect and cause.

So as life developed There, its exact counterpart developed Here. For every caveman There, one was Here—his exact counterpart in appearance. Everything that he did or thought or felt, the caveman Here did or thought or felt at the same time. And so it was through the ages.

When I, Charles David Avison, was born There, Charles David Avison was born Here. When he began to love, I began to love. When he made the greatest discovery of all ages—the S waves which, conducted

through a certain substance, will render it immune to the attraction of gravity, I made it There. Together we built spherical machines, and at the same second christened them the Vulcan.

I will not tell here of my discovery, but will leave it for some one else to make. One who belongs on this Here of yours. Your world has had its Avison; my world still awaits the benefits accruing from the discoveries of its own Avison.

On the same day we each made trial flights, I There on that far-away counterpart world, and he Here. A few months later, on the sixteenth of May, we left our worlds. He left Here and I left There, and each of us floated away toward the stars.

Each of us had air for many days and food enough. But then for the first time something happened There that did not happen Here. For the first time the dualism was broken.

A meteor came near There when one did not come Here. My Vulcan was attracted to it by gravity, and before I could throw the S waves into the metal covering to render us immune, I was sweeping after it at a terrific pace, faster than our finite minds can conceive. I became unconscious then. Why, I do not know.

And I see now what happened. The meteor carried me across that infinite expanse to a point where the gravity of this world began to grip me. I began to fall.

I remember now that when I wakened the sea was below me. I remember that I threw on the S waves just in time, and floated down to safety.

I do not know how the other Charles Avison of Here fell to his death. I know that his machine was as good as mine, for the laws of cause and effect ordered it so. I can only attribute his fall to some influence of this meteor, this monstrous disturber out of space. The

meteor probably never struck the earth. It might now be buried deep in the cold surface of the moon.

I have no place in this world of yours; I am a stranger here. In fact, I have no place anywhere now, for my counterpart is dead. If I stay here the old dualism will be broken still more, and our two worlds would soon become most different places. It is broken, anyway, now. For there is a man's body beneath the grass of Here, that is not There.

When you get this I will have boarded my Vulcan and will have started out into the strange, wonderful maze of worlds.

Perhaps I will go home—or perhaps to a new world. Perhaps I will not get anywhere. But I do not care. I would die out there among the stars, or perhaps remain on their unknown surfaces, the greatest voyager that the worlds have ever known.

An experiment with hypnotism that worked a little too well . . .

THE FACTS IN THE CASE OF M. VALDEMAR

by Edgar Allan Poe

OF COURSE I SHALL NOT PRETEND TO CONSIDER IT ANY MATTER for wonder, that the extraordinary case of M. Valdemar has excited discussion. It would have been a miracle had it not—especially under the circumstances. Through the desire of all parties concerned, to keep the affair from the public, at least for the present, or until we had further opportunities for investigation—through our endeavors to effect this—a garbled or exaggerated account made its way into society, and became the source of many unpleasant misrepresentations; and, very naturally, of a great deal of disbelief.

It is now rendered necessary that I give the *facts*—as far as I comprehend them myself. They are, succinctly, these:

My attention, for the last three years, had been repeatedly drawn to the subject of Mesmerism; and, about nine months ago, it occurred to me, quite suddenly, that in the series of experiments made hitherto, there had been a very remarkable and most unaccountable omission:—no person had as yet been mesmerized *in articulo mortis*.

It remained to be seen, first, whether in such condition, there existed in the patient any susceptibility to the magnetic influence; secondly, whether, if any existed, it was impaired or increased by the condition; thirdly, to what extent, or for how long a period, the encroachments of Death might be arrested by the process. There were other points to be ascertained, but these most excited my curiosity—the last, especially, from the immensely important character of its consequences.

In looking around me for some subject by whose means I might test these particulars, I was brought to think of my friend, M. Ernest Valdemar, the well-known compiler of the “*Bibliotheca Forensica*,” and author (under the *nom de plume* of Issachar Marx) of the Polish versions of “*Wallenstein*” and “*Gargantua*.” M. Valdemar, who has resided principally at Harlem, N. Y., since the year of 1839, is (or was) particularly noticeable for the extreme spareness of his person—his lower limbs much resembling those of John Randolph; and, also, for the whiteness of his whiskers, in violent contrast to the blackness of his hair—the latter, in consequence, being very generally mistaken for a wig. His temperament was markedly nervous, and rendered him a good subject for mesmeric experiment. On two or three occasions I had put him to sleep with little difficulty, but was disappointed in other results which his peculiar constitution had naturally led me to anticipate. His will was at no period positively, or thoroughly, under my control, and in regard to *clairvoyance*, I could accomplish with him nothing to be relied upon. I always attributed my failure at these points to the disordered state of his health. For some months previous to my becoming acquainted with him, his physicians had declared him in a confirmed phthisis. It was his custom, indeed, to speak calmly of his approaching dissolution, as a matter neither to be avoided nor regretted.

When the ideas to which I have alluded first occurred

to me, it was of course very natural that I should think of M. Valdemar. I knew the steady philosophy of the man too well to apprehend any scruples from *him*; and he had no relatives in America who would be likely to interfere. I spoke to him frankly upon the subject; and, to my surprise, his interest seemed vividly excited. I say to my surprise; for, although he had always yielded his person freely to my experiments, he had never before given me any tokens of sympathy with what I did. His disease was of that character which would admit of exact calculation in respect to the epoch of its termination in death; and it was finally arranged between us that he would send for me about twenty-four hours before the period announced by his physicians as that of his decease.

It is now rather more than seven months since I received, from M. Valdemar himself, the subjoined note:

"My dear P—

"You may as well come now. D— and F— are agreed that I cannot hold out beyond to-morrow midnight; and I think they have hit the time very nearly.

Valdemar"

I received this note within half an hour after it was written, and in fifteen minutes more I was in the dying man's chamber. I had not seen him for ten days, and was appalled by the fearful alteration which the brief interval had wrought in him. His face wore a leaden hue; the eyes were utterly lustreless; and the emaciation was so extreme, that the skin had been broken through by the cheek-bones. His expectoration was excessive. The pulse was barely perceptible. He retained, nevertheless, in a very remarkable manner, both his mental power and a certain degree of physical strength. He spoke with distinctness—took some palliative medicines without aid—and, when I entered the room, was occupied in penciling memoranda in a pocket-book. He was

propped up in the bed by pillows. Doctors D— and F— were in attendance.

After pressing Valdemar's hand, I took these gentlemen aside, and obtained from them a minute account of the patient's condition. The left lung had been for eighteen months in a semi-osseous or cartilaginous state, and was, of course, entirely useless for all purposes of vitality. The right, in its upper portion, was also partially, if not thoroughly, ossified, while the lower region was merely a mass of purulent tubercles, running one into another. Several extensive perforations existed; and, at one point, permanent adhesion to the ribs had taken place. These appearances in the right lobe were of comparatively recent date. The ossification had proceeded with very unusual rapidity; no sign of it had been discovered a month before, and the adhesion had only been observed during the three previous days. Independently of the phthisis, the patient was suspected of aneurism of the aorta; but on this point the osseous symptoms rendered an exact diagnosis impossible. It was the opinion of both physicians that M. Valdemar would die about midnight on the morrow (Sunday). It was then seven o'clock on Saturday evening.

On quitting the invalid's bedside to hold conversation with myself, Doctors D— and F— had bidden him a final farewell. It had not been their intention to return; but, at my request, they agreed to look in upon the patient about ten the next night.

When they had gone, I spoke freely with M. Valdemar on the subject of his approaching dissolution, as well as, more particularly, of the experiment proposed. He still professed himself quite willing and even anxious to have it made, and urged me to commence it at once. A male and female nurse were in attendance; but I did not feel myself altogether at liberty to engage in a task of this character with no more reliable witnesses than these people, in case

of sudden accident, might prove. I therefore postponed operations until about eight the next night, when the arrival of a medical student, with whom I had some acquaintance (Mr. Theodore L——l), relieved me from further embarrassment. It had been my design, originally, to wait for the physicians; but I was induced to proceed, first, by the urgent entreaties of M. Valdemar, and secondly, by my conviction that I had not a moment to lose, as he was evidently sinking fast.

Mr. L——l was so kind as to accede to my desire that he would take notes of all that occurred; and it is from his memoranda that what I now have to relate is, for the most part, either condensed or copied *verbatim*.

It wanted about five minutes of eight when, taking the patient's hand, I begged him to state, as distinctly as he could, to Mr. L——l, whether he (M. Valdemar) was entirely willing that I should make the experiment of mesmerizing him in his then condition.

He replied feebly, yet quite audibly: "Yes, I wish to be mesmerized"—adding immediately afterward: "I fear you have deferred it too long."

While he spoke thus, I commenced the passes which I had already found most effectual in subduing him. He was evidently influenced with the first lateral stroke of my hand across his forehead; but although I exerted all my powers, no further perceptible effect was induced until some minutes after ten o'clock, when Doctors D— and F— called, according to appointment. I explained to them, in a few words, what I designed, and as they opposed no objection, saying that the patient was already in the death agony, I proceeded without hesitation—exchanging, however, the lateral passes for downward ones, and directing my gaze entirely into the right eye of the sufferer.

By this time his pulse was imperceptible and his breathing was stertorous, and at intervals of half a minute.

This condition was nearly unaltered for a quarter of an hour. At the expiration of this period, however, a natural although a very deep sigh escaped from the bosom of the dying man, and the stertorous breathing ceased—that is to say, its stertorousness was no longer apparent; the intervals were undiminished. The patient's extremities were of an icy coldness.

At five minutes before eleven, I perceived unequivocal signs of the mesmeric influence. The glassy roll of the eye was changed for that expression of uneasy inward examination which is never seen except in cases of sleep-waking, and which it is quite impossible to mistake. With a few rapid lateral *passés* I made the lids quiver, as in incipient sleep, and with a few more I closed them altogether. I was not satisfied, however, with this, but continued the manipulations vigorously, and with the fullest exertion of the will, until I had completely stiffened the limbs of the slumberer, after placing them in a seemingly easy position. The legs were at full length; the arms were nearly so, and reposed on the bed at a moderate distance from the loins. The head was very slightly elevated.

When I had accomplished this, it was fully midnight, and I requested the gentlemen present to examine M. Valdemar's condition. After a few experiments, they admitted him to be in an unusually perfect state of mesmeric trance. The curiosity of both the physicians was greatly excited. Dr. D— resolved at once to remain with the patient all night, while Dr. F— took leave with a promise to return at daybreak. Mr. L——l and the nurses remained.

We left M. Valdemar entirely undisturbed until about three o'clock in the morning, when I approached him and found him in precisely the same condition as when Dr. F— went away—that is to say, he lay in the same position; the pulse was imperceptible; the breathing was gentle (scarcely noticeable, unless through the application of a

mirror to the lips); the eyes were closed naturally; and the limbs were as rigid and as cold as marble. Still, the general appearance was certainly not that of death.

As I approached M. Valdemar I made a kind of half effort to influence his right arm into pursuit of my own, as I passed the latter gently to and fro above his person. In such experiments with this patient, I had never perfectly succeeded before, and assuredly I had little thought of succeeding now; but to my astonishment, his arm very readily, although feebly followed every direction I assigned it with mine. I determined to hazard a few words of conversation.

"M. Valdemar," I said, "are you asleep?" He made no answer, but I perceived a tremor about the lips, and was thus induced to repeat the question, again and again. At its third repetition, his whole frame was agitated by a very slight shivering; the eyelids unclosed themselves so far as to display a white line of the ball; the lips moved sluggishly, and from between them, in a barely audible whisper, issued the words:

"Yes;—asleep now. Do not wake me!—let me die so!"

I here felt the limbs, and found them as rigid as ever. The right arm, as before, obeyed the direction of my hand. I questioned the sleep-waker again:

"Do you still feel pain in the breast, M. Valdemar?"

The answer now was immediate, but even less audible than before:

"No pain—I am dying!"

I did not think it advisable to disturb him further just then, and nothing more was said or done until the arrival of Dr. F—, who came a little before sunrise, and expressed unbounded astonishment at finding the patient still alive. After feeling the pulse and applying a mirror to his lips, he requested me to speak to the sleep-waker again. I did so, saying:

"M. Valdemar, do you still sleep?"

As before, some minutes elapsed ere a reply was made;

and during the interval the dying man seemed to be collecting his energies to speak. At my fourth repetition of the question, he said very faintly, almost inaudibly:

"Yes; still asleep—dying."

It was now the opinion, or rather the wish, of the physicians, that M. Valdemar should be suffered to remain undisturbed in his present apparently tranquil condition, until death should supervene—and this, it was generally agreed, must now take place within a few minutes. I concluded, however, to speak to him once more, and merely repeated my previous question.

While I spoke, there came a marked change over the countenance of the sleep-waker. The eyes rolled themselves slowly open, the pupils disappearing upwardly; the skin generally assumed a cadaverous hue, resembling not so much parchment as white paper; and the circular hectic spots which, hitherto, had been strongly defined in the centre of each cheek, went out at once. I use this expression, because the suddenness of their departure put me in mind of nothing so much as the extinguishment of a candle by a puff of the breath. The upper lip, at the same time, writhed itself away from the teeth, which it had previously covered completely; while the lower jaw fell with an audible jerk, leaving the mouth widely extended, and disclosing in full view the swollen and blackened tongue. I presume that no member of the party then present had been unaccustomed to death-bed horrors; but so hideous beyond conception was the appearance of M. Valdemar at this moment, that there was a general shrinking back from the region of the bed.

I now feel that I have reached a point of this narrative at which every reader will be startled into positive disbelief. It is my business, however, simply to proceed.

There was no longer the faintest sign of vitality in M. Valdemar; and, concluding him to be dead, we were consigning him to the charge of the nurses, when a strong

vibratory motion was observable in the tongue. This continued for perhaps a minute. At the expiration of this period, there issued from the distended and motionless jaws a voice—such as it would be madness in me to attempt describing. There are, indeed, two or three epithets which might be considered as applicable to it in part; I might say, for example, that the sound was harsh, and broken and hollow; but the hideous whole is indescribable, for the simple reason that no similar sounds have ever jarred upon the ear of humanity. There were two particulars, nevertheless, which I thought then, and still think, might fairly be stated as characteristic of the intonation—as well adapted to convey some idea of its unearthly peculiarity. In the first place, the voice seemed to reach our ears—at least mine—from a vast distance, or from some deep cavern within the earth. In the second place, it impressed me (I fear, indeed, that it will be impossible to make myself comprehended) as gelatinous or glutinous matters impress the sense of touch.

I have spoken both of “sound” and of “voice.” I mean to say that the sound was one of distinct—of even wonderfully, thrillingly distinct—syllabification. M. Valdemar spoke—obviously in reply to the question I had propounded to him a few minutes before. I had asked him, it will be remembered, if he still slept. He now said:

“Yes;—no;—I have been sleeping—and now—now—I am dead.”

No person present even affected to deny, or attempted to repress, the unutterable, shuddering horror which these few words, thus uttered, were so well calculated to convey. Mr. L——l (the student) swooned. The nurses immediately left the chamber, and could not be induced to return. My own impressions I would not pretend to render intelligible to the reader. For nearly an hour, we busied ourselves, silently—without the utterance of a word—in endeavors to revive Mr. L——l. When he came to himself,

we addressed ourselves again to an investigation of M. Valdemar's condition.

It remained in all respects as I have last described it, with the exception that the mirror no longer afforded evidence of respiration. An attempt to draw blood from the arm failed. I should mention, too, that this limb was no further subject to my will. I endeavored in vain to make it follow the direction of my hand. The only real indication, indeed, of the mesmeric influence, was now found in the vibratory movement of the tongue, whenever I addressed M. Valdemar a question. He seemed to be making an effort to reply, but had no longer sufficient volition. To queries put to him by any other person than myself he seemed utterly insensible—although I endeavored to place each member of the company in mesmeric rapport with him. I believe that I have now related all that is necessary to an understanding of the sleep-waker's state at this epoch. Other nurses were procured; and at ten o'clock I left the house in company with the two physicians and Mr. L——l.

In the afternoon we all called again to see the patient. His condition remained precisely the same. We had now some discussion as to the propriety and feasibility of awakening him; but we had little difficulty in agreeing that no good purpose would be served by so doing. It was evident that, so far, death (or what is usually termed death) had been arrested by the mesmeric process. It seemed clear to us all that to awaken M. Valdemar would be merely to insure his instant, or at least his speedy, dissolution.

From this period until the close of last week—an interval of nearly seven months—we continued to make daily calls at M. Valdemar's house, accompanied, now and then, by medical and other friends. All this time the sleep-waker remained exactly as I have last described him. The nurses' attentions were continual.

It was on Friday last that we finally resolved to make the experiment of awakening, or attempting to awaken, him;

and it is the (perhaps) unfortunate result of this later experiment which has given rise to so much discussion in private circles—to so much of what I cannot help thinking unwarranted popular feeling.

For the purpose of relieving M. Valdemar from the mesmeric trance, I made use of the customary passes. These for a time were unsuccessful. The first indication of revival was afforded by a partial descent of the iris. It was observed, as especially remarkable, that this lowering of the pupil was accompanied by a profuse out-flowing of a yellowish ichor (from beneath the lids) of a pungent and highly offensive odor.

It was now suggested that I should attempt to influence the patient's arm as heretofore. I made the attempt and failed. Dr. F— then intimated a desire to have me put a question. I did so, as follows:

"M. Valdemar, can you explain to us what are your feelings or wishes now?"

There was an instant return of the hectic circles on the cheeks: the tongue quivered, or rather rolled violently in the mouth (although the jaws and lips remained rigid as before); and at length the same hideous voice which I have already described, broke forth:

"For God's sake!—quick!—quick!—put me to sleep—or, quick!—waken me!—quick!—*I say to you that I am dead!*"

I was thoroughly unnerved, and for an instant remained undecided what to do. At first I made an endeavor to re-compose the patient; but, failing in this through total abeyance of the will, I retraced my steps and as earnestly struggled to awaken him. In this attempt I soon saw that I should be successful—or at least I soon fancied that my success would be complete—and I am sure that all in the room were prepared to see the patient awaken.

For what really occurred, however, it is quite impossible that any human being could have been prepared.

As I rapidly made the mesmeric passes, amid ejaculations

of "Dead! dead!" absolutely *bursting* from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer, his whole frame at once—within the space of a single minute, or less—shrunk—crumbled—absolutely rotted away beneath my hands. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putrescence.

When a mild-mannered man starts flashing a large knife . . . watch out!

THE BRONZE PARROT

by R. Austin Freeman

THE REVEREND DEODATUS JAWLEY HAD JUST SAT DOWN TO the gate-legged table on which lunch was spread and had knocked his knee, according to his invariable custom, against the sharp corner of the seventh leg.

"I wish you would endeavour to be more careful, Mr. Jawley," said the rector's wife. "You nearly upset the mustard pot and these jars are exceedingly bad for the leg."

"Oh, that's of no consequence, Mrs. Bodley," the curate replied cheerfully.

"I don't agree with you at all," was the stiff rejoinder.

"It doesn't matter, you know, so long as the skin isn't broken," Mr. Jawley persisted with an ingratiating smile.

"I was referring to the leg of the table," Mrs. Bodley corrected, frostily.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" said the curate; and, blushing like a Dublin Bay prawn, he abandoned himself in silence to the consideration of the numerical ratios suggested by five mutton chops and three prospective consumers. The problem thus presented was one of deep interest to Mr. Jawley, who had a remarkably fine appetite for such an ex-

ceedingly small man, and he awaited its solution with misgivings born of previous disappointments.

"I hope you are not very hungry, Mr. Jawley," said the rector's wife.

"Er—no—er—not unusually so," was the curate's suave and casuistical reply. The fact is that he was always hungry, excepting after the monthly tea-meetings.

"Because," pursued Mrs. Bodley, "I see that Walker has only cooked five chops; and yours looks rather a small one."

"Oh, it will be quite sufficient, thank you," Mr. Jawley hastened to declare, adding, a little unfortunately perhaps, "Amplly sufficient for any moderate and temperate person."

The Reverend Augustus Bodley emerged from behind the *Church Times* and directed a suspicious glance at his curate, who, becoming suddenly conscious of the ambiguity of his last remark, blushed crimson and cut himself a colossal slice of bread. There was an uncomfortable silence which lasted some minutes, and was eventually broken by Mrs. Bodley.

"I want you to go into Dilbury this afternoon, Mr. Jawley, and execute a few little commissions."

"Certainly, Mrs. Bodley. With pleasure," said the curate.

"I want you to call and see if Miss Gosse has finished my hat. If she has, you had better bring it with you. She is so unreliable and I want to wear it at the Hawley-Jones' garden party to-morrow. If it isn't finished you must wait until it is. Don't come away without it."

"No, Mrs. Bodley, I will not. I will be extremely firm."

"Mind you are. Then I want you to go to Minikin's and get two reels of whitey-brown thread, four balls of crochet cotton and eight yards of lace insertion—the same kind as I had last week. And Walker tells me that she has run out of black lead. You had better bring two packets; and mind you don't put them in the same pocket with the lace insertion. Oh, and as you are going to the oil shop, you may as well bring a jar of mixed pickles. And then you are to

go to Dumsole's and order a fresh haddock—perhaps you could bring that with you, too—and then to Barker's and tell them to send four pounds of dessert pears, and be sure they are good ones and not over-ripe. You had better select them and see them weighed yourself."

"I will. I will select them most carefully," said the curate, inwardly resolving not to trust to mere external appearances, which are often deceptive.

"Oh, and by the way, Jawley," said the rector, "as you are going into the town, you might as well take my shooting boots with you, and tell Crummell to put a small patch on the soles and set up the heels. It won't take him long. Perhaps he can get them done in time for you to bring them back with you. Ask him to try."

"I will, Mr. Bodley," said the curate. "I will urge him to make an effort."

"And as you are going to Crummell's," said Mrs. Bodley, "I will give you my walking shoes to take to him. They want soling and heeling; and tell him he is to use better leather than he did last time."

Half an hour later Mr. Jawley passed through the playground appertaining to the select boarding-academy maintained by the Reverend Augustus Bodley. He carried a large and unshapely newspaper parcel, despite which he walked with the springy gait of a released schoolboy. As he danced across the desert expanse, his attention was arrested by a small crowd of the pupils gathered significantly around two larger boys whose attitudes suggested warlike intentions; indeed, even as he stopped to observe them, one warrior delivered a tremendous blow which expended itself on the air within a foot of the other combatant's nose.

"Oh! Fie!" exclaimed the scandalised curate. "Joblett! Joblett! Do you realize that you nearly struck Byles? That you might actually have hurt him?"

"I meant to hurt him," said Joblett.

"You meant to! Oh, but how wrong! How unkind! Let

me beg you—let me entreat you to desist from these discreditable acts of violence.”

He stood awhile gazing with an expression of pained disapproval at the combatants, who regarded him with sulky grins. Then, as the hostilities seemed to be—temporarily—suspended, he walked slowly to the gate. He was just pocketing the key when an extremely somnolent pear impinged on the gate post and sprinkled him with disintegrated fragments. He turned, wiping his coat-skirt with his handkerchief, and addressed the multitude, who all, oddly enough, happened to be looking in the opposite direction.

“That was very naughty of you. Very naughty. Some one must have thrown that pear. I won’t tempt you to prevarication by asking who. But pears don’t fly of themselves—especially sleepy ones.”

With this he went out of the gate, followed by an audible snigger which swelled, as he walked away, into a yell of triumph.

The curate tripped blithely down the village street, clasp ing his parcel and scattering smiles of concentrated amiability broadcast among the villagers. As he approached the stile that guarded the foot-path to Dilbury, his smile intensified from mere amiability to positive affection. A small lady—a very small lady, in fact—was standing by the stile, resting a disproportionate basket on the lower step; and we may as well admit, at once and without circumlocution, that this lady was none other than Miss Dorcas Ship-ton and the prospective Mrs. Jawley.

The curate changed over his parcel to hold out a welcoming hand.

“Dorcas, my dear!” he exclaimed. “What a lucky chance that you should happen to come this way!”

“It isn’t chance,” the little lady replied. “I heard Mrs. Bodley say that she would ask you to go into Dilbury, so I determined to come and speed you on your journey.” (The distance to Dilbury was about three and a half miles.)

"And I wanted to see that you were properly equipped. Why did not you bring your umbrella?"

Mr. Jawley explained that the hat, the boots, the fresh haddock and the mixed pickles would fully occupy his available organs of prehension.

"That is true," said Dorcas. "But I hope you are wearing your chest protector and those cork soles that I gave you."

Mr. Jawley assured her that he had taken these necessary precautions.

"And have you rubbed your heels well with soap?"

"Yes," replied the curate. "Thoroughly, most thoroughly. They are a little sticky at present, but I shall feel the benefit as I go on. I have obeyed your instructions to the letter."

"This is right, Deodatus," said Miss Dorcas; "and as you have been so good, you shall have a little reward."

She lifted the lid of the basket and took out a small paper bag, which she handed to him with a fond smile. The curate opened the bag and peered in expectantly.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "Bull's-eyes! How nice! How good of you, Dorcas! And how discriminating!" (Bull's-eyes were his one dissipation.) "Won't you take one?"

"No, thank you," replied Dorcas. "I mustn't go into the cottages smelling of peppermint."

"Why not?" asked Deodatus. "I often do. I think the poor creatures rather enjoy the aroma, especially the children."

But Dorcas was adamant; and after some further chirping and twittering, the two little people exchanged primly affectionate farewells; and the curate, having popped a bull's-eye into his mouth, paddled away along the footpath sucking joyously.

It is needless to say that Mrs. Bodley's hat was not finished. The curate had unwisely executed all his other commissions before calling on the milliner; had ordered the pears, and even tested the quality of one or two samples; had directed the cobbler to send the rector's boots to the

hat-shop; and had then collected the lace, black lead, cotton, pickles and the fresh haddock and borne them in triumph to the abode of Miss Gosse. It appeared that the hat would not be ready until seven o'clock in the evening. But it also appeared that tea would be ready in a few minutes. Accordingly, the curate remained to partake of that meal in the workroom, in company with Miss Gosse and her "hands"; and having been fed to bursting-point with French rolls and cake, he left his various belongings and went forth to while away the time and paint the town of Dilbury, not exactly red, but a delicate and attenuated pink.

After an hour or so of rambling about the town, the curate's errant footsteps carried him down to the docks, where he was delighted with the spectacle of a military transport, just home from West Africa, discharging her passengers. The khaki-clad warriors trooped down the gang-planks and saluted him with cheerful greetings as he sat on a bollard and watched them. One even inquired if his—Mr. Jawley's—mother knew he was out, which the curate thought very kind and attentive of him. But what thrilled him most was the appearance of the chaplain, a fine, portly churchman with an imposing, coppery nose, who was so overjoyed at the sight of his native land that he sang aloud; indeed, his emotion seemed actually to have affected his legs, for his gait was quite unsteady. Mr. Jawley was deeply affected.

When the soldiers had gone, he slowly retraced his steps towards the gates; but he had hardly gone twenty yards when his eye was attracted by a small object lying in the thick grass that grew between the irregular paving-stones of the quay. He stooped to pick it up and uttered an exclamation of delight. It was a tiny effigy of a parrot, quaintly wrought in bronze and not more than two and a half inches high including the pedestal on which it stood. A perforation through the eyes had furnished the means of suspen-

sion, and a strand of silken thread yet remained to show, by its frayed ends, how the treasure had been lost.

Mr. Jawley was charmed. It was such a dear little parrot, so quaint, so naive. He was a simple man and small things gave him pleasure; and this small thing pleased him especially. The better to examine his find, he seated himself on a nice, clean, white post and proceeded to polish the little effigy with his handkerchief, having previously moistened the latter with his tongue. The polishing improved its appearance wonderfully, and he was inspecting it complacently when his eye lighted on a chalked inscription on the pavement. The writing was upside down as he sat, but he had no difficulty in deciphering the words "Wet Paint."

He rose hastily and examined the flat top of the post. There is no need to go into details. Suffice it to say that anyone looking at that post could have seen that some person had sat on it. Mr. Jawley moved away with an angry exclamation. It was very annoying, but that did not justify the expressions that he used, which were not only out of character with his usual mild demeanour, but unsuitable to his cloth, even if that cloth happened to be—but again we say there is no need to go into details. Still frowning irritably, he strode out through the dock gates and up the High Street on his way to Miss Gosse's establishment. As he was passing the fruiterer's shop, Mr. Barber, the proprietor, ran out.

"Good-evening, Mr. Jawley. About those pears that you ordered of my young man. You'd better not have those, sir. Let me send you another kind."

"Why?" asked the curate.

"Well, sir, those pears, to be quite candid, are not very good—"

"I don't care whether they are good or bad," interrupted Mr. Jawley. "I am not going to eat them," and he stamped away up the High Street, leaving the fruiterer in a state of stupefaction. But he did not proceed directly to the mil-

liner's. Some errant fancy impelled him to turn up a side street and make his way towards the waterside portion of the town, and it was, in fact, nearly eight o'clock when he approached Miss Gosse's premises (now closed for the night) and rang the bell. The interval, however, had not been entirely uneventful. A blue mark under the left eye and a somewhat battered and dusty condition of hat and clothing seemed reminiscent of recent and thrilling experiences; and the satisfied grin that he bestowed on the astonished caretaker suggested that those experiences, if strenuous, had not been wholly unpleasurable.

The shades of night had fallen on the village of Bobham when Mr. Jawley appeared in the one and only street. He carried, balanced somewhat unsteadily on his head, a large cardboard box, but was otherwise unencumbered. The box had originally been of a cubical form, but now presented a slightly irregular outline, and from one corner a thin liquid dripped on Mr. Jawley's shoulder, diffusing an aroma of vinegar and onions, with an added savour that was delicate and fish-like. Up the empty street the curate strode with a martial air, and having picked up the box—for the thirteenth time—just outside the gate, entered the rectory, deposited his burden on the drawing-room sofa, and went up to his room. He required no supper. For once in a way he was not hungry. He had, in fact, taken a little refreshment in town; and whelks are a very satisfying food, if you only take enough of them.

In his narrow and bumpy bed the curate lay wakeful and wrapped in pleasing meditation. Now his thoughts strayed to the little bronze parrot, which he had placed, after a final polish, on the mantelpiece; and now, in delightful retrospection, he recalled the incidents of his little jaunt. There was, for instance, the slightly intoxicated marine with whom he had enjoyed a playful interview in Mermaid Street. Gleefully he reconstituted the image of that warrior as he had last seen him, sitting in the gutter attending

to his features with a reddened handkerchief. And there was the overturned wheel stall and the two blue-jackets outside the "Pope's Head." He grinned at the recollection. And yet there were grumblers who actually complained of the dullness of the clerical life!

Again he recalled the pleasant walk home across the darkening fields; the delightful rest by the wayside (on the cardboard box), and the pleasantries that he had exchanged with a pair of rustic lovers—who had told him that "he ought to be ashamed of himself; a gentleman and a minister of religion, too!" He chuckled aloud as he thought of their bucolic irritation and his own brilliant repartee.

But at this moment his meditations were broken into by a very singular interruption. From the neighbourhood of the mantelpiece, there issued a voice, a very strange voice, deep, buzzing, resonant, chanting a short sentence, framed of yet more strange and unfamiliar words:

"Donkōh e didi ma tum. On esse?"

This astounding phrase rang out in the little room with a deep, booming emphasis on the "tum," and an interrogative note on the two final words. There followed an interval of intense silence, and then, from some distance, as it seemed, came the tapping of drums, imitating most curiously the sound and accent of the words—"tum," for instance, being rendered by a large drum of deep, cavernous tone.

Mr. Jawley listened with a pleased and interested smile. After a short interval, the chant was repeated; and again, like a far-away echo, the drums performed their curious mimicry of speech. Mr. Jawley was deeply interested. After a dozen or so of repetitions, he found himself able to repeat, with a fair accent, the mysterious sentence, and even to imitate the tapping and booming of the drums.

But, after all, you can have too much of a good thing; and when the chant had continued to recur, at intervals

of about ten seconds, for a quarter of an hour, Mr. Jawley began to feel bored.

"There," said he, "that'll do," and he composed himself for slumber. But the invisible chanter, ignoring his remark, continued the performance *da capo* and *ad lib.*—in fact, *ad nauseam*. Then Mr. Jawley became annoyed. First he sat up in bed, and made what he considered appropriate comments on the performance, with a few personal references to the performer; and then, as the chant still continued with the relentless persistence of a chapel bell, he sprang out and strode furiously over to the mantelpiece.

"Shut up!" he roared, shaking his fist at the invisible parrot; and, strange to say, both the chant and the drumming ceased forthwith. There are some forms of speech, it would seem, that require no interpreter.

When Mr. Jawley entered the breakfast-room the following morning, the rector's wife was in the act of helping her husband to a devilled kidney, but she paused in the occupation to greet the curate with a stony stare. Mr. Jawley sat down and knocked his knee as usual, but commented on the circumstance in terms which were not at all usual. The rector stared aghast, and Mrs. Bodley exclaimed in shrill accents: "Mr. Jawley, how dare—"

At this point she paused, having caught the curate's eye. A deathly silence ensued, during which Mr. Jawley glared at a solitary boiled egg. Suddenly he snatched up a knife, and with uncanny dexterity decapitated the egg with a single stroke. Then he peered curiously into the disclosed cavity. Now if there was one thing that Mr. Jawley hated more than another, it was an underdone egg; and, as his eye encountered a yellow spheroid floating in a clear liquid, he frowned ominously.

"Raw, by gosh!" he exclaimed hoarsely, and, plucking the egg from its calyx, he sent it hurtling across the room. For several seconds the rector stared, silent and open-

mouthed, at his curate; then, following his wife's gaze, he stared at the wall, on the chrysanthemum paper of which appeared a new motif un contemplated by the designer. And, meanwhile, Mr. Jawley reached across the table and stuck a fork into the devilled kidney.

When the rector looked round and discovered his loss, he essayed some spluttered demands for an explanation. But, since the organs of speech are associated with the act of mastication, the curate was not in a position to answer him. His eyes, however, were disengaged at the moment, and some compelling quality in them caused the rector and his wife to rise from their chairs and back cautiously towards the door. Mr. Jawley nodded them out blandly, and being left in possession, proceeded to fill himself a cup of tea and another of coffee, cleared the dish, emptied the toast-rack, and having disposed of these trifles, concluded a Gargantuan repast by crunching up the contents of the sugar basin. Never had he enjoyed such a breakfast, and never had he felt so satisfied and joyous.

Having wiped his smiling lips on the table cloth, he strolled out into the playground, where the boys were waiting to be driven into lessons. At the moment of his appearance, Messrs. Joblett and Byles were in the act of resuming adjourned hostilities. The curate strode through the ring of spectators and beamed on the combatants with ferocious benevolence. His arrival had produced a brief armistice, but as he uttered no protests, the battle was resumed with a tentative prod on the part of Joblett.

The curate grinned savagely. "That isn't the way, Joblett," he exclaimed. "Kick him, man. Kick him in 'the stomach.'"

"Beg pardon, sir," said Joblett, regarding his preceptor with saucer eyes. "Did you say kick him?"

"Yes," roared the curate. "In the stomach. Like this!"

He backed a few paces, and fixing a glittering eye on

Byles' abdomen, rushed forward, and, flinging his right foot back until it was almost visible over his shoulder, let out a tremendous kick. But Byles' stomach was not there. Neither was Byles—which, of course, follows. The result was that Mr. Jawley's foot, meeting with no resistance, flew into space, carrying Mr. Jawley's centre of gravity with it.

When the curate scrambled to his feet and glared balefully around, the playground was empty. A frantic crowd surged in through the open house door, while stragglers hurriedly climbed over the walls.

Mr. Jawley laughed hoarsely. It was time to open school, but at the moment he was not studiously inclined. Letting himself out by the gate, he strolled forth into the village, and sauntered up the street. And here it was, just opposite the little butcher's shop, that he encountered the village atheist. Now this philosopher who, it is needless to say, was a cobbler by profession, had a standing and perennial joke, which was to greet the curate with the words:

"How do, Jawley!" and thereby elicit a gracious "Good-morning, Mr. Pegg," and a polite touch of the hat. He proceeded this morning to utter the invariable formula, cocking his eye at the expectant butcher. But the anticipated response came not. Instead, the curate turned on him suddenly and growled:

"Say 'sir,' you vermin, when you speak to your betters."

The astounded cobbler was speechless for a moment; but only for a moment.

"What!" he exclaimed, "me say 'sir' to a sneakin' little devil-dodger, what—"

Here Mr. Jawley turned and stepped lightly over to the shop. Reaching in through the open front, he lifted a cleaver from its nail, and, swinging it high above his head, rushed with a loud yell at the offending cobbler. But Mr. Pegg was not without presence of mind, which, in this case, connoted absence of body. Before you could say "wax," he

had darted into his house, bolted the door, and was looking down with bulging eyes from the first-floor window on the crown of the curate's hat.

Meanwhile the butcher had emerged angrily from his shop, and approached the curate from behind.

"Here," he exclaimed gruffly, "what are you doing with that chop—" Here he paused suddenly as Mr. Jawley turned his head, and he continued with infinite suavity:

"Could you, sir, manage to spare that cleaver? If you would be so kind—"

Mr. Jawley uttered a sulky growl and thrust the great chopper into its owner's hands; then, as the butcher turned away, he gave a loud laugh, on which the tradesman cleared his threshold at a single bound and slammed the half-door behind him. But a terrified backward glance showed him the curate's face wreathed in smiles, and another glance made him aware of the diminutive figure of Miss Dorcas Shipton approaching up the street.

The curate ran forward to meet her, beaming with affection. But he didn't merely beam. Not at all. The sound of his greeting was audible even to Mr. Pegg, who leaned out of window, with eyes that bulged more than ever.

"Really, Deodatus!" exclaimed the scandalised Miss Dorcas. "What can you be thinking about; in such a pub—" Her remonstrances were cut short at this point by fresh demonstrations, which caused the butcher to wipe his mouth with the back of his hand, and Mr. Pegg to gasp with fresh amazement.

"Pray, pray remember yourself, Deodatus!" exclaimed the blushing Dorcas, wriggling, at length, out of his too-affectionate grasp. "Besides," she added, with a sudden strategic inspiration, "you surely ought to be in school at this time."

"That is of no consequence, darling," said Jawley, advancing on her with open arms; "old Bod can look after the whelps."

"Oh, but you mustn't neglect your duties, Deodatus," said Miss Dorcas, still backing away. "Won't you go in, just to please me?"

"Certainly, my love, if you wish it," replied Jawley, with an amorous leer. "I'll go at once—but I must have just one more," and again the village street rang with a sound as of the popping of a ginger-beer cork.

As he approached the school, Mr. Jawley became aware of the familiar and distasteful roar of many voices. Standing in the doorway, he heard Mr. Bodley declare with angry emphasis that he "would not have this disgraceful noise" and saw him slap the desk with his open hand; whereupon nothing in particular happened, excepting an apparently preconcerted chorus, as of many goats. Then Mr. Jawley entered and looked round; and in a moment the place was wrapped in a silence like that of an Egyptian tomb.

Space does not allow of our recording in detail the history of the next few days. We may, however, say in general terms that there grew up in the village of Bobham a feeling of universal respect for the diminutive curate, not entirely unmixed with superstitious awe. Rustics, hitherto lax in their manners, pulled off their hats like clock-work at his approach; Mr. Pegg, abandoning the village street, cultivated a taste for footpaths, preferably remote and unobstructed by trees; the butcher fell into the habit of sending gratuitous sweetbreads to the Rectory, addressed to Mr. Jawley, and even the blacksmith, when he had recovered from his black eye, adopted a suave and conciliatory demeanour.

The rector's wife, alone, cherished a secret resentment (though outwardly attentive in the matter of devilled kidneys and streaky bacon), and urged the rector to get rid of his fire-eating subordinate; but her plans failed miserably. It is true that the rector did venture tentatively to open the subject to the curate, who listened with a lower-

ing brow and sharpened a lead pencil with a colossal pocket-knife that he had bought at a ship-chandler's in Dilbury. But the conclusion was never reached. Distracted, perhaps, by Mr. Jawley's inscrutable manner, the rector became confused and, to his own surprise, found himself urging the curate to accept an additional twenty pounds a year which Mr. Jawley immediately insisted upon having in writing.

The only persons who did not share the universal awe was Miss Dorcas; for she, like the sun-dial, numbered only the sunny hours. But she respected him more than any; and, though dimly surprised at the rumours of his doings, gloried in secret over his prowess.

Thus the days rolled on and Mr. Jawley put on flesh visibly. Then came the morning when, on scanning the rector's *Times*, his eye lighted on an advertisement in the Personal Column:

"Ten pounds reward. Lost; a small, bronze effigy of a parrot on a square pedestal; the whole two and a half inches high. The Above Reward will be paid on behalf of the owner by the Curator of the Ethnographical Department of the British Museum, who has a photograph and description of the object."

Now Mr. Jawley had become deeply attached to the parrot. But after all it was only a pretty trifle, and ten pounds was ten pounds. That very afternoon, the Curator found himself confronted by a diminutive clergyman of ferocious aspect, and hurriedly disgorged ten sovereigns after verifying the description; and to this day he is wont to recount, as an instance of the power of money, the remarkable change for the better in the clergyman's manners when the transaction was completed.

It was late in the afternoon when Mr. Jawley reappeared

in the village of Bobham. He carried a gigantic paper parcel under one arm, and his pockets bulged so that he appeared to suffer from some unclassified deformity. At the stile, he suddenly encountered Mr. Pegg. That gentleman, prepared for instant flight, was literally stupefied when the curate lifted his hat and graciously wished him "Good-evening." But Mr. Pegg was even more stupefied when, a few minutes later, he saw the curate seated on a doorstep with the open parcel on his knees, and a mob of children gathered around him. For Mr. Jawley, with the sunniest of smiles, was engaged in distributing dolls, peg-tops, skipping-ropes, and little wooden horses, to a running accompaniment of bull's-eyes, brandy balls and other delicacies, which he produced from inexhaustible pockets. He even offered Mr. Pegg himself a sugar-stick, which the philosophic cordwainer accepted with a polite bow, and presently threw over a wall. But he pondered deeply on this wonder and is probably pondering still, in common with the other inhabitants of Bobham.

But though, from that moment, Mr. Jawley became once more the gentlest and most amiable of men, the prestige of his former deeds remained; reverential awe attended his footsteps abroad, devilled kidneys and streaky bacon were his portion at home, until such time as Miss Dorcas Shipton underwent a quieter metamorphosis, and became Mrs. Deodatus Jawley. And thereafter he walked, not only amidst reverence and awe, but also amidst flowers and sunshine.

P.S.—The curious who would know more about the parrot, may find him on his appropriate shelf in the West African Section of the Museum, and read the large, descriptive label which sets forth his history:

"Bronze gold-weight in the form of a parrot.
This object was formerly the property of the great

Ashanti War Chief, Amankwa Tia, whose clan totem was a parrot. It was worn by him, attached to his wrist, as an amulet or charm and, when on a campaign, a larger copy of it, of gilded wood, was carried by the chief herald, who preceded him and chanted his official motto. It may be explained here that each of the Ashanti generals had a distinguishing motto, consisting of a short sentence, which was called out before him by his heralds when on the march, and repeated, with remarkably close mimicry, by the message drums. Thus, when several bodies of troops were marching through the dense forest, their respective identities were made clear to one another by the sound of the chant on the drums. Amankwa Tia's motto was:

“Donköh e didi ma tum. On esse?” Which may be translated ‘(Foreign) Slaves revile me. Why?’ A somewhat meaningless sentence, but having, perhaps, a sinister significance.”

He knew the man he saw couldn't possibly be there . . .

LIFE ON THE MOON

by Alexander Samalman

FIRST THE NEWS WAS WHISPERED IN HIGH OFFICIAL CIRCLES, very hush-hush and mysterious. Then it became a rumor, a rumor that spread into seas of exaggeration, a rumor that brought hysterics, fright and exaltation in its wake, according to the natures of its auditors. When the news could no longer be kept confidential—there really wasn't any reason for concealing it in the first place—it appeared in cold, dispassionate print in the more dignified newspapers and in screaming headlines in the lurid press.

At the same time the full battery of radio commentators went to work on the story, with their extraordinary range of treatment, from dry and monotonous monologue to dramatic, flamboyant oratory. And so the story became public property, and was discussed in subways and offices, in homes and at clubs, in forest and factory.

There was life on the Moon!

"The possibility of life-forms on the Moon," wrote Professor Arnold Karlton in a special syndicated feature that girdled the globe, "has always been denied by our leading scientists. And yet now we have proof, incontrovertible

proof, backed up by tangible evidence, that such life does exist.

"It makes one wonder how many curious misconceptions of the Universe have been carefully nurtured and promulgated by science in the past, and reminds us of the necessity of revising all our preconceived notions. For this is a new age of science, the age of the atom, of radar, of space-flight, and it is also an age of skepticism, an age that refuses to be bound by the obsolete findings of years gone by."

It all began with the direction of the radar beam to the Moon and its successful contact with that satellite. Then, as everyone knows, the radar map of the Moon was made—and after that, the empty rocket ship, guided from a laboratory on Earth, circled the Moon and returned to Earth, but brought back no evidence of its strange journey.

It all would have ended there, for a while at least, if it were not that in the small town of Riverport there lived a man, an accountant named Jay Revere to be exact, who rather fancied himself as a space pioneer and inserted an advertisement in his local paper to the effect that he would gladly offer his services to science by risking the perilous journey to the Moon in an Earth-guided rocket ship. He would, if he remained alive, be happy to give a full account of his experiences without any other compensation than the awareness of his own service to humanity.

After a great deal of pro and con discussion as to the ethics of the case, a conclave of noted scientists voted to give Jay Revere the privilege of being the first man to make a journey to the Moon.

And so, on a sunny day in May, 1960, meek little accountant Jay Revere, who had never before been more than five miles out of Riverport in his life, climbed into a rocket ship at La Guardia Field and made himself as comfortable as he could in the small cramped space the craft

afforded. The doors were shut tight, and Jay Revere was suddenly more alone than any other man in the world, seeing nothing but the blank metal walls around him and hearing no sound.

Because the scientists did not want to make a public spectacle of the event, there were very few persons on the field and of those only a handful knew what was taking place. They stood about, watching the strange experiment with a curious mixture of surprise, excitement, curiosity and awe.

"Here she goes!" shouted a mechanic and the field became a hive of activity.

All those connected with the flight took their posts in the elaborate control-rooms from which the ship was to be steered, observed, and landed on the Moon, and brought back again upon the signal of Jay Revere. There was a two-way radar arrangement so that a limited amount of communication could be carried on.

This communication, however, could not take the form of words, because the rocket-ship would be out of radio range in a remarkably short time—all the signals could tell Revere was that he was still under observation, and all he could convey was the simple fact that he was still alive.

THERE WAS A GREAT SPUTTERING NOISE, AND SPARKS AND flames issued from the rocket ship as it abruptly bounded from the surface of the Earth. Inside, Jay Revere, who already felt like a prisoner in solitary confinement, knew none of this. He did not even feel a jolt as the rocket ship started. It was so thoroughly soundproofed and insulated against shock, and supplied with a complete air system of its own, that Revere was literally out of the world.

He squirmed about a bit, and finally settled down to as much composure as he could summon. When the ship was a hundred thousand miles out in space, he wondered:

"Why don't they start? I wonder what's delaying them."

It was really most irritating. Might as well start and get it over with and see what happens! To some degree he regretted his rash offer, and became hot and cold by turns as he contemplated the fearsome possibilities of the unknown.

Jay Revere was being hurtled through space at the rate of seven miles per second, but he did not know he was in motion. His isolation was complete, and he could not tell he was moving because he saw nothing that moved about him. Time, too, had ceased to exist, save that on numerous occasions he became very hungry or thirsty, and he helped himself to the concentrated pill rations with which he had been supplied.

To do this was an elaborate process, as he did not have much freedom of movement, and getting his hand into his pocket and then into his mouth required a series of shiftings and squirmings that would have appeared to an observer like the gyrations of a man gone berserk.

Suddenly the rocket ship landed, and Jay Revere would not have known it were it not that the door of the rocket ship abruptly opened, a happening which was prearranged to synchronize with the landing of the craft.

Revere's first emotion was of relief as he squirmed out of his uncomfortable position. Then the relief gave way to fear, which he finally conquered, and now he had a great urge for caution. Gingerly he stepped out of the rocket ship, put one foot down experimentally, then the other.

He was ankle-deep in slimy, thick mud utterly different from any mud he had ever seen in Riverport. It was a rich purple color, with greenish veins in it, and it had a glue-like stickiness that was most repellent. The air was thin and unpleasant. It was hot, hot with a ferocity unknown on Earth. The Sun seemed to be right on top of him, aiming at him as though he were a target for immolation.

There was no vegetation, no sign of life about him. It was easy enough for Jay Revere to determine, with his smattering of scientific knowledge, that he was indeed on the

Moon. It was just as it had been described by learned savants who had long, long before pieced together all the available clues to form a picture of the Moon's surface. As he stood there on this alien soil, all Jay Revere's fears, all his caution, all his doubts of his wisdom in attempting the journey, vanished, and gave way to a feeling of pride and exultation.

"I have done it!" he exclaimed aloud. "I am the first human of Earth to visit the Moon! I am here! No man before me has put a foot on this ground! Should this mean my death, it would have been well worth while."

The mud below, the broiling sun above, all lost their terror for him. As one inspired, he struggled through the mud, his eyes gazing into the future. He became impervious to physical discomfort, and felt that he was the greatest, the biggest, the most wonderful thing alive in all the Universe.

Jay Revere glanced this way and that, and only barrenness met his eyes.

"The scientists have been right about the Moon all along," he muttered. "I shall have to start back soon, and tell them all about it. I was warned not to venture far from the rocket ship on this first journey, for I might be lost and swallowed up, and no man would know what became of me. But it seems to me that the scientists were correct in picturing the Moon as barren and lifeless, and I shall tell them so. They shall be proud of their perspicacity, but perhaps a little disappointed too, as I am."

Suddenly Jay Revere's reverie was broken as he heard a slight rustling in the distance. And now cold fear and apprehension clutched his heart. What was that? Could anything be moving? Could anything be—alive? Could there be anything here—man or bird or beast?

Jay Revere became wary, watchful. In the midst of his excitement, he grinned as he thought how akin his sensations were to those he had felt when as a boy he had gone hunting in the forests surrounding Riverport.

He was on the hunt now, too, for truly big game. But would he live to tell the story? If anything lived on the Moon, would it allow him to live?

JAY REVERE DID NOT HEAR THE RUSTLING AGAIN, BUT HE STOOD rooted to the spot, his features pointing, like those of a hunting dog, toward the direction of the strange sound. And as he stood there, the sun's rays grew kinder, and the light became dim, and he drew from his pocket a tiny flashlight with which he had been provided, and he swung it around him in an arc.

And then suddenly he saw it! There, running past him, was a creature peculiarly like a man—and yet not like a man.

For a moment the creature was so close he could have touched it, but he was too spellbound and frightened to make a move.

The creature had a large head, and a tiny body, and long, apelike arms, and looked ferocious. And it was dressed in a garment that closely resembled armor, and upon the large head there was a strange box-like hat from which many little horns protruded.

For several moments all time stood still, and then Jay Revere recovered his wits and his courage. He was, he knew, on the verge of a tremendous, earth-shaking discovery.

"Hey, there!" he shouted. "Come back here!"

The words sounded strange in Jay Revere's ears, and they were indeed strange words to use to this Moon-creature, but they had issued from him of their own accord. However, his quarry certainly did not understand and in any case did not want to obey, and disappeared in the distance.

Jay Revere had a difficult time getting his feet out of the glue-like mud after having stayed in one spot so long, and

found it impossible to pursue his quarry. And he discovered he was tired, weary, on the brink of collapse.

"I have some information, anyway," he thought, "and the rest will have to wait for another trip. I'm going home."

Ah, how wonderful Riverport seemed to Jay Revere now. He was filled with an irresistible homing impulse. He didn't belong here on the Moon. The exultation was gone. It was getting damp, uncomfortable here. He'd go home. He'd gird himself for the long return journey and go home.

Jay Revere trudged through the mud toward the rocket ship, tiredness eating into his body, when suddenly he saw something in the mud, something that gleamed with a strange light.

He bent down to pick it up, and realized that he now held in his hand the hat which the strange creature had worn, which it had dropped in its headlong flight from him.

"Can it be it was afraid of me?" wondered Jay Revere.

He crammed the hat into a corner of the rocket ship, smiling with satisfaction at the thought of the wonderful souvenir he would bring back and how it would prove everything he had to report. Then with a sigh the little accountant squeezed himself into the rocket ship, banged the door, sent out a radar signal to the effect that he was ready for the guided return flight, and settled down as comfortably as he could.

The return journey was as devoid of sensation as the journey from Earth. It was even less eventful, if that were possible. For Jay Revere, thoroughly exhausted, slept by fits and starts all the way back. He landed in La Guardia Field and was allowed to rest and replenish himself, and then he stood before a conclave of scientists and told them the strange story of his exploit and showed them the hat he had brought back as a souvenir.

Needless to say, Jay Revere's revelations caused much shaking of heads, gasps of incredulity, cries of amazement. The hat was finally taken as positive evidence of life on the Moon. And Jay Revere's ride became a world-shaking event that found its way into the press and into the everyday conversation of people the world over who now knew there was life on the Moon. Knew it beyond the shadow of a doubt.

As for Jay Revere himself, he became the man of the hour, feted and praised everywhere for his courage. A pioneer of science, they called him, and men spoke his name in admiration and awe.

At the very moment that Jay Revere was holding forth before the conclave of Earth scientists about his amazing journey, another such conclave was taking place far, far from Earth. Millions of miles away, on the Fiery Planet Mars, a conference of men of learning was being addressed by a young Martian.

"I made a good landing with the ship," the young Martian was saying. "And then I looked around a bit. I saw nothing, nothing but mud and more mud—and suddenly I heard the strange sound of another being, and there was a flash of light from some terrible weapon. A long, thin creature with a small head, dressed in some fabric the like of which I have never seen, suddenly lunged forward at me. His eyes were wild with killer lust.

"I should have liked to communicate with him, but he shouted a strange threat at me in some odd gibberish of a language, and I felt that discretion was the better part of valor. Had I remained to parley, gentlemen, I am sure he would have destroyed me. I fled, losing my gravity-cap as I ran.

"I can only conclude, gentlemen, that as we have long suspected, there is life on the Moon of Earth—but it is wild, undeveloped life, vicious in the greatest degree, and

in future trips we shall have to learn how to deal with the strange type of creature who has his being there. That is all, gentlemen."

Needless to say, these revelations brought much shaking of heads, gasps of incredulity, cries of amazement. And the young Martian's adventure was spoken of in every corner of the Planet Mars, and it was known to all Martians that there was life on Earth's curious satellite, the Moon.

*They gambled a fortune against bitter disaster . . .
but when the results came in, nobody really cared.*

BLUNDER

by Philip Wylie

THERE IS NO RECORD OF THE EXACT DATE. IT WAS PROBABLY a morning in late May, or possibly in early June, when Carl Everson and Hugh Dunn rode up from the abandoned nickel mine on its creaky hoist and stood with their hands over their eyes, spreading their fingers apart slowly, to become accustomed to the outdoor brilliance. Late May or early June—since this was the latitude of the “midnight sun” and there had been no dark. Around the two men was an enormous clearing which stretched from a solid wall of spruces to boulders fringing the polar ocean; an expanse of weeds, birches, wild grass and young conifers gradually obliterating a village near the mine and steadily overgrowing high, rusty cones of tailings.

Everson and Dunn had invested their life savings here. The region suited their needs; a mine in hard rock, deep enough, with extensive lateral galleries, close to the sea. Here, moreover, on a Pole-facing promontory of the North Cape, was utter isolation—necessary because some risk was involved in their work and they did not wish to endanger human beings. Indeed, the harming of a person would have

ruined their purpose, which was essentially as commercial as it was scientific.

Carl Everson held the Chair of Physics in the Oslo Institute; Hugh Dunn was Dean of Engineering at Glasgow, and a Nobel Laureate, besides. The scheme on which they had long plotted together was ingenious and, basically, quite simple.

It depended upon two facts. First, that volcanic phenomena are radioactive in nature. Second, that certain types—the stem-producing types—are usable as a power source: at least one Italian city had drawn its electricity from steam that gushed out of a volcanic vent, since the 1920's. Everson and Dunn intended to disintegrate a bismuth "bomb" in the mine gallery in such a way as to start a slow, hot, atomic chain reaction. The process, according to their calculations, would not "burn out" for centuries and conjunction of the sea would guarantee production of superheated steam which, they believed, could be "harnessed." As owners of such a source, the two scientists knew that they could furnish to all of northern Scandinavia, and much of Finland, extremely cheap electrical power. In doing so, they would make their fortunes.

The venture had one unfavorable aspect: research in physics was sequestered by individual national governments. For many years, new information had been released only after the security authorities in the "nation-of-discovery" had assured themselves it was no longer, actually, "new." Thus, scientific advances made in Britain, Russia, America, China and elsewhere were not always added to the body of common human knowledge but often retained as "military secrets." Owing to that situation, Everson and Dunn had long argued the wisdom of carrying out their plan.

"Bismuth fission," the Norwegian had often said, "is something new under the sun. We'll be the first to do it—maybe. We think we know what will happen. But are

we sure? Evans is apparently working on it. Chandra Lalunal, at Delhi. And Stackpole. Maybe we'd better wait for their further reports. They've hinted at progress—"

And the Scot would generally reply, "Aye. Wait. Wait how long? For the rest of our lives? Wait until generals and statesmen decide the knowledge has leaked, or their spies have learnt it? Suppose we do fail, Carl? What then?"

"Then we'll jointly own a big puddle of hot rock that nobody can approach for centuries."

"Right." The Scot would chuckle. "Right. And be the precious fools of physics, too! Well, get on with it, Carl. Fine times, these, for what they used to call a free man!"

The times. The date. It was May or early June, but the year is not on the record, either. The vague monographs concerning bismuth fission, by Evans and Lalunal and Stackpole, had been published twenty-eight years after the first appalling rainbow of transmuted mass flashed onto (and into) the barrens of New Mexico, U. S. A. The famed "atomic bomb." So the date was a springtime later than 1973. 'Seventy-four, perhaps. Everson and Dunn had a questioning paper, too, in the hope of getting more data for their experiment. But it had been held up by Norwegian censorship. That it had finally been released, and was even now in print, they could not know for they had camped in solitude for some weeks.

They stood in the sunshine a moment—in the stillness—in the subarctic morning. The two men could see, now. They put out the miner's lights on their hats and walked, quickly, through the grass, following a cable that snaked from the mine shaft.

They came to a detonator and stood over it, reluctantly; a pair of tall thoughtful men—the Scot redheaded, the Norwegian blond as glass. Good men.

"Touch it off," the Scot said.

"I hate to."

Dunn chuckled and rammed home the plunger. The

mine shaft grunted repeatedly. Small shocks vibrated the weedy ground. A wisp of smoke—then a cloud—puffed out of the vertical bowel. The hoist dropped out of sight; the housing over it collapsed. All down the deep intestine, dynamite exploded; its sides caved in and tumbled, blocking heavily the gallery in which a mechanism the size of a piano ticked and ticked, undisturbed by the choking of exit.

"Done," said Everson.

They strode into the forest, following a path that was the remnant of a heavy-duty highway. The trucks of Norwegians, then Germans, then Russians, had rolled here long ago, hauling off nickel ore for the violent purposes of World War II. Everson, who was less sanguine than his colleague, contemplated a gold-headed fly that lighted on his mackinaw. It was, he thought, a perfect creature—sterile as the northern woods, efficient as nature, germane to the region—which man had never been. Man had left the bleaching wreckage of the mine town and the corroded heaps of ore; the fly brought only a living goldness into this place, this sprucy fragrance, this green churchliness.

Their car faced south. They removed its tarpaulin and drove, swiftly, to the main road. At an inn some fifty miles from the mine, they stopped and entered the dining room. Their waitress had long, silvery braids, and she let them fall invitingly over the shoulders of Hugh Dunn while he peered at the menu. But he did not notice. Everson, finally, translated the list of dishes and did the ordering; Dunn spoke Norwegian badly. This is usually so; the citizens of the weak countries learn the tongues of the stronger . . .

Morning in Scandinavia was afternoon in India. Chandra Lalunal neither resisted nor resented the heat; he accepted it. He sat watching garden shadows stretch across a dry lawn and listening to the spatter of a fountain. The sound should have contributed psychological coolness; it failed;

it made the young man think of the mammoth humidity which seemed to be the entire substance of the day. Chandra's apartment was a unit in a file of one-story white buildings which quartered down a hill, parallel to a garden—the work of some landscape architect who had fancied the Ficus. These trees, with small leaves and great, standing tall and growing a tangle of root exposed in low stalactite-crowded caves, all glittered alike in the hazy sunshine.

Chandra could look over their tops, here and there, at the domes and spicules of the city and the square, huge walls of the government buildings. He sat in a doorway not because there was a breeze, but in case there might be one. Occasionally he turned a page of the newly arrived journal in his lap. It was called *The International Physical Quarterly*. Much of its text was printed not in words but in diagrams and mathematical symbols. His dark profile had a remarkable sharpness, so that, viewed from the side, it seemed akin to the keener animals. With a full-face view, however, this predatory look was overmastered by his eyes—bright, black and yet dreaming in subjective peace. His brown fingers turned another page.

The eyes glanced down, held, changed shape minutely. "Inquiries into the Binding Fractions of Bismuth," the article said. Its authors were known by reputation to the Indian: Carl Everson and Hugh Dunn. Chandra, also, had made some "inquiries" into the action of bismuth. Now, his brain commenced its common, human, utterly astonishing function. Words and symbols became electrical patterns within it; these took meaning, related to apparatus in Chandra's own laboratory, represented similar pages of figures he had written, and spelled thoughts, concepts, actual experiments. An hypothesis, begun two generations before by a dead and greatly honored savant named Albert Einstein, was the starting place of the electronic panoply that informed the young man's reading mind. Chandra checked, cross-checked, opened his lips to say an unsaid

word of disapproval, and presently came to the end of the monograph.

Now, he looked for some time at the gardens. Far away, the temples brayed—slat-ribbed priests riding on the bell ropes. Chandra did not notice. The Delhi plane slanted overhead, fast, quiet. He saw it—and did not see. At last he rose. He crossed the marble floor of his living room, picked up a white hand set, dialed. He asked for Lord Polt and, after a time, talked to him.

"But it may be very important," Chandra finally said. "I know it is late. But this is pressing, sir."

The other man changed his mind. Chandra presently drove his car through the heat walls and among the slow snarl of people to the government buildings.

Lord Polt wanted to get into his air-conditioned home. He wanted tea. He wanted to change his linen. He wanted to forget the harangue he'd had that day from the leader of the Eastern Conference. He wanted to get out of the drab, damned, sweating institutional chamber where he rotted away his life. He wanted to go home to England. . . . He said all that, pushing his tall bulkiness around despairfully behind his desk, wiping his sweated forehead with a white handkerchief, envying Chandra his appearance of dryness. He finally said, "What the devil is it, son?"

Chandra put the periodical on the governor's desk. "It is this."

Lord Polt looked at it and his vexation returned. "Talk sense, Chandra, for the love of heaven! 'This'! What is it? Runes! Hieroglyphics!"

"It's got a mistake in it," Chandra said. His voice belonged to his eyes. "A quite bad mistake."

The Englishman was too deeply exasperated now and, paradoxically, too fond of the young physicist, to maintain his damp vehemence. "You'll have to do better than that,

Chandra," he said slowly. "A mistake? Thousands of you birds make millions of 'em. Are you asking me to correct the papers of a couple of Oslo and Glasgow chemists? I mean—what do you want?"

"I want," Chandra answered, "to have you requisition the world network, at once. Tonight. For at least an hour. I would like to be put on the air to explain this—error in mathematics."

Lord Polt's eyes bulged. "Are you mad, son? The world —!"

"It's a most hazardous mistake. Time shouldn't be lost. There may be much time. Years. But there may be no time at all."

"Time, in the name of the Eternal, for what?"

"To prevent any accident." Chandra smiled slightly. "In the name of the Eternal, as you say, sir."

A choleric disposition was not the reason for which the Foreign Office had sent Lord Polt to India; he had brains. He said, after a moment, "See here, Chandra. If this mistake is so important, how'd the Board miss it? How does it come to be in print?"

The dark youth showed his teeth; only a man who knew Indians well would have understood it was more than an easy smile. "There are branches of mathematics and of physical research which are pursued by a few people only. Branches which have been thoroughly investigated and abandoned, long ago. This is one. Besides — even with mathematics, it is possible to—to—"

"Dissemble?" The man's head nodded.

"—to publish papers which would mean one thing to most scientists—and a little more, perhaps, to a few others." Chandra sighed. "That is another reason why it is sad—and vain—to imagine that science can be searched, censored and deleted—like soldiers' mail."

They were silent. The Englishman used his handkerchief again. "Chandra, the heat's affected you. It would require

an emergency order from London to get the world network tonight. Or any night. I couldn't ask it, to let you lecture on physics. And even if I could, whatever you want to say would have to be reviewed first by the Board. You know that. The Board is two years behind. Censoring your stuff is difficult—"

"I assure you, sir, the peril is—is of a magnitude—"

Lort Polt was annoyed again. "The devil with the peril! People in your business have gone around muttering about peril for thirty years! Send your blasted corrections through channels!"

For a long moment, the liquid Indian eyes rested upon the bright blue eyes. Dark eyes—fatigued with subjugation, fatalistic, fatal. Then Chandra said, "I'm sorry I troubled you, sir. Perhaps it isn't urgent."

The governor nodded. "You're on the ragged side. Take a week off, son. Go up in the hills. If your school president's sticky about it, phone me."

Chandra thanked him.

He went back to his apartment and sat, again in the doorway, looking at the many kinds of Ficus trees and their increasing shadows. . . .

Stackpole—Jeffrey Stackpole, of Atlanta, Georgia, Harvard University, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, now, and for a long time, far from home—learned of the blunder in the Everson-Dunn equations from a subordinate. Stackpole was chief engineer of Plant Number 5, Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Uranium Works. His subordinate, Plummer, knocked and entered his office without waiting. He had *The International Physical Quarterly* in his hand. Plummer was fresh from the States—recently a good quarterback but now a better nuclear physicist—and what he had discovered amused him.

"Look at this, chief," he said. "I just opened it. Dunn may have won a Nobel Prize, but he and Everson—the

Oslo Everson—have sure taken a fall in bismuth-radiation-effect."

Stackpole was young, reputation and achievements considered—forty-two. A lean man with brown eyes, bald on top; a man with big hands and feet and a big, placid voice. The kind of man to whom a stranger would talk in a bar; the kind for whom a lost old lady would look, in order to inquire the right direction He put aside a cost report. The spark in his eye showed he was not so formal as to resent Plummer's hasty entrance; the slight pursing of his lips, that Plummer's statement interested him.

"Bismuth?" Stackpole repeated. "Radiation? Let's look."

Plummer went on enthusiastically. "They missed the proper description of k as the infinite constant under special pressure circumstances—"

"Hold on, Plum"—there was still faint Georgia in Stackpole's voice—"I can read, myself."

He read. For five minutes, ten, fifteen. His long face became insensitive fixity. Plummer lost his excitement, watching, and after a time, gasped suddenly: "You mean, Jeffry—that you think they might—?"

"They might. Who mightn't—figuring it that way?"

"What are you going to do?" The young man's voice was low, eager.

Stackpole closed the scientific journal. "Tell May to call my car, Plum. I'll see the general tonight. Maybe—just maybe—this is what we've waited for. Maybe this one'll convince them that they can't keep knowledge in a lot of different pockets. Keep us in their pockets, either. I'll see if the general will let me get through to Oslo, or Glasgow. Wherever Dunn and Everson are. And we'll plan a general announcement. Others must be catching onto the fumble—right this minute."

He put on a hat and took a raincoat from a hidden closet. There were no windows in his office: the light was indirect, the ventilation mechanical and the furnishings ultra-

modern. He knew he needed a raincoat only because a small panel, set in his desk-top, constantly reported the weather outside. Plummer had gone. Stackpole crossed the room, switched off the lights, and went out, also. A Chinese girl in a red dress was sitting at a desk in the anteroom.

"I sent for the car," she said.

He noticed, with the vacant acuity that accompanies crisis moods, how beautiful she was. "Thank you, May. Good night."

His long legs scissored in the scintillant corridors; his big feet fell hard on the plastic flooring. He went through the main lobby and out onto the steps. The rain hit him, then—the wind whipped his coat—lightning split his vision—thunder followed. His nerves burned with crucial fire. And with hope . . .

Now, on the shimmery black paving, the car came. But now, his mind was elsewhere—in many elsewheres, moving swiftly with a nearly simultaneous consciousness. He was on Peace Street. He was in the M. I. T. high-tension lab. He was saying goodbye to a New York City gal who wouldn't marry him and go to live in China but who still said she loved him. He was glancing—just glancing—at May Tom. Cheng blew the musical horn; Stackpole went down the steps at a run.

They drove past the plant, after he'd told Cheng to go to the general's home—past the solid mile of cubic architecture that turned masses of uranium into energy for a great and growing people. The structures, seen in headlights, seen in lightning flashes, were, somehow, both critical of nature and anti-human. He tried conversation to dispel the shadows. "How are you tonight, Cheng?"

The chauffeur lifted one shoulder. "Not good, Dr. Stackpole."

"Girl trouble?"

The head shook in the murk. "Just full of nothing, Doctor. Who isn't? It is a disease people have now, I guess.

A pain of emptiness. We have been afraid too long. And we cannot get used to it."

Stackpole gave up the idea of conversation. Nameless terror, or named terror, year after year: it was a world disease, all right. Better to glance away from the squat, streaming, soundless mills of Twentieth-Century man. Better to look out the car window on the other side, where, in the relatively feeble flare of lightning, the Yangtze River labored beneath a hectic wind

Chicago's Herbert Evans was the third scientist who, in the opinion of Everson and Dunn, might have contributed valuable data to the experiment in the nickel mine. It was just dawn, in Chicago, at the time the Norwegian and the Scot were taking lunch, the Indian was staring with fatigue and fatalism over his hot valley, and the Georgian was racing on his errand in central China.

Dawn pleased Evans: it was the period he usually chose to go home from work. Home, for him, was a shabby, outmoded, two-room hotel apartment where a bachelor could accumulate unanswered mail, old clothes and the patina of pipe-smoke without human rebuke or even the implied protest of neater quarters. Home was not where he hung his hat, but where he tossed it—ever since he'd gone to work in the university as instructor and laboratory assistant. Work, for Evans, had then been in a stuffy roomful of hurriedly made gadgets. Down the years, that informal shop had turned into a gleaming hall where apparatus worth millions was ranged in a vast stupefying geometry.

Evans left this chamber as the sky grayed. He went down the street whistling—a chubby little man, a merry, grandpa-looking man, who wore a smile and carried his hands in his pockets. He had coffee and Danish pastry in a cheap, all-night restaurant. He walked on to his hotel, went up in the antediluvian elevator, and found the *Review* with his morning paper, inside the door on the floor.

Naturally, he read it—as the others had—immediately. Evans could remember the life of scientists in the pre-secrecy days. People didn't leap for journals, then. Journals weren't raked clean of all sorts of data by governments, either. Scientific news was just news—and, even though the modern journals were distributed all over the world at the same time, it wasn't any advantage. For every scientist had turned into a man who snatched at crumbs.

Evans could easily remember the spirit of science before the Fear—and the old, free great who served it. He'd even talked to Einstein, once.

He lay down on his bed, fully clothed, and read. When he came to the article about bismuth, the youthfulness and rosiness went out of him. He recognized the error and he shut his eyes, thinking hard. If anybody should set up the experiment suggested here—!

What could one man do? He considered a direct call to the seat of government and knew, even while he thought of it, that the people in Washington would demur, temporize, doubt, ask for additional opinion—unwilling all the while to smash an international habit that was like hysteria carved in marble.

He was in the same predicament as Chandra. As Stackpole. Only a higher authority could act. But Evans knew one very high authority; he knew the President of the United States. For a long time, the old man lay there, wondering how it would be possible to compel the President to break through international silence and tell the whole world, immediately, not to do so-and-so; not to try this; not to set up that equipment in such-and-such a way. Tell the world—even though it meant giving up certain useful data belonging to the U. S.

Finally, Evans got up. He went to the telephone and reserved a seat on the seven o'clock to Washington. He sent word to Charlie Trent to make an appointment for him with the President that same morning. Then he began

throwing old clothes—mildewed, mothly, forgotten—from the bottom drawer of a big bureau. What he found underneath was a shoulder holster, a revolver, a waxed box of shells.

Nobody would search him; they knew him at the White House. It was just possible—just—that, if the President didn't believe him, he could draw the gun suddenly enough and threaten him long enough to make him speak certain orders into his desk instruments. The President wouldn't believe him, he felt.

Evans smiled very sorrowfully. This rash idea would doubtless fail. Perhaps, though, its very attempt and failure would attract political interest in the obscure data in the journal. His scheme came from long ago—from his boyhood—from motion pictures about gangsters. Even the revolver was obsolete, nowadays. A museum piece. He smiled again, whimsically; broke the gun, loaded it, and before he put it in its holster, noticed with vague surprise that it had been manufactured in Worcester, Massachusetts, U. S. A. . . .

There was no Worcester any more, of course. No Massachusetts. No New England. From Lake Champlain and the Hudson River down to the Atlantic Ocean stretched what nowadays was called "The New England Wastes." In the Sahara, there are oases; here, were none.

The cities were scoured away, for the most part stone sinks, some filled with water. Wherever buildings remained, they were halved, quartered, toppled, bleached. What had not vaporized had burned or melted or blanched in a hideous heat. Nothing grew; nothing. No trees on the White Mountains and no reeds around the stale ponds. No anemone blossomed in the deepest cranny of rock. From time to time the great Connecticut River flash-flooded. The event went all unnoticed. In summer, the river was partly dry. No insects danced above it; never a trout or bass spilled its surface in climbing attack. No

squatting frog croaked there, or hyla trilled. Even ducks had learned not to migrate over this immense region—and gulls, not to fly in from the sea. The lonely land eroded; the continental skeleton steadily emerged; the aspect of it grew lunar—suggesting hauntingly, horribly, that some similar catastrophe had stripped the moon of air and pitted its ground like this; some fiend's bombardment, some deliberate boiling of the moonmen's land—a million years ago.

New England had vanished in eight minutes, during the infamous "sneak punch" or World War III, now called the "Short War"—as though man still awaited a longer. On Christmas Eve, in 1966, the rockets broke a hundred miles above, and their bomb-contents homed accurately. What they did not destroy in that infernal period was left radio-active. The thousand of survivors who drove and flew out of the holocaust also died—slowly—of leukemia, of cancer, of ray burns which ate their extremities to stumps and gradually along the stumps to vital portions.

There existed, in central Europe, another region like The New England Wastes, but larger—as large as the Ukraine. It had been created three hours after the obliteration of New England, by the answering American salvo—a blow of a strength not foreseen by the treacherous assailants; a blow that had set diplomats chattering over the international wave bands and brought armistice before morning. Armistice. Armed truce. Armed vigilance. Armed secrecy. That had lasted till this very hour

Man was stubbornly attempting to reclaim the lost domain. Even as Evans noted the legend on his revolver, the effort got under way. A prodigious machine broke over a hilltop on the edge of the Wastes. It came clanking from a woods where the leaves were fresh, flowers bloomed, bees buzzed and morning was late Maylike, or early Junelike. Its caterpillar treads stamped pungency from the grass. It descended upon the barren earth, cumbersome, buglike;

where it went, it left behind a row of planted saplings, like a harvester that worked backwards. Inside this contrivance, protected from the radioactivity of the ground by lead shields, two men watched instruments that told how the holes were being dug, the water poured, the small trees set, the earth packed around their roots.

They were ordinary men — farmer-mechanics — and by and by they stopped to survey their accomplishment through quartz slits. They lighted cigarettes and looked at each other.

"I bet they die, too, Ed."

"Want to put up dough, Curley?"

"Well—"

"Those birches are a new strain," Ed said. "Some professor developed 'em. They're supposed to stand twice as much rays as there is around here. Stand 'em—and grow."

"And drop seeds? And make little birches in this hell-hole?"

"There—you've got me. Let's start her up."

"Take a lot of birches," Curley said, "to cover New England. And then what have you got?" He spat over a shield, taking care not to expose his face . . .

At the seaside inn, on the North Cape, Everson and Dunn compared watches. Their luncheon—sampled, cold—sat at their heavy elbows. In the last half hour they had scarcely communicated—and yet, each man knew that the other had reached a passionate and belated decision. A decision that the experiment was a mistake. A decision that they had acted beyond their rights; that they should have waited until they possessed all possible information concerning bismuth.

As the two watches pushed time along on the pine table, Dunn showed abrupt anger. He doubled his fist and made the dishes jump. "If this goes wrong—if this makes another shambles like New England—it's justice! It will teach the whole idiotic world that you cannot monopolize knowledge!

Or own scientists! I say, Carl, we'll either be rich men, soon—or the authors of a lesson people need as badly as they need air to breathe!"

Everson only said, "Five seconds."

In the gallery of the choked mine, the piano-sized mechanism stopped ticking. For a moment—a moment in the infinite darkness—nothing happened. Then a flame sputtered. It shot shadows down the man-hewn corridor. Minerals glinted. The flame brightened. Now, lead began to melt—to dribble like pure silver onto the dust-deep floor. As it flowed, it made a flake of beryllium accessible to particles streaming from a tube of radon. This was the first step. It took a minute or so.

New particles sprang from the beryllium into a series of sheets of pure uranium. The atoms of this substance split in two. They drove into the bismuth blocks and their containing cadmium. For a certain time, very short, the purest light surged through the cavern and became brighter than the sun. Now, as the bismuth commenced to split, the rock walls were bombarded by the three rays—alpha, beta and gamma—and by a spreading storm of atomic fragments. The light—visible light, light invisible, and light that would blind human eyes—swelled within the region, drove through the walls, reflected, here and there, from the sleazy stuff of the world. For another, equally brief moment, the rock-jammed throat of the mine acted as a tamper. It half held in the accumulating temperatures and pressures.

The interval of compression was very short. Everson and Dunn had calculated that it would produce one new effect: As each bismuth atom divided, the additional pressure violence, swifter-paced than that of the resonance of half nuclei, would shake from each another neutron—a small, additional quantum. This, they assumed, would be the necessary "torch" to set a slow, enduring "fire" to the mineral walls; a perpetual chain reaction.

It was there that Everson and Dunn had erred: the tamper changed all resonance. The bismuth flew apart entirely. Its disintegration destroyed surrounding structures in the same fashion. The thing envisaged by Chandra Lalunal, Jeffry Stackpole and Herbert Evans now took place under the spruce forest and the sea edge. An atomic glare began to penetrate the earth and to race across the chords of it. Energy, driving up through the White Sea, boiled it, vaporized it, atomized it, broke its atoms and pushed against the ocean that might otherwise have driven toward the now empty place.

Vertical surge traversed the atmosphere and the stratosphere and broke into space. Here, cosmic particles, traveling at the velocity of a harmonic — since they were unslowed, unmuffled, by the air — destroyed certain fragments in the rising plane of atomic debris. These produced the “omega ray,” hypothesized and variously named by Lalunal, Stackpole and Evans. (But still on the restricted lists, while London and Washington separately cogitated its possible military value.) An atmosphere would have shielded the earth from the omega ray. But, in place of atmosphere, there was now an expanding region of disintegration, and the ray penetrated it, shattering even the crushed, abnormal atomic structures in the central globe beneath. . . .

In London, in the House of Parliament, Jeremy Hathcoat had commenced an oration on a proposal to restrict certain areas of research. One of the most brilliant orators in England's long history, he had finished a solemn period and was maturing his pace when the House of Parliament was closed forever. In Pennsylvania, in the United States, hundreds of Boy Scouts were assembling outside Philadelphia to search a deep and fragrant forest for an heiress who had been missing from her nearby mansion for three days; their excited voices, the confident instructions of their

scoutmasters, the barking of dogs which were to accompany them—all these were ended. Gunner McPhey, the greatest pitcher in a decade, was enjoying an early workout in the empty ball park in Washington, D. C. He raised his left foot, circled it gracefully, and flung a ball that never smacked the catcher's mitt. In Missouri, farmers rising at the bird-chittery interval before dawn, finished their breakfasts, many of them—but few reached their stables or their fields. Few of the stay-out revelers in Hollywood, California, ever saw their homes again.

Busy afternoon for Europe—morning for South America, for Gauchos on the plains, poison-dart blowers in deep jungles, astronomers studying the sun on Andes' tip—night and sleep on the Pacific. In darkened Seattle, a jealous wife approached her snoring husband, step by step, with a blade that caught the light of half a moon: a death she meant to deal was done for her and she perished, also—no murderess. To dancers in cabarets and to lollers on beaches, to night-watchmen and men pitching hay—it came alike.

The North Polar icecap melted. The sea boiled away. The Scandinavian Peninsula cracked open. The seam ran down Europe and, in Africa, met radiance emerging there. The hot contents of the earth extruded in the north, but it was as if the molten mass emerged and was laid bare simultaneously. Of all habitable places, Tasmania last experienced the advent of energy and the accompanying transmutation of its island mass.

When the event occurred, Chandra was still sitting in his wicker chair, staring at the banyan trees with an expression of almost aggressive fatalism. He had the journal in his hand. Stackpole and his driver, Cheng, were watching a boatman fight the hard current of the storm-pounded Yangtze Kiang. Their sight was extinguished—the boatman's hands did not even slip from the tiller as vision and thought were joined amongst the temperatures. To Evans, flying toward Washington at eight hundred miles

an hour—to this oddly armed, cherubic old man—there came horrible suspicion—a presentiment that his errand would be futile. On *The New England Wastes*, Ed got halfway through a sentence intended to state that birches were better than nothing. Everson and Dunn, of course, were among the first victims.

If Mars had inhabitants, they certainly rejoiced, for there was created in their chilly firmament a small but profligate sun where the earth had circled, blue-green, for two billion years. A little sun that grew large — and a million times brighter than earth—and sent to them, across the reaches, additional heat and more light for their dim, red sandstone plains. To the Martians came the spectacular comfort of a new, radiant companion. If there were thoughtful creatures alive in the steaming hurricanes of Venus, they must have marveled and perhaps worried over the phenomenon; it is dangerous to be too near a sun birth. It is dangerous, when a close neighbor grows ten times its size and spurts incredible energy into space. If the Martians became glad, surely the Venusians grew anxious.

In due course, the earth's moon was engulfed and added as fuel to the atomic holocaust. *Due course*. It was not long. The atomic principle involves velocities which the average terrestrial man had not taken the trouble to understand, even at the year of his dissolution.

Indeed, the time which elapsed after the first, great light sprang from the Everson-Dunn machine, and until the earth became an expanding sphere heated to trillions of degrees, was slightly less than one-nineteenth of a second.

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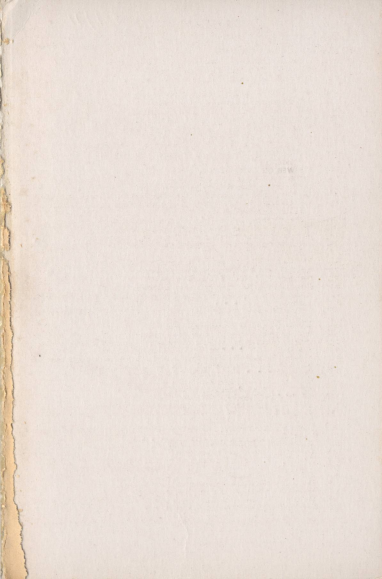
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