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SF

THE BEST OF THE BEST

Theodore Sturgeon ▪ Brian W. Aldiss
J. G. Ballard ▪ Algis Budrys
Clifford D. Simak ▪ Robert Sheckley
Fritz Leiber ▪ Isaac Asimov
Damon Knight ▪ Shirley Jackson
Theodore L. Thomas ▪ Zenna Henderson
Mack Reynolds ▪ Avram Davidson

and eleven other contemporary masters
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JUDITH MERRIL

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THE BEST OF THE BEST

EDITED BY

Judith Merril

A DELL BOOK

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This book is respectfully
and gratefully dedicated to

ANTHONY BOUCHER, KNOX BURGER
and JIM HAWKINS,

who taught me.

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INTRODUCTION

I don't read introductions myself: not ahead of time. Anything the author, or his friend or admirer has to say about it *may* interest me after I have read the book. Occasionally, I go back to a preface part way through the book, hoping for some sort of background to place unfamiliar or difficult material in context; but, that's rare, and there really ought to be a different label for that kind of introduction.

The stories in this anthology are not difficult; some of them were surely unfamiliar in tone or subject when they were first published, in the remote Sputnik and pre-Sputnik days, but there is nothing in here that needs footnoting for the ordinary space-age citizen of the sixties. Nevertheless, custom (and my contract with the publishers) requires that a collection of this sort have a preface.

I understand that the basic function of the introduction is advertising. I am supposed to tell you how good the book is and make you want to read (buy) it. Quickly, then—this is a very good book. If you are just deciding whether or not to read (buy) it, I suggest you turn immediately to the first page of the first story (or any other story); any one of them will be more convincing, and much more entertaining, than I am likely to be.

Presumably, I could stop here: perhaps wisely so. But it occurs to me that some of you may, after reading the stories, be interested in the background from which they came. Perspective and context I can talk about—at length. The problem becomes one of where to start and how to stop. Suddenly I still don't want to write an introduction: I want to write a book.

"Science fiction isn't a livelihood for you, it's a way of life," a typist told me once. True.

Science fiction—by which I mean for the moment the science-fiction field—has been my life, in large degree, for the last twenty years

or so. I have made my living from it, and derived most of my entertainment and education through the reading and writing of it. My closest friends and most uncomfortable enemies were made among the writers and editors and publishers of SF. My children were raised on its ideas. Books and correspondence files overrun my living quarters. What traveling I have done has been inspired by science-fiction happenings or people, and often made possible by professional connections.

In short, I am prepared to talk at length about what it (*SF*, s-f, science fiction, science fantasy, speculative fiction—*it*) is and where it fits and who does it and why, and whether it's worth it. I will try to limit myself only to what applies to this particular book.

Science fiction as a descriptive label has long since lost whatever validity it might once have had. By now it means so many things to so many people that—even though there are more and more people to whom it means *something*—I prefer not to use it at all, when I am talking about stories. *SF* (or generically, s-f) allows you to think *science fiction* if you like, while I think *science fable* or *scientific fantasy* or *speculative fiction*, or (once in a rare while, because there's little enough of it being written, by any rigorous definition) *science fiction*.

(I am not going to trap myself into attempting a definition of what I mean by *science fiction;* enough to say that of the stories in this book, those by Thomas, Reynolds, Byram, Budrys, and Asimov, and Carol Emshwiller's "Day at the Beach" are all valid examples.)

So I say *SF*—but I still think *science fiction*: like it or not, the label sticks. It has a ring to it that suits our times: an implicit dialectical synthesis equally expressive of our acclimatization to the ever-more-fantastic facts of daily life, and the growing popularity of fact-filled fantasy and fiction. ("True stories" have taken over the pop-magazine field; sex becomes so graphic it ceases to be suggestive; the Timeless West is vanishing before a flood of dates and names; the Private Eye has become a form-filling-out police detective, and the psychiatric crime-suspense novel has given way to the gadget-and-gimmickful spy story.)

In fact, one of the main difficulties with *science fiction* as a label for a particular kind of story, or category of publishing, is a popular reversal of meaning most often applied by editorial writers for *Time-Life*, political speechmakers, and a certain breed of science writer teacher: phrases like "a sciencefictional adventure" or "an accomplishment positively sciencefictional" or "beyond sciencefiction" mean,

as we all immediately understand, not a fantasy based on science or scientific reasoning, but a truly astonishing fact.

Aside from the inversion-process, there is a sideways slippage. To the moviegoer, "science fiction" has come to mean "horror." A "science-fiction movie" means *The Blob from Time,* not *Dr. Strangelove.* To the comic-book addict, it means Superman and his many friends. To the TV viewer, it is beginning to mean "space story" instead of "chiller," as *Star Trek* takes over from the *Twilight Zone.*

And of course, in book publishing, "science fiction" means either a book written by an author whose name is familiar to *s-f* book-buyers, or any poor-to-mediocre book with fantastic or futuristic elements written by an unknown. (So Vonnegut's *Player Piano* was "science fiction" in 1952, and "caustic social comment" when it was reissued in 1966; anything by Sturgeon is science fiction; anything by John Barth or John Hersey is not.)

People read for two reasons: to get away from reality, and to get closer to it; the ideal story form, I suppose, is the fable, which does both. In his introduction to the first SF Annual, Orson Welles suggested that s-f stories are "our modern fables." More recently there has been much talk (from me among others) about SF as modern myth. It may seem pretentious to speak of a field which degenerates so readily into mere adventure story as the replacement for classical philosophy in our time—and yet this is to some extent the role s-f has been playing. Science-fiction is not fiction *about* science, but fiction which endeavors to find the meaning in science and in the scientific-technological society we are constructing.

This book, then, contains 29 *s-f* stories, by which I mean a special sort of contemporary writing which makes use of fantastic or inventive elements to comment on, or speculate about, society, humanity, life, the cosmos, reality, and any other topic under the general heading of philosophy. They are, generally speaking, the stories that looked best to me on rereading, out of all those included in the first five SF Annuals. That means, among other things, that they were all published between 1955–1960, a significant half-decade with special import for speculative fiction.

I started work on the 1st Annual in the fall of 1955. Two of the stories in this book were first published in January, 1955, and three more in March—which means one or more was probably written at least as early as 1953.

1953 was the year Dwight Eisenhower became President of the United States, and the Korean war ended, and McCarthy became Chairman of the Senate Committee on Government Operations. Stalin died. The peptide molecule was synthesized for the first time. Dr. Oppenheimer, the "father of the H-bomb," was dismissed from government employ as a bad security risk. John F. Kennedy, the junior Senator from Massachusetts married society girl, Jacqueline Bouvier. Dylan Thomas died; James Baldwin published his first novel; William Burroughs wrote *Junkie. The Old Man and the Sea* won a Pulitzer for Hemingway.

1954 was the Supreme Court ruling on integration, and Dien Bien Phu, and the formation of SEATO. Winston Churchill retired as Prime Minister; McCarthy was censured by the Senate. The USSR exploded an H-bomb; the first peace-use atomic power plant was opened in Shippingport, Pa. Aldous Huxley published a book of his experiences with mescalin, *The Doors of Perception.*

In '55, the Salk vaccine for polio was put into use; the CIO and AFL merged; there were Freedom Riders in the South; the DNA and RNA molecules were synthesized; *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* won the Pulitzer drama prize; nobody paid much attention to the early publicity releases coming from Washington about the satellites to be orbited during the International Geophysical Year. The anti-proton was produced in a laboratory.

'56: Sen. Kennedy (D., Mass.) failed to gain the vice-presidential nomination. Fidel Castro landed in Oriente Province and started fighting his way to Havana. The U.S. conducted an aerial H-bomb test over Bikini atoll. Premier Diem refused to allow a Vietnam election. *A Walk on the Wild Side* and *Giovanni's Room* came out, and *Around the World in 80 Days* brought wide-screen vision to the world. *The Rebel* won a Nobel Prize for Camus.

'57 was Kerouac's *On the Road* and Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage;* the first Little Rock ruckus; the Principle of Conservation of Parity, and the Sabin sugarcubes; O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night.* Ghana achieved independence. And in October—*Sputnik I.*

In '58, the first atomic submarine was launched; Alaska was admitted to the Union; the Diner's Club began; the Space Race got underway. '59 was the Castro victory in Cuba, college students in phone booths, *Lolita* banned and *Lady Chatterley* sold, the first Soviet moon rockets, and the Able-Baker rockets in the U.S.

When the last of the Annuals represented here was published, in 1960, more than 20 satellites had gone up, the lunch-counter sit-ins were starting, *The Catcher in the Rye* had become a Big Thing on

Campus, Hawaii was the 50th State. Elizabeth Taylor had found happiness at last with Eddie Fisher, and John F. Kennedy was campaigning against Richard Nixon for the Presidency.

No one—well, hardly anyone—had yet heard of the Beatles or Bob Dylan or Dick Gregory. Malcolm X was barely known outside Harlem. McCarthy was dead, but not McCarthyism, which seemed to have taken root in the American soul. There was much concern about science education, and classics were being dropped from school curricula. Khrushchev had not-been to Disneyland, and people were starting to worry about China instead of Russia.

This was the time, so close and somehow so remote, during which these stories were written and published. It was a time of adjustments, culmination, transitions, announcements, rather than new achievements. (The basic satellite designs were on the drawing boards in 1952; the polio research was completed in 1953; Castro was already gathering his forces in 1954; and so forth.) This was even more true inside science fiction.

The best s-f of the forties had been (often brilliantly) predictive; the overall tone up through the early fifties was instructive, indeed evangelist; science fictionists were triumphant prophets of atomic power and space flight, direful forewarners of atomic war and brainwashing and overpopulation.

In the early fifties, the bright new ideas and urgent messages were fewer. Between 1948 and 1952, new writers had poured into the field, and new ideas as well as new techniques emerged in every issue of the proliferating magazines. Between 1955 and 1960, I think more writers left the field than came into it; the number of magazine titles fell off sharply; the new-concepts writing began to be found in RAND reports and NASA releases, more than in s-f. The beginning of the industrial, political, and technological space age meant the beginning of a new period of exploration in "the human factor," as opposed to the "hardware," for both science and science fiction. The interesting new work tended to emphasize literary qualities rather than philosophic ones. And by 1955, the field had achieved just enough literary respectability to be able to serve a vital function: during the entire period covered by this anthology, it was the science-fiction magazines that provided the only widely read medium for protest and dissent in a witch-haunted country.

It was a curious combination of pressures and circumstances which resulted in the best American short fiction of that period being published in magazines most "literary" people (still) were not willing to have seen on their coffee tables. And it is interesting to note

that the sophistication of science fiction through those years was, to some extent at least, a conscious process.

In 1956, the first Milford Science Fiction Writer's Conference took place under the joint direction of Damon Knight, James Blish, and myself. Thirty-odd writers attended, and discussed things like symbolism in fiction and techniques of criticism, as well as problems of marketing and plotting. The impact of the week of talks on those who attended was enormous, and the Conference has continued to function as an arena for serious professional discourse.

An indirect result of the Conference was a publication edited for several years by Theodore Cogswell, called *Proceedings of the Institute for Twenty-first Century Studies*. PITFCS published articles, limericks, nonsense stuff, poetry, and letters—most of all, letters. It provided a running round-robin for everyone professionally involved with s-f—and its full role in the development of the field, and of some individual writers, is hard to overestimate.

This anthology, as I said earlier, is made up of the stories in the first five Annuals that seemed best to me in retrospect—in a general way.

For instance, Daniel Keyes' "Flowers for Algernon" is not here, because it has since been published as a novel even better than the original novelette version. Eugene Ionesco's "Flying High" is missing because I could not secure permission to reprint. And half a dozen more I'd have liked to include, there was simply not enough space for.

Beyond that, there are stories missing here that should by all means be in any volume called *The Best of the Best*—but they were not in the Annuals to begin with. Some of these were permission problems, some were editorial restrictions imposed by the publishers, some again, lack of space. The considerations that go into the makeup of each year's Annual are complex: Charles Beaumont's "The Vanishing American," for instance, was published in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* in 1955; there were too many stories from that magazine, *and* too many conformity/alienation stories that year, so it dropped out; in another volume, it would have been a sure selection.

Some other authors whose work was significant and popular during the period involved are not here and were not in the original Annuals because they were not writing short fiction at the time, or because a great deal of good fiction from one author does not always add up to individually excellent stories.

But while there are, to my knowledge, at least as many other stories published between 1955–60 that are just as good as these —these still (and I know I said it before) are very good indeed.

I have read each of them many times now, and I *know*.

THE HOOFER
Walter M. Miller, Jr.

Walter M. Miller, Jr., is best known for his only novel, *A Canticle for Liebowitz* (Lippincott, 1959); he has also published two collections of short fiction, *Conditionally Human* (1962) and *The View from the Stars* (1965).

Born in Florida in 1923, Miller served in the Air Corps during World War II as radio operator and gunner, flying 55 missions over Italy and the Balkans. He began writing in 1950 during his convalescence from an automobile accident which interrupted his G.I.-bill studies at the University of Texas. He took his degree in electrical engineering a year later, and shortly afterward returned to Florida, where he still lives with his wife and four children.

Miller's first short story was published in *American Mercury* and received an Honorable Mention in *The Best American Short Stories* for 1950. Between 1951–1957, he published approximately 40 stories in the science-fantasy magazines, including the three novellas in *Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1955–57 on which *Canticle* was based; among the stories most widely reprinted since are "Command Performance", "Crucifixus Etiam", "Momento Homo", and "Darfsteller", which won science fiction's annual "Hugo" award for short fiction in 1955.

He has also written for television, most notably for the gone-but-not-forgotten *Captain Video* show of the early fifties.

"The Hoofer" was first published in *Fantastic Universe*, September, 1955, and is reprinted from the 1st SF Annual.

THEY ALL KNEW he was a spacer because of the white goggle marks on his sun-scorched face, and so they tolerated him and helped him. They even made allowances for him when he staggered and fell in the aisle of the bus

while pursuing the harassed little housewife from seat to seat and cajoling her to sit and talk with him.

Having fallen, he decided to sleep in the aisle. Two men helped him to the back of the bus, dumped him on the rear seat, and tucked his gin bottle safely out of sight. After all, he had not seen Earth for nine months, and judging by the crusted matter about his eyelids, he couldn't have seen it too well now, even if he had been sober. Glare-blindness, gravity-legs, and agoraphobia were excuses for a lot of things, when a man was just back from Big Bottomless. And who could blame a man for acting strangely?

Minutes later, he was back up the aisle and swaying giddily over the little housewife. "How!" he said. "Me Chief Broken Wing. You wanta Indian wrestle?"

The girl, who sat nervously staring at him, smiled wanly, and shook her head.

"Quiet li'l pigeon, aren'tcha?" he burbled affectionately, crashing into the seat beside her.

Two men slid out of their seats, and a hand clamped his shoulder. "Come on, Broken Wing, let's go back to bed."

"My name's Hogey," he said. "Big Hogey Parker. I was just kidding about being a Indian."

"Yeah. Come on, let's go have a drink." They got him on his feet, and led him stumbling back down the aisle.

"My ma was half Cherokee, see? That's how come I said it. You wanta hear a war whoop? Real stuff."

"Never mind."

He cupped his hands to his mouth and favored them with a blood-curdling proof of his ancestry, while the female passengers stirred restlessly and hunched in their seats. The driver stopped the bus and went back to warn him against any further display. The driver flashed a deputy's badge and threatened to turn him over to a constable.

"I gotta get home," Big Hogey told him. "I got me a son now, that's why. You know? A little baby pigeon of a son. Haven't seen him yet."

"Will you just sit still and be quiet then, eh?"

Big Hogey nodded emphatically. "Shorry, officer, I didn't mean to make any trouble."

When the bus started again, he fell on his side and lay still. He made retching sounds for a time, then rested, snoring softly. The bus driver woke him again at Caine's junction, retrieved his gin bottle from behind the seat, and helped him down the aisle and out of the bus.

Big Hogey stumbled about for a moment, then sat down hard in the gravel at the shoulder of the road. The driver paused with one foot on the step, looking around. There was not even a store at the road junction, but only a freight building next to the railroad track, a couple of farmhouses at the edge of a side-road, and, just across the way, a deserted filling station with a sagging roof. The land was Great Plains country, treeless, barren, and rolling.

Big Hogey got up and staggered around in front of the bus, clutching at it for support, losing his duffle bag.

"Hey, watch the traffic!" The driver warned. With a surge of unwelcome compassion he trotted around after his troublesome passenger, taking his arm as he sagged again. "You crossing?"

"Yeah," Hogey muttered. "Lemme alone, I'm okay."

The driver started across the highway with him. The traffic was sparse, but fast and dangerous in the central ninety-mile lane.

"I'm okay," Hogey kept protesting. "I'm a tumbler, ya know? Gravity's got me. Damn gravity. I'm not used to gravity, ya know? I used to be a tumbler—*huk!*—only now I gotta be a hoofer. 'Count of li'l Hogey. You know about li'l Hogey?"

"Yeah. Your son. Come on."

"Say, you gotta son? I bet you gotta son."

"Two kids," said the driver, catching Hogey's bag as it slipped from his shoulder. "Both girls."

"Say, you oughta be home with them kids. Man oughta stick with his family. You oughta get another job." Hogey eyed him owlishly, wagged a moralistic finger, skidded on the gravel as they stepped onto the opposite shoulder, and sprawled again.

The driver blew a weary breath, looked down at him, and shook his head. Maybe it'd be kinder to find a con-

stable after all. This guy could get himself killed, wandering around loose.

"Somebody supposed to meet you?" he asked, squinting around at the dusty hills.

"*Huk!*—who, me?" Hogey giggled, belched, and shook his head. "Nope. Nobody knows I'm coming. S'prise. I'm supposed to be here a week ago." He looked up at the driver with a pained expression. "Week late, ya know? Marie's gonna be sore—woo-*hoo!*—is she gonna be sore!" He waggled his head severely at the ground.

"Which way are you going?" the driver grunted impatiently.

Hogey pointed down the side-road that led back into the hills. "Marie's pop's place. You know where? 'Bout three miles from here. Gotta walk, I guess."

"Don't," the driver warned. "You sit there by the culvert till you get a ride. Okay?"

Hogey nodded forlornly.

"Now stay out of the road," the driver warned, then hurried back across the highway. Moments later, the atomic battery-driven motors droned mournfully, and the bus pulled away.

Big Hogey blinked after it, rubbing the back of his neck. "Nice people," he said. "Nice buncha people. All hoofers."

With a grunt and a lurch, he got to his feet, but his legs wouldn't work right. With his tumbler's reflexes, he fought to right himself with frantic arm motions, but gravity claimed him, and he went stumbling into the ditch.

"Damn legs, damn crazy legs!" he cried.

The bottom of the ditch was wet, and he crawled up the embankment with mud-soaked knees, and sat on the shoulder again. The gin bottle was still intact. He had himself a long fiery drink, and it warmed him deep down. He blinked around at the gaunt and treeless land.

The sun was almost down, forge-red on a dusty horizon. The blood-streaked sky faded into sulphurous yellow toward the zenith, and the very air that hung over the land seemed full of yellow smoke, the omnipresent dust of the plains.

A farm truck turned onto the side-road and moaned away, its driver hardly glancing at the dark young man who sat swaying on his dufflebag near the culvert. Hogey

scarcely noticed the vehicle. He just kept staring at the crazy sun.

He shook his head. It wasn't really the sun. The sun, the real sun, was a hateful eye-sizzling horror in the dead black pit. It painted everything with pure white pain, and you saw things by the reflected painlight. The fat red sun was strictly a phoney, and it didn't fool him any. He hated it for what he knew it was behind the gory mask, and for what it had done to his eyes.

With a grunt, he got to his feet, managed to shoulder the duffle bag, and started off down the middle of the farm road, lurching from side to side, and keeping his eyes on the rolling distances. Another car turned onto the side-road, honking angrily.

Hogey tried to turn around to look at it, but he forgot to shift his footing. He staggered and went down on the pavement. The car's tires screeched on the hot asphalt. Hogey lay there for a moment, groaning. That one had hurt his hip. A car door slammed and a big man with a florid face got out and stalked toward him, looking angry.

"What the hell's the matter with you, fella?" he drawled. "You soused? Man, you've really got a load."

Hogey got up doggedly, shaking his head to clear it. "Space legs," he prevaricated. "Got space legs. Can't stand the gravity."

The burly farmer retrieved his gin bottle for him, still miraculously unbroken. "Here's your gravity," he grunted. "Listen, fella, you better get home pronto."

"Pronto? Hey, I'm no Mex. Honest, I'm just space burned. You know?"

"Yeah. Say, who are you, anyway? Do you live around here?"

It was obvious that the big man had taken him for a hobo or a tramp. Hogey pulled himself together. "Goin' to the Hauptman's place. Marie. You know Marie?"

The farmer's eyebrows went up. "Marie Hauptman? Sure I know her. Only she's Marie Parker now. Has been, nigh on six years. Say—" He paused, then gaped. "You ain't her husband by any chance?"

"Hogey, that's me. Big Hogey Parker."

"Well, I'll be—! Get in the car. I'm going right past

John Hauptman's place. Boy, you're in no shape to walk it."

He grinned wryly, waggled his head, and helped Hogey and his bag into the back seat. A woman with a sun-wrinkled neck sat rigidly beside the farmer in the front, and she neither greeted the passenger nor looked around.

"They don't make cars like this anymore," the farmer called over the growl of the ancient gasoline engine and the grind of gears. "You can have them new atomics with their loads of hot isotopes under the seat. Ain't safe, I say—eh, Martha?"

The woman with the sun-baked neck quivered her head slightly. "A car like this was good enough for Pa, an' I reckon it's good enough for us," she drawled mournfully.

Five minutes later the car drew in to the side of the road. "Reckon you can walk it from here," the farmer said. "That's Hauptman's road just up ahead."

He helped Hogey out of the car and drove away without looking back to see if Hogey stayed on his feet. The woman with the sun-baked neck was suddenly talking garrulously in his direction.

It was twilight. The sun had set, and the yellow sky was turning gray. Hogey was too tired to go on, and his legs would no longer hold him. He blinked around at the land, got his eyes focused, and found what looked like Hauptman's place on a distant hillside. It was a big frame house surrounded by a wheatfield, and a few scrawny trees. Having located it, he stretched out in the tall grass beyond the ditch to take a little rest.

Somewhere dogs were barking, and a cricket sang creaking monotony in the grass. Once there was the distant thunder of a rocket blast from the launching station six miles to the west, but it faded quickly. An A-motored convertible whined past on the road, but Hogey went unseen.

When he awoke, it was night, and he was shivering. His stomach was screeching, and his nerves dancing with high voltages. He sat up and groped for his watch, then remembered he had pawned it after the poker game. Remembering the game and the results of the game made him wince and bite his lip and grope for the bottle again.

He sat breathing heavily for a moment after the stiff drink. Equating time to position had become second na-

ture with him, but he had to think for a moment because his defective vision prevented him from seeing the Earth-crescent.

Vega was almost straight above him in the late August sky, so he knew it wasn't much after sundown—probably about eight o'clock. He braced himself with another swallow of gin, picked himself up and got back to the road, feeling a little sobered after the nap.

He limped on up the pavement and turned left at the narrow drive that led between barbed-wire fences toward the Hauptman farmhouse, five hundred yards or so from the farm road. The fields on his left belonged to Marie's father, he knew. He was getting close—close to home and woman and child.

He dropped the bag suddenly and leaned against a fence post, rolling his head on his forearms and choking in spasms of air. He was shaking all over, and his belly writhed. He wanted to turn and run. He wanted to crawl out in the grass and hide.

What were they going to say? And Marie, Marie most of all. How was he going to tell her about the money?

Six hitches in space, and every time the promise had been the same: *One more tour, baby, and we'll have enough dough, and then I'll quit for good. One more time, and we'll have our stake—enough to open a little business, or buy a house with a mortgage and get a job.*

And she had waited, but the money had never been quite enough until this time. This time the tour had lasted nine months, and he had signed on for every run from station to moon-base to pick up the bonuses. And this time he'd made it. Two weeks ago, there had been forty-eight hundred in the bank. And now . . .

"Why?" he groaned, striking his forehead against his forearms. His arm slipped, and his head hit the top of the fencepost, and the pain blinded him for a moment. He staggered back into the road with a low roar, wiped blood from his forehead, and savagely kicked his bag.

It rolled a couple of yards up the road. He leaped after it and kicked it again. When he had finished with it, he stood panting and angry, but feeling better. He shouldered the bag and hiked on toward the farmhouse.

They're hoofers, that's all—just an Earth-chained bunch

of hoofers, even Marie. And I'm a tumbler. A born tumbler. Know what that means? It means—God, what does it mean? It means out in Big Bottomless, where Earth's like a fat moon with fuzzy mold growing on it. Mold, that's all you are, just mold.

A dog barked, and he wondered if he had been muttering aloud. He came to a fence-gap and paused in the darkness. The road wound around and came up the hill in front of the house. Maybe they were sitting on the porch. Maybe they'd already heard him coming. Maybe . . .

He was trembling again. He fished the fifth of gin out of his coat pocket and sloshed it. Still over half a pint. He decided to kill it. It wouldn't do to go home with a bottle sticking out of his pocket. He stood there in the night wind, sipping at it, and watching the reddish moon come up in the east. The moon looked as phoney as the setting sun.

He straightened in sudden determination. It had to be sometime. Get it over with, get it over with now. He opened the fence-gap, slipped through, and closed it firmly behind him. He retrieved his bag, and waded quietly through the tall grass until he reached the hedge which divided an area of sickly peach trees from the field. He got over the hedge somehow, and started through the trees toward the house. He stumbled over some old boards, and they clattered.

"*Shhh!*" he hissed, and moved on.

The dogs were barking angrily, and he heard a screen door slam. He stopped.

"Ho there!" a male voice called experimentally from the house.

One of Marie's brothers. Hogey stood frozen in the shadow of a peach tree, waiting.

"Anybody out there?" the man called again.

Hogey waited, then heard the man muttering, "Sic 'im, boy, sic 'im."

The hound's bark became eager. The animal came chasing down the slope, and stopped ten feet away to crouch and bark frantically at the shadow in the gloom. He knew the dog.

"Hookey!" he whispered. "Hookey boy—here!"

The dog stopped barking, sniffed, trotted closer, and

went *"Rrrooff!"* Then he started sniffing suspiciously again.

"Easy, Hookey, here boy!" he whispered.

The dog came forward silently, sniffed his hand, and whined in recognition. Then he trotted around Hogey, panting doggy affection and dancing an invitation to romp. The man whistled from the porch. The dog froze, then trotted quickly back up the slope.

"Nothing, eh, Hookey?" the man on the porch said. "Chasin' armadillos again, eh?"

The screen door slammed again, and the porch light went out. Hogey stood there staring, unable to think. Somewhere beyond the window lights were—his woman, his son.

What the hell was a tumbler doing with a woman and a son?

After perhaps a minute, he stepped forward again. He tripped over a shovel, and his foot plunged into something that went *squelch* and swallowed the foot past the ankle. He fell forward into a heap of sand, and his foot went deeper into the sloppy wetness.

He lay there with his stinging forehead on his arms, cursing softly and crying. Finally he rolled over, pulled his foot out of the mess, and took off his shoes. They were full of mud—sticky sandy mud.

The dark world was reeling about him, and the wind was dragging at his breath. He fell back against the sand pile and let his feet sink in the mud hole and wriggled his toes. He was laughing soundlessly, and his face was wet in the wind. He couldn't think. He couldn't remember where he was and why, and he stopped caring, and after awhile he felt better.

The stars were swimming over him, dancing crazily, and the mud cooled his feet, and the sand was soft behind him. He saw a rocket go up on a tail of flame from the station, and waited for the sound of its blast, but he was already asleep when it came.

It was far past midnight when he became conscious of the dog licking wetly at his ear and cheek. He pushed the animal away with a low curse and mopped at the side of his face. He stirred, and groaned. His feet were burning up! He tried to pull them toward him, but they wouldn't

budge. There was something wrong with his legs.

For an instant he stared wildly around in the night. Then he remembered where he was, closed his eyes and shuddered. When he opened them again, the moon had emerged from behind a cloud, and he could see clearly the cruel trap into which he had accidentally stumbled. A pile of old boards, a careful stack of new lumber, a pick and shovel, a sand-pile, heaps of fresh-turned earth, and a concrete mixer—well, it added up.

He gripped his ankles and pulled, but his feet wouldn't budge. In sudden terror, he tried to stand up, but his ankles were clutched by the concrete too, and he fell back in the sand with a low moan. He lay still for several minutes, considering carefully.

He pulled at his left foot. It was locked in a vise. He tugged even more desperately at his right foot. It was equally immovable.

He sat up with a whimper and clawed at the rough concrete until his nails tore and his fingertips bled. The surface still felt damp, but it had hardened while he slept.

He sat there stunned until Hookey began licking at his scuffed fingers. He shouldered the dog away, and dug his hands into the sand-pile to stop the bleeding. Hookey licked at his face, panting love.

"Get away!" he croaked savagely.

The dog whined softly, trotted a short distance away, circled, and came back to crouch down in the sand directly before Hogey, inching forward experimentally.

Hogey gripped fistfuls of the dry sand and cursed between his teeth, while his eyes wandered over the sky. They came to rest on the sliver of light—the space station—rising in the west, floating out in Big Bottomless where the gang was—Nichols and Guerrera and Lavrenti and Fats. And he wasn't forgetting Keesey, the rookie who'd replaced him.

Keesey would have a rough time for a while—rough as a cob. The pit was no playground. The first time you went out of the station in a suit, the pit got you. Everything was falling, and you fell with it. Everything. The skeletons of steel, the tire-shaped station, the spheres and docks and nightmare shapes—all tied together by umbilical cables and flexible tubes. Like some crazy sea-thing they seemed,

floating in a black ocean with its tentacles bound together by drifting strands in the dark tide that bore it.

Everything was pain-bright or dead black, and it wheeled around you, and you went nuts trying to figure which way was down. In fact, it took you months to teach your body that *all* ways were down and that the pit was bottomless.

He became conscious of a plaintive sound in the wind, and froze to listen.

It was a baby crying.

It was nearly a minute before he got the significance of it. It hit him where he lived, and he began jerking frantically at his encased feet and sobbing low in his throat. They'd hear him if he kept that up. He stopped and covered his ears to close out the cry of his firstborn. A light went on in the house, and when it went off again, the infant's cry had ceased.

Another rocket went up from the station, and he cursed it. Space was a disease, and he had it.

"Help!" he cried out suddenly. "I'm stuck! Help me, help me!"

He knew he was yelling hysterically at the sky and fighting the relentless concrete that clutched his feet, and after a moment he stopped.

The light was on in the house again, and he heard faint sounds. The stirring-about woke the baby again, and once more the infant's wail came on the breeze.

Make the kid shut up, make the kid shut up . . .

But that was no good. It wasn't the kid's fault. It wasn't Marie's fault. No fathers allowed in space, they said, but it wasn't their fault either. They were right, and he had only himself to blame. The kid was an accident, but that didn't change anything. Not a thing in the world. It remained a tragedy.

A tumbler had no business with a family, but what was a man going to do? Take a skinning knife, boy, and make yourself a eunuch. But that was no good either. They needed bulls out there in the pit, not steers. And when a man came down from a year's hitch, what was he going to do? Live in a lonely shack and read books for kicks? Be-

cause you were a man, you sought out a woman. And because she was a woman, she got a kid, and that was the end of it. It was nobody's fault, nobody's at all.

He stared at the red eye of Mars low in the southwest. They were running out there now, and next year he would have been on the long long run . . .

But there was no use thinking about it. Next year and the years after belonged to *little* Hogey.

He sat there with his feet locked in the solid concrete of the footing, staring out into Big Bottomless while his son's cry came from the house and the Hauptman menfolk came wading through the tall grass in search of someone who had cried out. His feet were stuck tight, and he wouldn't ever get them out. He was sobbing softly when they found him.

BULKHEAD

Theodore Sturgeon

Theodore Sturgeon is probably science fantasy's most-reprinted author: of the hundred-odd short stories, novelettes, and novellas published in magazines between "Ether Breather" in 1939, and "Tandy's Story" in 1961, almost all have since appeared in book form; some of the best-known ("Microcosmic God", "Killdozer", "Thunder and Roses", "Saucer of Loneliness") have been reprinted five or six times in English-language collections alone. His outstanding novel, *More Than Human,* won the International Fantasy Award in 1952, and a short story, "Bianca's Hands", was awarded the British *Argosy* $1000 prize in 1947.

Born on Staten Island in 1918, Sturgeon grew up in Philadelphia with one basic ambition: to become a circus acrobat. When rheumatic fever made that career impossible, he worked as a roustabout for a while, then went to sea in the merchant marine. Sold his first story at eighteen, to McClure's Syndicate for $5.00; shortly afterwards came ashore to stay, and except for short spells (as hotel executive, bulldozer operator, literary agent, etc.), has been a full-time writer since. He now lives in Woodstock, N.Y., with his wife and their four children.

Sturgeon has published seven novels (one under the pen name, Frederick R. Ewing, and one a "novelization" of a movie), and almost a dozen short-story collections, the latest of which was *Sturgeon in Orbit* (1964). In September, 1963, the magazine *Fantasy & Science Fiction* published an issue in his honor, centered on one of his rare stories of recent years, "When You Care, When You Love". Since then, most of his time has gone to critical writing (*If* and *National Review,* primarily), and to television work; only two pieces of fiction (in *Playboy* and *Sports Illustrated*) have appeared until the recent Doubleday anthology, *Dangerous Visions,* which included his new "If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let Your Sister Marry One?"

"Bulkhead" was originally published (as "Who?") in *Galaxy,* and was reprinted in the collection, *A Way Home* (Funk & Wagnall, 1955)

and in the 1st SF Annual. Other stories of Sturgeon's—"The Other Man", "The Comedian's Children", and "The Man Who Lost the Sea"—appeared in the 2nd, 4th, and 5th SF Annuals.

YOU JUST DON'T LOOK through viewports very often.

It's terrifying at first, of course—all that spangled blackness and the sense of disorientation. Your guts never get used to sustained free-fall and you feel, when you look out, that every direction is *up,* which is unnatural, or that every direction is *down,* which is sheer horror. But you don't stop looking out there because it's terrifying. You stop because nothing ever happens out there. You've no sensation of speed.

You're not going anywhere.

After the weeks and months, there's some change, sure; but from day to day, you can't see the difference, so after a while you stop looking for any.

Naturally, that eliminates the viewports as an amusement device, which is too bad. There aren't so many things for a man to do during a Long Haul that he can afford to eliminate anything.

Getting bored with the infinities outside is only a reminder that the same could happen with your writing materials, and the music, the stereo and all the rest of it.

And it's hard to gripe, to say, "Why don't they install a such-and-such on these barrels?" because you've already got what a thousand spacemen griped about long since—many of them men with more experience, more imagination and less internal resources (that is to say, more need) than you'll ever have. Certainly more than you have now; this is your first trip and you're just making the transition from "inside looking out" to "inside looking on."

It's a small world. It *better* be a little complicated.

A lot that has happened in worlds like these would be simple to understand, if you knew about it. Not knowing is better, though; it keeps you wondering. Some of it you can figure out, knowing as you do that a lot of men have died in these things, a lot have disappeared, ship and all, and some (but you don't know how many) have been taken

out of the ships and straight to the laughing academy.

You find out fairly soon, for example, that the manual controls are automatically relayed out, and stay out of temptation until you need them to land. (Whether they'll switch in if you need them for evasive maneuvering some time, you don't know yet.) Who died—how many died—because they started playing with the manual controls? And was it because they decided to quit and go home? Or because they convinced themselves that the auto-astrogator had bugs in it? Or because they just couldn't stand all those stationary stars?

Then there's this: You're alone. You have a shipmate, but even so, you're alone. You crouch in this little cell in the nose of your ship, with the curving hull to your left and the flat wall of the midship bulkhead to your right. Because it's there, that bulkhead, you know that in previous models it wasn't. You can imagine what happened in some (how many?) ships to make it necessary to seal you away from your shipmate.

Psychodynamics has come a long way, but you called this a world; well, reduce a world to two separate nations and see what happens. Between two confined entities, there's no mean and no median, and no real way of determining a majority. How many battered pilots have come home crazed, cooped up with the shredded bodies of their shipmates?

So that's easy to understand—you can't trust two human beings together. Not for long enough. If you don't believe it, look at the bulkhead. It's there because it *has* to be there.

Being a peaceable guy, it scares you a little to know how dangerous you are.

Makes you a little proud, though, doesn't it?

Be proud of this, too—that they trust you to be alone so much. Sure, there *is* a shipmate; but by and large you're alone, and that's what's expected of you. What most people, especially Earthside people, never find out is that a man who can't be by himself is a man who knows, away down deep, that he's not good company. You could probably make it by yourself altogether . . . but you must admit you're glad you don't have to. You have access to the other side of the bulkhead, when you need it. If you need it. It

didn't take you too long to figure out you'd use it sparingly.

You have books and you have games, you have pictures and text tapes and nine different euphorics (with a watchdog dispenser, so you can never become an addict) all of which help you, when you need help, to explore yourself. But having another human mind to explore is a wonderful idea—a wonder tempered by the knowledge—oh, how smart you were to figure it out in time!—that the other mind is a last resort. If you ever use up the potentialities it holds for you, you're through, brother!

So you have endurance contests with yourself to see how long you can leave that bulkhead alone.

You go back over your life, the things you've done. People have written whole novels about 24 hours in a man's life. That's the way you think it all out, slowly, piece by piece; every feature of every face and the way they were used; what people did and why. Especially why. It doesn't take any time to remember what a man did, but you can spend hours in thinking about why he did it.

You live it again and it's like being a little god, knowing what's going to happen to everyone.

When you reported to Base, there was a busload of guys with you. Now you know who would go all the way through the course and wind up out here; reliving it, you can put yourself back in the bus again and say, "That stranger across the aisle is Pegg. He isn't going to make it. He'll go home on furlough three months from now and he'll try to kill himself rather than come back. The freckled nape in the seat ahead of you belongs to the redhead Walkinok, who will throw his weight around during his first week and pay expensively for it afterward. But he'll make it."

You make friends with the shy dark guy next to you. His name is Stein and he looks like a big-brain. He's easy to talk to and smart, the kind of fellow who always goes straight to the top. And he won't last even until the first furlough; two weeks is all he can take, and you never see him again. But you remember his name. You remember everything and you go back over it and remember the memories in between the memories. Did somebody on that

bus have shoes that squeaked? Back you go and hunt for it. If it happened, you'll remember it.

They say anyone can recall this way; but for you, with what the psycho-dynamicians have done to you—or is it *for* you?—you can do more of this than anybody. There isn't anything that ever happened in your whole life that you can't remember. You can start at the beginning and go all the way through. You can start at the beginning and jump years in a second and go through an episode again . . . get mad again . . . fall in love again.

And when you get tired of the events themselves, you can run them off again, to find out why. Why did Stein go through those years of study and preparation, those months of competition, when all the time he didn't *want* to be in the Space Service? Why did Pegg conceal from himself that he wasn't fit for the Space Service?

So you cast back, comb, compare and ponder, keeping busy. If you're careful, just remembering lasts a long time, wondering why lasts even longer; and in between times, there are the books and stereos, the autochess and the music . . . until you're ready to cast and comb in your memories again. But sooner or later—later, if you're especially careful—you'll get restless and your life as it was played out, and the reasons why it was played just that way, all that gets old. You can think of no new approach to any of it and learn nothing more from it.

That's where the centerline bulkhead comes in handy. Its very shape is a friendly thing to you; the hull on your left is curved, being part of the ship's side, but the bulkhead is a flat wall. Its constant presence is a reminder that it has a function, like everything else in your world; that it is, by nature, a partition; that the existence of a partition presupposes another compartment; and that the other compartment is the size and shape of this one and designed for a similar purpose—to be a dwelling for someone.

With no sound nor sign of occupancy, the bulkhead still attests the life behind it, just by being there. It's a friendly flatness, a companionable feature of your world, and its company pervades all your thinking.

You know it's your last resort, but you know, too, that it's a rich one, and when at last you're driven to use it,

you'll enter another kind of world, more complex and more engrossing than your own, just for the work it takes to get from place to place and the mystery of the fog between the places. It's a mind, another human mind, sharing this prison with you when at last you need sharing more than anything whatever in all of space.

Who is it?

You think about that. You think a whole lot about that. Back at Base, in your last year, you and the other cadets thought about that more than anything. If they'd ever given you the shadow of a hint . . . but no; wondering about it was apparently part of your training. You knew only that on your Long Haul, you would not be alone. You had a pretty good idea that the choice of a shipmate for you would be a surprise.

You looked around you at mess, in class, in the dormitory; you lay awake at night dealing out their faces in a sort of solitaire game; and sometimes you thought about one and said, "That'd be fine. We'd get along." And sometimes you said, "That stinker? Lock me up with *him* and that bulkhead won't be tough enough. I'll kill him after the third day, so help me!"

And after they tapped you for your first Haul, this was the only thing you were scared about—who'd be your shipmate. Everything else, you thought you could handle. You knew your job inside out and backward and it wouldn't whip you. You were sharp-tuned, fine-honed, ready for anything that was under your own control. You were even confident about being alone; it wouldn't get you. Not a chance.

Away down deep, no man believes he can be driven out of his mind, just as he cannot believe—really believe—that he will be dead. That's the kind of thing that happens to someone else.

But this business of a shipmate—this wasn't under your control. You didn't control who it would be and you wouldn't control the guy after blastoff. It was the only unknown and therefore the only thing that scared you.

Amendment: there was a certain amount of control. The intercom button was on your side of the bulkhead. Leave it alone and you didn't have to so much as know

you had a shipmate until you were good and ready.

Being able to shut off a voice isn't control, though. You don't know what your shipmate will do. Or *be.*

In those last tight days before blastoff, there was one thing you became overwhelmingly aware of. *Esprit de corps,* they call it. You and the other graduates were hammered into a mold—and hammered some more until the resiliency was gone out of you. You were alike and you did things alike because you had grown to want to. You knew for certain that one of this tight, trustworthy little group would be picked for you; their training and yours, their whole lives and yours, pointed toward this ship, this Haul.

Your presence on this ship summed up your training; your training culminated in your presence on the ship. Only a graduate cadet was fit to man the ship; the ship existed solely for the graduate cadet. This was something so self-evident that you never thought about it.

Not until now.

Because now, a few minutes ago, you were ready to push that button. You couldn't know if you'd broken all records for loneliness, for duration of solitary confinement, but you'd tried. You'd looked through the viewport until it ceased to mean anything. You'd read until you didn't care any more. You'd lived the almost-life of the stereos until you couldn't make believe you believed them. You'd listened to music until it didn't matter. And you'd gone over and over your life from its very beginnings until you'd completely lost perspective on it or anything and anyone in it.

You'd found that you could go back to the viewport and cycle through the whole thing again, but you'd done that, too, so often that the whole matrix of personal involvement was emptied out. Then the flatness of the bulkhead made itself felt. In a way, it seemed to bulge toward you, crowd you against the ship's side, and you knew it was getting to be time you pushed that button and found out for sure.

Who?

Pete or Krakow or that crazy redhead Walkinok? Or Wendover (you all called him Bendover) with all those in-

comprehensible shaggy-dog stories? Harris? Beerbelly Flacker or Cohen the Wire-haired Terror? Or Shank (what you all called him was a shame)? Or Gindes, whose inexplicable nickname was Mickey Mouse? You'd sort of hoped it would be Gindes, not because you liked him, but more because he was the one classmate you'd never known very well. He always used to look on and keep his mouth shut. He'd be much more fun to explore than, say, old Shank, who was so predictable that you could practically talk in chorus with him.

So you've tortured yourself, just for the sake of torture, with your thumb over the intercom button, until even the torture dried out and blew away.

You pushed.

You found out, first of all, that the intercom apparently had its own amplifier, energized when you held the button down, and that it took forever—well, three or four seconds, anyway—to warm up. First nothing, then a carrier, then the beginning of a signal; then, at last, the voice of your shipmate, rushing up to full volume, as loud and as clear as if the bulkhead did not exist. And you get off that button as if it had turned into a needle; and you're backed against the outboard bulkhead, deep in shock, physically in silence, but with that voice going on and on and on unbelievably in your unbelieving brain.

It was crying.

It wept wearily, as though you had tuned in toward the end of a long session of wild and lonesome grief. It cried quietly, exhaustedly, without hope. And it cried in a voice that was joltingly wrong for this place—a light, high voice, nearly a contralto. It was wrong, altogether wrong.

The wild ideas come first: *Stowaway?*

You almost laugh. For days before blastoff, you were drugged and immersed in high-frequency fields; hypnotized, worked and reworked mentally and physically. You were passively fed and passively instructed.

You don't know now and you may never know all they did to you. But you can be sure it was done inside six concentric rings of "security" of one kind and another, and you can be sure that your shipmate got the same. What it amounted to was concentrated *attention* from a mob of specialists, every sleeping and waking second from the

time you beered it up at the class farewell dinner to the time the accelerator tug lifted your ship and carried it screaming up and outward. Nobody was in this ship but those who belonged in it; that you can absolutely bank on.

Mad idea, the second. For a while, you don't even dare think it, but with that kind of voice, that crying, you have to think of something. So you do and you're scared, scared in a way you've never imagined before, and to a degree you didn't think was possible. *There's a girl in there!*

You run those wordless syllables, those tired sobs, through your mind again, seeking for vocalizations as separated from the breathy, painful gasping that accompanied them. And you don't know. You just can't be certain.

So punch the button again. Listen some more.

Or *ask*.

But you can't. The crazy idea might be true and you couldn't stand that. They couldn't—they just couldn't—put a girl on these ships with you and then stow her behind the bulkhead.

Then you have an instant fantasy about that. You kneel (bumping your skull on the cover) and feel frantically around the bulkhead, where it meets deck-plates, nose compartment, overhead, after-bulkhead; and all around your fingers ride the bead of a weld. You sit back, sweating a little and half-laughing at yourself. Scratch off one fantasy; there'll be no sliding partitions into any harems this trip.

You stop laughing and think. "They couldn't be that *cruel!*" You're on a test run, sure, and it isn't the ship that's being tested. You know that and you accept it. But tests, tests . . . must you throw a glass vase on a brick sidewalk to find out if it's brittle? You see one of your own hands going up and out to check for a panel, a joint again. You sneer at it, at your own hand, and watch it stop in embarrassment.

Well, say they weren't that cruel. Whom did they put in there?

Not Walkinok. Not Shank. Not Harris or Cohen or any cadet. A cadet wouldn't lie there and cry like that, like a

child, a schoolgirl—a baby.

Some stranger, then.

Now the anger comes, shouldering out all the fear. They wouldn't! This ship is everything a cadet was born for—no, made for. That tight leash that bound you with the others, all your thinking, an easy thing you all shared and never had to think about—that was a thing that didn't admit strangers.

Aside from that—beyond that—this wasn't a matter of desecrated *esprit;* it was a matter of moral justice. Nobody but a cadet *deserves* a ship! What did you give your life to and what for? Why did you give up marriage, and freedom, and all the wonderful trivialities called "fun" that made most human lives worth living? Why did you hold still for Base routines and the hazing you got from the upper classmen?

Just to have some stranger, someone who wasn't even a cadet, wander in without training, shaping, conditioning, experience . . . and get on your ship?

No, it has to be a cadet. It couldn't be anything else. Even a cadet who could break down and cry—that's a more acceptable idea than its being a woman or a stranger.

You're still angry, but now it's the kind of anger that goads you, not the kind that stops you. You push the button. You hear the carrier, then the beginnings of something else . . . Breathing. Difficult, broken breathing, the sound of someone too tired to cry any more, even when crying has changed nothing and there are still more tears to come.

"What the hell are you bawling about?" you yell.

The breathing goes on and on. Finally it stops for a moment and then a long, whispery, shuddery sigh.

"Hey!" you shout. "Hey—you in there!"

But there is no answer. The breathing is fainter, more regular. Whoever it is is going to sleep.

You press even harder on the button, as if that would do any good, and you yell again, this time not even "Hey!" but a blunter, angrier syllable. You can think only that your shipmate chooses—*chooses,* by God!—not to answer you.

You're breathing hard now, but your shipmate isn't.

You hold your breath and listen. You hear the deep, quiet inhalations, and then a small catch, and a little sigh, the ghost of half a sob.

"Hey!"

Nothing.

You let the button go and in the sharp silence that replaces the carrier's faint hum, the same wordless syllable builds and builds inside you until it bursts free again. You can tell from the feel of your throat and the ringing in your ears that it's been a long, long time since you used your voice.

You're angry and you're hurt from these insults to yourself and to your Service. And you know what? You feel good. Some of the stereos you have are pretty nice; they take you right into battle, into the arms of beautiful women, into danger, and from time to time you could get angry at someone in them. You could—but you haven't for a long time now. You haven't laughed or been angry ever since . . . since . . . well, you can't even remember when. You'd forgotten how and you'd forgotten just when it was you forgot. And now look. The heart's going, the sweat . . .

This is fine.

Push the button again, take another little sip of anger. It's been aging; it's vintage stuff. Go ahead.

You do, and up comes the carrier.

"Please," begs the voice. "Please, please . . . say something else."

Your tongue is paralyzed and you choke, suddenly, when you swallow wrong. You cough violently, let go the button and pound yourself on the chest. For a moment, you're in bad shape. Coughing makes your thinking go in spurts, and your thinking is bouncing up and down on the idea that, until now, you didn't really believe there was anyone in there at all. You get your wind and push the button again.

The voice asks, "Are you all right? Can I do anything?"

You become certain of something else: that isn't a voice you recognize. If you ever heard it before, you certainly don't remember it. Then the content of it hits you. *Can I*

do anything? You get mad again.

"Yeah," you growl. "Hand me a glass of water." You don't have your thumb on the button, so you just say what pops into your mind. You shake yourself like a wet bird dog, take a deep breath, and lean on the control again.

Before you can open your mouth, you're in a hailstorm of hysterical laughter. "Glass of water . . . uh-uh-uh . . . that's good . . . you don't know what this means," says the voice, suddenly sober and plaintive. "I've waited so long. I've listened to your music and the sound from your stereos. You never talk, you never say anything at all. I never even heard you cough before."

Part of your mind reacts to that: *That's unnatural, not even to cough, or laugh aloud, or hum. Must be a conditioning.* But most of it explodes at this stranger, this—intruder, talking away like that without a word of explanation, of apology . . . talking as if that voice of all voices had a right to be there.

"I was beginning to think you were deaf and dumb. Or maybe even that you weren't there at all. That was the thing that scared me the most."

"Shut up," you hiss, with all the fury, all the deadly warning you can command.

"I knew they wouldn't," the voice continues happily. "They'd never put anyone out here by himself. That would be too—" It stops abruptly as you release the button.

"My God!" you think. "The dam has boist! That character'll chunter along like that for the duration!"

You press the button quickly, hear "—all alone out here, you get scared to look out the viewp—" and you cut off again.

That stuff like an invisible mist you see melting away is all the conjecture, those great half-formed plans of shipping out with Walkinok or the Wirehaired Terror.

You were going to review your courses, remember? Slow and easy—take a week on spatial ballistics or spectroscopy. Think it all through for a day between sentences. Or laugh over the time you and the Shank got tanked up at the canteen and pretended you were going to tie up the C.O. and jet him off with Colonel Provost, the head PD man, for a shipmate. The General would get all the psychodynamics he needed. The General was always talking psychody-

namics, Provost was always doing psychodynamics.

Well, it seemed funny at the time, anyway. It wasn't so much the beer. It was knowing the General and knowing Colonel Provost that made it funny. How funny would it be with a stranger?

They give you someone to talk to. They give you someone you haven't anything to talk to *about!* That idea of putting a girl behind the bulkhead, now, that was a horrible idea. It was torture. Well, so's this. Maybe worse.

A thought keeps knocking and you finally back off and let it in. Something to do with the button. You push it and you can hear your shipmate. You release it and . . . shut off the intercom?

No, by the Lord, you don't! When you were coughing, you were off that button. *Can I do anything?*

Now what the hell kind of business is this? (And that detached part of your mind reaches hungrily for the pulses of fury: ah, it feels good!) Do you mean to sit there and tell me (you rage silently at the PD men who designed this ship) that even if I don't push that button, my shipmate can hear everything that goes on with me? The intercom's open on the other side all the time, open on this side only when I push the button—is that it?

You turn and glare out the viewport, staring down the cold, distant eye of infinity, and *Where the hell,* you storm silently, *is my privacy?*

This won't do. It won't do at all. You figured right from the start that you and your shipmate would be pretty equal, but on a ship, even a little two-passenger can like this, someone's got to be in command. Given that the other compartment has the same stereos, the same dispensers, the same food and water and everything else, and the only difference between these living quarters is that button—who's privileged? Me, because I get to push the button? Or my shipmate, who gets to listen in on me when I so much as cough?

"I know!" you think suddenly. "That's a PD operative in there! A psychodynamics specialist assigned to observe me!"

You almost laugh out loud; relief washes over you. PD work is naturally hush-hush. You'll never know how many

hours during your course you were under hypnosis. It was even rumored around that some guys had cerebral surgery done by the PD boys and never knew it. The boys had to work in secret for the same reason you don't stir your coffee with an ink-stick—PD is one field where the tools must leave no mark.

Well, fine, fine. At last this shipmate makes some sense: at last you've got an answer you can accept. This ship, this trip, is of and for a cadet—but it's PD business. The only non-cadet who'd conceivably be aboard would have to be a PD tech.

So you grin and reach for the button. Then, remembering the way it works, that the intercom's open from your side when you're off the button, you draw your hand back, face the bulkhead, and say easily, "Okay, PD, I'm on to you. How'm I doing?" You wonder how many cadets tumble to the trick this soon. You push the button and wait for the answer.

The answer is "Huh?" in a mixture of shyness and mystification.

You let go the button and laugh. "No sense stringing it out, Lieutenant." (This is clever. Most PD techs are looeys; one or two are master sergeants. Right or not, you haven't hurt his feelings.) "I know you're a PD man."

There's a silence from the other side. Then: "What's a PD man?"

You get a little sore. "Now see here, Lieutenant, you don't have to play any more of these psych games."

"Gosh, I'm no lieutenant. I—"

You cut him off quickly. "Sergeant, then."

"You got me all wrong," says that damnable high voice.

"Well, you're PD, anyway."

"I'm afraid I'm not."

You can't take much more of this. "Then what the hell are you?"

A silence. And as it beats by, that anger and that fear of torture begin to mount, hand in hand.

"Well?" you roar.

"Well," says the voice, and you can practically see it shuffle its feet. "I'm not anything. I'm fifteen years old . . ."

You drag out your senior-class snap; there's a way of talking to fourth and third classmen that makes 'em jump.

"Mister, you give an account of yourself, but now. What's your name?"

"Skampi."

"Skampi? What the hell kind of a name is that?"

"It's what they call me."

Did you detect a whisper of defiance there? *"Sir!"*

The defiance disappears instantly. "It's what they call me . . . sir."

"And what are you doing on my ship, mister?"

A frightened gulp. "I—I'm sorry—uh—sir. They put me on."

"They?"

"At the Base . . . sir," he amended quickly.

"You were on the Base just how long, mister?" That "mister" can be a lead-shot whiplash if you do it right. It was sure being done right.

"I don't know, sir." You have the feeling the punk's going to burst into tears again. "They took me to a big laboratory and there were a lot of sort of booths with machines in them. They asked me all kinds of questions about did I want to be a spaceman. Well, I did. I always did, ever since I was a kid. So, after a while, they put me on a table and gave me a shot and when I woke up, I was here."

"Who gave you a shot? What was his name?"

"I never . . . I didn't find out, sir." A pause. "A big man. Old. He had gray hair, very short, and green eyes."

Provost, by God. This is PD business, all right, but from where you sit, it's monkey business.

"You know any spatial ballistics?"

"No, sir. Some day, I—"

"Astrogation?"

"Only what I picked up myself. But I'll—"

"Gravity mechanics? Differentials? Strength of materials? Light-metal fission? Relativity?"

"I—"

"Well? *Well?* Speak up, mister!"

"I heard of them, sir."

" 'I heard of them, sir!' " you mimic savagely. "Do you know what this ship is for?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Everybody knows that. This is the Long Haul. When you come back from this, you get your com-

mission and they give you a starship!" And if the voice had shuffled its feet once, now its eyes shone.

"You figure to get a starship, mister?"

"Well, I—I—"

"You think they give commands to Boy Scouts just because the Boy Scout wants to go to space *awful* bad?"

No answer.

You jeer, "Have you got the slightest idea how much training a cadet has to go through, how much he has to learn?"

"Well, no, but I guess I will."

"Sir!"

"Sir. They put me aboard, all those officers who asked me the questions and everything. It must be all right. *Hey!*" he says excitedly, all the crushed timidity disappearing, to be replaced by a bubbling enthusiasm. "*I* know! We have all this time . . . maybe you're supposed to teach me astrogation and relativity and all that."

Your jaw drops at the sheer childishness of it. And then something really ugly drifts up and smothers everything else.

For some reason, your mind flashes back to the bus, the day you got to Base. You can remember back easily to all the faces you worked with, those who made it and those who didn't. But your class had thirty-eight cadets in it and that bus must have held fifty. What happened to the rest? You'd always assumed they went into other sections—ground crew, computer men, maintenance. Suppose they'd been sorted out, examined for some special trait or talent that only the PD men knew about? Suppose they were loaded right aboard ships, each with a graduate cadet?

And why?

Suppose these punks, greenhorns, Boy Scouts, *children*—suppose they were the ones slated for a commission? Suppose guys like you, thinking all this while you were the cream of the crop, and the top cream off that—suppose all along you'd tested out as second-grade material. Suppose you were the one who did the sweating and cramming and took the hazing and the demerits and the lousy messhall food, not to command a starship, not to get a commis-

sion, but just to be a private tutor to a boy genius who wanted to go to space *awful* bad?

This wouldn't make sense anywhere else but in the starship service. It barely made sense there, but look:

A starship commander might make two trips in his whole career, that's all. Eighteen years each round trip, with his passengers in coldpacks and a cargo of serums, refractories, machine tools and food concentrate for the xenologists and mineralogists who were crazy enough to work out there.

Training the commander for such a ship was easy, as far as operating knowledge was concerned, though there was a powerful lot of it. But training him to stay conscious, awake and aware—and alone—for all those years was something else again. Few men like that were born; they had to be made.

Most of your recluses, your hermits, all through history, have been guys who had things drastically wrong with them. There couldn't be anything wrong with a starship commander. He had to be captain and deck crew, and know his black-hole as well (though most of the drive machinery down there was automatic) and stay alert—stay *sane*—in a black, mad, weightless emptiness God never made him for.

Give him more books and pictures, games and music than even he would have time for and you'd still not be sure he'd stay sane unless he had some very special inner resources.

These (and one other thing) were what a cadet was screened for and what he was trained in. PD packed him full of technical knowledge, psyched him to a fare-thee-well, and when they figured he was machine-finished and carrying a high gloss, they sealed him in a space can and threw it out for the Long Haul.

The course was pre-set, and it might last 14 months, and it might last three years, and after a guy got back (if he got back), he would be fit to take out a starship or he would not. As for the shipmate—well, you'd always assumed that PD was looking for a way to shake down two guys at once so they could be together on a starship.

Maybe, some day, the ships would carry eight, ten at

once, and at last natural human gregariousness would have a chance to compete with the pall of black distances. So far, though, psychic disorientation had made everything that was latently mean and murderous in a man explode into action. Putting more than a single human being on those boats to nurse them through was just asking for slaughter. And shipwreck.

The other thing required of you besides technical ability and these inner resources is—youth. You're only twenty-two, so full of high-intensity training that, as Walkinok once said, you feel your brain convolutions are blown out smooth like a full bladder. And you've compacted this knowledge, coded it, used it. You're so full of it that it's bound to ooze out onto anyone around you.

You're twenty-two and you're sealed up in a can with a thirsty-headed fifteen-year-old who knows nothing, but wants to go to the stars *awful* bad. And you can forget how stupid he seems to be, too, because you can bet your bulging cortex that the kid has such an enormous I.Q. that he can afford to act stupid and cry.

What a dirty, rotten, lousy deal to put you through all this just to shave seven years off the age of a starship commander! Next thing you know, they'd put a diapered baby in with a work-weary sucker of a fine-honed cadet and get three star trips out of him instead of two!

And what's to become of *you?* After you've done your generous stint of tutoring, they pin a discharge emblem on your tunic and say, "Well done, Cadet. Now go raise Brussels sprouts." And you stand at attention and salute the downy-cheeked squirt in all the gold braid and watch him ride the gantry crane to the control cabin you've aimed at and sweated for ever since you were weaned!

You sprawl there in that living space, so small that you can't stand up in it, and you look at that bland belly of a bulkhead with its smooth, round navel of a button, and you think, "Well, there's a lot of guts back of that." You heave a deep breath, while still the detached part of your mind looks on. Now it's saying wonderingly, "Aren't you the guy who was scared because nothing could get him excited any more?" And you speak and your voice comes out sounding quite different from anything you've ever heard

from anyone before. Maybe you've never been this mad before.

"Who told you to say that?"

You push the button and listen.

"Say what—uh—sir?"

"About me teaching you. Anybody at Base?"

He seems to be thinking. "Why, no, sir. I just thought it would be a good idea."

You don't say anything. You just hold the button down.

He says diffidently, "Sort of pass the time?" When you still don't say anything, he adds wistfully, "I'd try. I'd try awful hard."

You let go the button and growl, "I just bet you would. You just thought it up all your own little self, huh?"

"Well, yes."

"You're a bright boy. You're a real, smart, ambitious little *louse!"*

You push the button real quick, but all you get is an astonished silence.

You say, real composed, almost gentle, "That 'louse,' now, that's not just a figure of speech, little boy. I mean that. I mean you're a crummy little crawler looking to suck blood after somebody else has done all the work. You know what you do? You just make like you're all alone in this can. You don't talk to me and you don't listen to me and I'll do you a favor—I'll forget all about you, too. I'm not going to bat your eyeballs together just yet, but don't call me generous, little boy—never that. It's just that I can't reach in there just now."

"No!" That boy can make a real piteous noise when he wants to. "No, no! Wait—please!"

"Well?"

"I don't under—I mean I'm sorry, Cadet. I'm honest-to-Pete sorry. I never meant—"

But you cut him off. You lie back and close your eyes. You're thrumming with fury right down to your toenails.

This, says your internal observer, is all right. This is living.

So the weeks pass, and so do more weeks. You shoot a

star and make some notes, and wait a while and shoot it again, and pretty soon you have enough data to fool around with. You get your stylus and block, and the point darts around the way you want it to, and those old figures sit up and lie down and rush around just the way you want them to. You laugh when you do it; wouldn't Junior just love to learn some of these tricks?

Anyway, you figure you're just past the cusp perihelion of your parabola and you're starting back. You know how far you've come and when you'll get back. You laugh again. The sound of your voice reminds you he can hear you, so you crawl over to the bulkhead and push the button.

"Cadet," he says. "Please, Cadet. Please." His voice is hoarse and weak; the syllables come out as if they're meaningless from repetition. He's probably been lying in there for weeks bleating "Cadet—please—Cadet—please" every time you clicked the stylus against your teeth or set the quadrant on your Sun gun.

You spend a lot of time looking out the viewport, but you get sick of that and turn to the euphorics. You see a lot of stereo shows. You are always aware of the button in the bulkhead, but you ignore it. You read. You get a lot of use out of the octant; it seems you take a lot more bearings than you have to. And when at last the button starts to be intrusive, you make a real effort and leave it alone; you figure out something else to do instead.

You take a careful survey of your instruments to figure which one you need least, and finally decide on the airspeed indicator. You've spent plenty of time in a mockup and you know you can compute your airspeed when you return to Earth by the hull-temperature plus your ground-rise radar.

You dismount the instrument and take it apart and get the diamond bearing. You go through the games locker and the equipment chest until you put together a nickel rod and a coil, and you hook on to your short-range radio where the oscillations suit you. You cement the diamond to the tip of the rod, shove the rod through the long axis of the coil. You turn on the juice and feel (rather than hear) the rod humming softly.

"The phenomenon, dear pupil," you say, but silently, "is magneto-striction, whereby the nickel rod contracts

slightly in the magnetic field. And since the field is in oscillation, that diamond on the tip is vibrating like crazy."

You get your stylus and, after careful consideration, decide on a triangle with round corners, just big enough to shove an arm through comfortably; the three corners would make peepholes.

All the while, you have quick fantasies about it. You'll knock the triangular piece out of the bulkhead and stick your face in the hole and say *"Surprise!"* and he'll be cowering there, wondering what goes on. And you'll say "Shake and let bygones be." And he'll jump over, all eager, and you'll take his hand and drag it through the hole and put your back against the bulkhead and pull till his shoulder dislocates.

He's gasping, "Cadet, please," until you get tired of amusing yourself and haul the wrist around and sink your teeth in it. Then he starts to bleed, and you just hold him there while "Cadet-please" gets fainter and fainter, and you explain to him all about differential equations and mass-ratios.

And as you're thinking about this, you're going round and round the blunted triangle with your vibrating diamond. The bulkhead is thick as hell and tough—it's hullmetal; imagine that, for an inboard bulkhead!—but that's all right. You've got plenty of time. And bit by bit, your scored line goes deeper.

Every once in a while, you take a breather. It occurs to you to wonder what you'll say when you're grappled in and the Colonel sees that hole in the bulkhead. You try not to wonder about this, but you do all the same, a whole lot. You run it over in your mind and sometimes the Colonel says, "Good, Cadet. That's real resourcefulness, the kind I like to see." But other times it doesn't quite come out that way, especially with the kid dead on one side of the bulkhead and his blood all over the place on the other side.

So maybe you won't kill him. You'll just scare him. Have fun with him.

Maybe he'll talk, too. Maybe this entire Long Haul was set up by PD just to find out if you'd cooperate with your shipmate, try to teach him what you know, at any cost. And you know, if you thought more of the Service than you do about your own dirty career in it, that's just what

you'd do. Maybe if you did that, they'd give you a starship, you and the kid both.

So, anyway, this cutting job is long and slow and suits you fine; no matter what you think, you go on with it, just because you started. When it's finished you'll know what to do.

Funny that the result of this trip was going to be the same as some of those you'd heard whispered about, where a ship came in with one guy dead and the other . . .

But that was the difference. To do a thing like that, those guys must have been space-happy. You're doing it, sure, but for different reasons. You're no raving looney. You're slow-and-steady, doing a job, knowing exactly why.

Or you will, when the time comes.

You're real happy this whole time.

Then all that changes.

Just why, you can't know. You turned in and you slept, and all of a sudden you're wide awake. You're thinking about some lab work you did. It was a demonstration of eddy-current effects.

There was a copper disk as thick as your arm and a meter in diameter, swinging from a rope in the center of the gymnasium. You hauled it up to the high ceiling at the far end and turned it loose. There was a big electromagnet set up in the middle of the place, and as the disk reached the bottom of its long swing, it passed between the poles of the magnet, going like hell. You threw the switch and the disk stopped dead right where it was and rang like a big gong, though nothing had touched it.

Then you remember the sixty zillion measurements you'd taken off a synchro-cosmotron so huge that it took you four minutes at a fast walk to get from one end to the other.

You remember the mockups, the hours and hours of hi-G, no-G; one instrument out, another, all of 'em, some of 'em; simulated meteorites on collision orbit; manual landing techniques—until your brains were in your hands and the seat of your pants, and you did the right things with them without thinking. Exhausted, you still did it right. Even doped up.

You remember the trips into town with Harris and Flacker and the others. Something happened to you every time you so much as walked down a street with those guys. It was a thing you'd never told anyone. Part of it was something that happened between the townspeople and your group. Part of it was between your group and yourself. It all added up to being a little different and a little better . . . but not in a cocky way. In a way that made you grateful to the long, heavy bulk of a starship and what such ships are for.

You sit up in your bunk, with that mixed-up, wide-awake feeling, reaching for something you can't quite understand, some one simple thing that would sum up the huge equipment, the thousands of measurements, the hours of cramming and the suspense of examinations; the seat-of-the-pants skills and the pride in town . . .

And now you see what it is.

That kid in there, he could have an I.Q. of nine goddam hundred and never learn how to put down a ship with all his instruments out and the gyros on manual. Not by somebody telling him over an intercom when he's never even sat in a G-seat. He might memorize twelve thousand slightly varying measurements off a linear accelerator, but he wouldn't gain that certain important thing you get when you make those measurements yourself. You could describe the way the copper disk rang when the eddy current stopped it, but he would have to see it happen before it did to him all the things it did to you.

You still don't know who that kid is or why he's here, but you can bet on one thing—he isn't here to pick your brains and take your job. You don't have to like him and you can be mad he's aboard instead of Harris or Walky; but get that junk out of your head right now about him being a menace to you. Goddlemighty Godfrey, where did that poisonous little crumb in your brain come from? Since when are you subject to fear and jealousy and insecurity? Since when do you have to guard yourself against your own imagination?

Come the hell off it, Cadet. You're not that good a teacher; he's not that much of a monster.

Monster! Did you hear him cry that time?

You feel twenty pounds lighter (which is odd, seeing that you're still in free-fall) and as if you'd just washed your face. "Hey, Krampi!"

You go push the button and wait. Then you hear a sharp inhalation through nostrils. A sniff . . . no, you won't call it that.

"Skampi, sir," he corrects you timidly.

"Okay, whatever you say. And knock off that 'sir.' "

"Yes, sir. I mean yes."

"What were you crying about?"

"When, s—?"

"Okay," you break in gently. "You don't have to talk about it."

"No. I wasn't trying to deny it. I . . . cried twice. I'm sorry you heard me. You must think . . ."

"I don't think," you say sincerely. "Not enough."

He thinks that over and apparently drops it. "I cried right after blastoff."

"Scared?"

"No . . . yes, I was, but that wasn't why. I just . . ."

"Take your time telling me. Time is what we got nothing else but of."

"It was just that I—I'd always wanted to be in space. I thought about it in the daytime and dreamed about it at night. And all of a sudden, there it was, happening to me for real. I . . . thought I ought to say something and I opened my mouth to do it and all of a sudden I was crying. I couldn't help it. I guess I— Crazy, I guess."

"I wouldn't say so. You can hear and talk and see pictures and get yourself all ready, but there's nothing like doing it. *I* know."

"You, you're used to it."

He seems to want to say something else; you hold the button down. Finally, with difficulty, he asks, "You're big, aren't you? I mean you're . . . you know. Big."

"Well, yes."

"I wish I was. I wish I was good for . . . well, something."

"Everybody push you around?"

"Mm."

"Listen," you say. "You take a human being and put him down next to a starship. They're not the same size

and they're not the same shape, and one of 'em's pretty insignificant. But you can say that *this* built *this,* not the other way around."

"Y-e-eah." It is a whisper.

"Well, you're that human being, that self-same one. Ever think of that?"

"No."

"Neither did I, till now," you admit rapidly. "It's the truth, though."

He says, "I wish I was a cadet."

"Where do you come from, kid?"

"Masolo. It's no place. Jerk town. I like big places with big things going on. Like the Base."

"Awful lot of people charging around."

"Yeah," he says. "I don't like crowds much, but the Base —it's worth it."

You sit and look at the bulkhead. It's companionable, suddenly, and sort of changed, as if it had just grown warm, or quilted. You get a splinter of light off the bright metal where you've scored it. You think it's down pretty deep. A man could stand up to it and knock that piece out with a maul, if a man could stand up, if he had a maul.

You say, very fast, as if you're afraid something's going to stop you, "Ever do anything you were really ashamed of? I did when I talked to you the way I did. I shouldn't've done it like that . . . I don't know what got into me. Yes, I do and I'll tell you. I was afraid you were a boy genius planted on me to strip my brains and take my command. I got scared."

It all comes out like that. You feel much better and at the same time you're glad Walkinok or Shank aren't around to hear you spout like that.

The kid's very quiet for a while. Then he says, "One time my mother sent me to the market and something was a special, I forget what. But anyway I had forty cents change and I forgot about it. I found it in my pants in school next day and bought a starship magazine with it and never told her. I used to get every issue that way after that. She never missed the money. Or maybe she did and didn't say anything. We were pretty hard up."

You understand that the kid is trying to give you something, because you apologized to him. You don't say any-

thing more about that. Right here, a wonder starts to grow. You don't know what it is, but you know that stand-off-and-watch part of your mind is working on it.

You say, "Where is this Masolo?"

"Upstate. Not far from Base. Ever since I was a baby, the axi-tugs were shaking the house when they took off. There's a big tree outside the house and all the leaves shiver—with the tugs, you know. I used to climb out a limb and get on the roof and lie down on my back. Sometimes you could see the starships orbiting. Just after the Sun goes down, sometimes you can . . ." He swallows; you can hear it plainly. "I used to put out my hand. It was like a firefly up there."

"Some firefly," you say.

"Yeah. Some firefly, all right."

Inside you, the wonder is turning to a large and luminous astonishment. It's still inexpressible, so you leave it alone.

The kid is saying, "I was with two other fellows out by the high school one time. I was just a kid—eleven, I think. Well, some gorillas from the high school chased us. We ran and they caught up with us. The other kids started to fight them. I got over to one side and, when I had a chance, I ran. I ran all the way home. I wish I'd stayed there with those other two kids.

"They got the tar kicked out of them and I guess it hurt, but I guess it stopped hurting after some teacher came along and broke up the fight. But I hurt every time I think about running away like that. Boy, did those two give me a razzing when they saw me next day! *Boy!* So what I wanted to ask you, you don't think a kid who would run away like that could be a cadet."

He ends it like that, flat. No question.

You think about it. You've been in some fine brawls as a cadet. You're in a bar and someone cracks wise, and your blood bubbles up, and you wade in, feeling giant-size. But maybe that's just because of the business of belonging.

You say carefully, "I think if I was in a fight, I'd rather have a guy on my side who knew what being scared felt like. Then it would be like having two guys on my side, instead of one. One of the guys wouldn't care if he got hurt

and the other guy would never want to be hurt that way again. I think a fellow like that would be a pretty good cadet."

"Well, yeah," says the kid, in that funny whisper.

Now the inner astonishment bursts into sight and you recognize what it is about this kid.

At first, you were scared of him, but even when that went away, you didn't like him. There was no question of liking him or not liking him; he was a different species that you couldn't have anything to do with.

And the more you talked with him, the more you began to feel that you didn't have to set yourself apart from him, that he had a whole lot you didn't have—and that you could use it. The way he talked, honest and unabashed; you don't know how to do that. You nearly choked to death apologizing to him.

It suddenly is very important to get along with this kid. It isn't because the kid is important. It's because if you can get along with somebody so weak, so wet behind the ears, and yet in his peculiar way so rich, why you can get along with anybody, even your own lousy self.

And you realize that this thing of getting along with him has extension after extension. Somehow, if you can find more ways to get along with this kid, if you can see more things the way he sees them with no intolerance and no altitude, you'll tap something in yourself that's been dried up a long time now.

You find all this pretty amazing, and you settle down and talk to the kid. You don't eke it out. You know he'll last all the way back to Base and have plenty left over. You know, too, that by the time you get there, this kid will know a cadet can also be a louse. You can give him that much.

The way you treated him, he was hurt. But you know? He wasn't mad. He doesn't think he's good enough to get mad at a cadet. He thinks a cadet rates what he does just by being a cadet.

Well, you are going to fix that.

The time goes by and the time comes; the acceleration tug reaches out and grabs you high above Earth, so, after

all that manual-control drill, you don't have a thing to do but sit there and ride it down.

The tug hovers over the compound right near the administration building, which disappears in a cloud of yellow dust. You sink down and down in the dust cloud until you think they must be lowering you into a hole in the ground. Then, at last, there's a slight thump and an inhuman amount of racket as the tug blasts away free.

After that, there's only the faint whisper of the air circulator, the settling dust, and a profoundly unpleasant feeling in calves and chest as the blood gets used to circulating in a 1-G environment.

"Now don't you forget, Skampi," you say. You find it difficult to talk; you've got a wide grin plastered across your face and you can't cast it adrift. "Just as soon as they're through with you, you come looking for me, hear? I'll buy you a soda."

You lean back in your G-chair and hold the bulkhead button.

"I can drink beer," he says manfully.

"We'll compromise. We'll make your soda with beer. Listen, kid, I can't promise, but I know they're fooling with the idea of a two-man crew for starships. How'd you like to go with me—one trip, anyhow? Of course, you'll have to be conditioned six ways from the middle, double-time, and it'll be real rough. But—what do you say?"

And you know? He doesn't say anything!

He laughs, though.

Now here comes Colonel Provost, the *big* big brass of Psychodynamics, and a young M.P. That's all the welcoming committee you'll get. The compound's walled and locked, and no windows look out on it. They must have unloaded some pretty sorry objects from these space cans from time to time.

They open the hatch from the outside and you immediately start coughing like hell. Your eyes say the dust has settled, but your lungs say no. By the time you have your eyes wiped, the M.P. is inside and squatting on the deck, cross-legged.

He says cheerfully, "Hi, kay-dee. This here's a stun gun

and if you so much as squint at me or the Colonel, you get flaked out like a heaving-line."

"Don't worry about me," you say from behind that silly grin. "I got no quarrel with anybody and I like it here. Good morning, Colonel."

"Look out for this one," said the M.P. "Likes it here. He's sick."

"Shut up, wheelhead," says the Colonel cheerfully. He has his gray crewcut and barrel torso shoved into the hatch and it's real crowded in that little cabin. "Well, Cadet, how are we?"

"We're fine," you say. The M.P. cocks his head a little to one side and gets bright-eyed. He thinks you're sassing the C.O., but you're not. When you say "we," you mean you and your shipmate.

"Anything special happen?"

The answer to that is a big fat yes, but it would take forever to tell. It's all recorded, anyway; PD doesn't miss a trick. But that's from then till now, and done with. You're concerned from now on. "Colonel, I want to talk to you right now. It's about my shipmate."

The Colonel leans a little further in and slaps the M.P.'s gun hand. He's in front of the guy, so you can't see his face. "Beat it, wheelhead."

The M.P. clears out. You stagger up out of the G-seat and climb through the hatch. The Colonel catches your arms as you stagger. After a long time in free-fall, your knees won't lock as you walk; you have to stiffen each one as your weight comes on it, and you have to concentrate. So you concentrate, but that doesn't stop you from talking. You skim over the whole business, from your long solo to being reduced to meeting your shipmate, and the hassel you had with yourself over that, and then this thing that happened with the kid—weeks and weeks of it, and you've only just begun.

"You can pick 'em, sir," you pant as you lurch along. "Do you always use a little know-nothing kid? Where do you find 'em? Does it always work out this well?"

"We get a commander out of every Long Haul," he says.

"Say, that's great, sir!"

"We don't have very many ships," he says, just as cheerfully.

"Oh," you say.

Suddenly you stop. "Wait, sir! What about Skampi? He's still locked in on his side of the bulkhead."

"You first," says the Colonel. You go on into the PD lab. "Up you go."

You look at the big chair with its straps and electrodes and big metal hood.

"You know, they used chairs like these in the French Revolution," you say, showing off. You're just busting with friendliness today. You *never* felt like this. You sit in the big chair. "Look, sir, I want to get started on a project right away. This kid, now—I tell you, he's got a lot on the ball. He's spaceman right to the marrow bones. He comes from right around here, that little place up the pike, Masolo. He got shook out of his bassinet by the axi-tugs. He spent his childhood lying on his back on the roof looking for the starships in orbit. He's—"

"You talk all the time," the Colonel breaks in mildly. "Sum up, will you? You made out with your shipmate. You think you could do it again in a starship. That it?"

"Think we can try it? Hey, really? Look, can I be the one to tell him, Colonel?"

"Close your mouth and sit still."

Those are orders. You sit still. The Colonel gets you strapped in and connected up. He puts his hand on the switch.

"Where did you say you came from?"

You didn't say, and you don't, because the hood swings down and you're surrounded by a sudden dissonant chord of audio at tremendous amplitude. If you had been allowed to say, though, you wouldn't have known.

The Colonel doesn't even give you time to be surprised at this. You sink into blackness.

It gets light again. You have no idea how much time has passed, but it must be plenty, because the sunlight from outside is a different color and slants in a different way through the venetian blinds. On a bench nearby is a stack of minicans with your case number painted on each one—

that'd be the tape record of your Long Haul. There's some stuff in there you're not proud of, but you wouldn't swap the whole story for anything.

"Hello, Colonel," you say with your tongue thick.

"You with us again? Good." He looks at an enlarged filmstrip and back at you. He shows you. It's a picture of the bulkhead with the triangular score in it. "Magnetostriction vibrator, with a diamond bearing for a drill bit, hm? Not bad. You guys scare me. I'd have sworn that bulkhead couldn't be cut and that there was nothing in the ship that could cut it. You must've been real eager."

"I wanted to kill him. You know that now," you say happily.

"You damn near did."

"Aw, now, Colonel! I wouldn't have gone through with it."

"Come on," he says, opening the buckles.

"Where, sir?"

"To your space can. Wouldn't you like to have a look at it from the outside?"

"Cadets aren't permitted—"

"You qualify," says the old man shortly.

So out you go to the compound. The can still stands where it was landed.

"Where's Skampi?" you ask worriedly.

The Colonel just passes you an odd look and walks on. You follow him up to the can. "Here, around the front."

You walk around to the bow and look up at it. It's just the shape it ought to be from the way it looked from inside, except that it looks a little like a picture of a whale caught winking at you.

Winking?

One-eyed!

"Do you mean to tell me you had that kid in a blind compartment, without so much as a viewport?" you rage.

The Colonel pushes you. "Sit down. Over there. On the hatch. You returning heroes and your manic moods . . . *sit down!*"

You sit on the edge of the open hatch.

"Sometimes they fall over when I explain," he says gruffly. "Now what was bothering you?"

"Locking that kid up in a dark—"

"There isn't a kid. There isn't a dark cabin. There's no viewport on that side of the can. It's a hydrazine tank."

"But I—but we—but the—"

"Where do you come from?"

"Masolo, but what's that to—"

"What did your mother and all the kids call you when you were a space-struck teener?"

"Scampy. They all—*Scampy?*"

"That's right," he says bluntly.

Rocked, you cover your face. "By God! I can remember now, thinking back in detail over my whole life—it started *in the bus* that day I passed the entrance exams. What is it? Please, *what is it?*"

"Well, if you want me to get technical, they call it Dell's hypothesis. It was formulated way back in the middle of the 20th century by Dudley Dell, which was one of the pseudonyms of a magazine editor. As I remember it, he later became a lay analyst and—"

"Please, Colonel!" You're in trouble.

"Okay, okay," he says soothingly. "Well, up to that time, psychologists—particularly analysts—had been banging their heads against a stone wall in certain cases, and sometimes banging up the patient in the process. Those early therapists knew that childish feelings and motivations were interfering with adult efficiency and happiness. When a man would slam out of his house and do a lousy day's work after a fight with his wife, the doctor would tell him, 'You're acting *as if* you were a child rejected by its mother,' and this was—"

"Colonel, sir, are you going to please tell me what the hell's with *me?*"

"I am," he answers calmly. "This, as I was beginning to explain, was all wrong because the 'as if' concept made the patient disbelieve in this active eight-year-old within him —a very viable, hard-fighting, eight-year-old it was, too. So when behaviour got more infantile, the doc would pull his beard, or chin, and say, 'Mm-*hmm,* schizophrenia,' thereby scaring the liverwurst out of the patient. Dell stopped all that."

"Dell stopped all that," you repeat, suffering.

"It was a little thing, that hypothesis of his—little like

$E = MC^2$ or Newton's apple—but, oh, my, what happened!"

"Oh, my," you agree. "What happened?"

"Dell began directing therapy to the infantile segment, treating it as a living, thinking, feeling organism. It responded so excellently that it changed the face of psychoanalysis. Now in your case—you're not going to interrupt?"

You shake your head blankly but obediently.

"Good. In your case, an extension of Dell's hypothesis was used. The sum total of your life up until you took your entrance examinations to this Base was arrested at the age of 15. A hypnotic barrier was erected so that you could have no access to any of this. You—all of you cadets—literally start a new life here, with no ties whatever to an earlier one. Your technical education very deliberately has no reference factors to anything but itself. You learn quickly because your minds are uncluttered. You never miss your past because we're careful never to reactivate it.

"When this approach was first tried, the subjects were graduated with memories only of their training. Well, it didn't work. Childhood conditioning is too important to the entire human being to be wiped out without diminishing the subject in just about every emotional way. So we developed this new system. That's what we used on you.

"But we discovered a peculiar thing. Even in untrained adults—as opposed to the sharp division of pre- and post-entrance you have here—even untrained adults suffer to greater or lesser degree from internal strife between childhood and adult interpretations and convictions. An exaggerated example would be a child's implicit belief in Santa Claus and the Easter bunny, existing at one and the same time with the adult's realization that these are only legends. The inner child—the child within the adult—still exists, according to Dell and to all tests since, and will fight like the very devil for survival, beliefs and all . . . *especially* one whose beliefs and natural feelings and reactions had been made grounds for punishment or ridicule.

"The schism between you and Scampy was extreme; you were, in effect, born on different planets. To be a complete human being, you had to be rejoined; but to be integrated successfully, you and Scampy had to learn

how to get along together. For Scampy, this was not difficult—you, even in injustice and cruelty, were a real live hero-image. But the adult you had a stonier path. Somewhere within yourself, though, you somehow found an element of tolerance and empathy, and used it to bridge the gap.

"I may say," the Colonel adds severely, "that it takes a particularly fine kind of person to negotiate this difficult merger. You are not usual, Cadet; not usual at all."

"Scampy," you murmur. Impulsively, you pull your shirt away from your chest and look down as if there were something hiding there. "But he *talked* to me! Don't tell me you've secretly invented a telepathic converter with band-pass filters!"

"Of course not. When the barrier was erected between you and Scampy, Scampy was conditioned to speak subvocally—that is, back in the throat and virtually without lip movement. You have a subminiature transmitter placed surgically in your pharynx. The button on your bulkhead activated it. There had to be a button, you see; we couldn't have the two of you speaking at the same time, which is what persons in the same room invariably do. You can't subvocalize *and* talk simultaneously. It would have tipped you off. Hence the button."

"I can't get used to it," you complain. "I can't! I practically *saw* the boy! Listen, Colonel—can I keep my built-in transmitter and have the same rig on my starship?"

He smiles, although you think it hurts his face. "You really want it left as is?"

"He's a good kid."

"Very well—Commander. Dismissed." He marches away.

You look after him, shaking your head. Then you duck into the space can. You stare at the bulkhead and at the button and at the scoring on the plate where you came *that* close to filling your cabin with your hydrazine supply. You shudder.

"Hey," you call softly. "Scamp!"

You push the button. You hear the carrier. Then, "I'm thirsty," says Scampy.

You cut out of there and go down to the rec area and into the short-order bar.

"A beer," you say. "And put a lump of vanilla ice cream in it. And two straws."

"You crazy?" asks the man.

"No," you say. "Oh, no!"

THE ANYTHING BOX

Zenna Henderson

Zenna Henderson is a schoolteacher ("mostly first grade, but have taught them all—up to Adult Group Teaching in Eloy now") who has lived all her life in or near Tucson, Arizona, except for two years in France (teaching in Army schools) and one in Connecticut. Her first story, "Come On, Wagon" (1951), was included in a 1965 collection of which *The Anything Box* is the title story; "Something Bright" and "Subcommittee", in the same collection, also appeared in the 6th and 8th SF Annuals. In 1952, she began writing the "People" stories, for which she is best known; these have now been collected in two book-length volumes: *Pilgrimage: The Book of the People* (1962) includes "Pottage", which also appeared in the 1st *SF Annual*, and "Wilderness", which was in the 3rd. *The People: No Different Flesh* was published earlier this year by Doubleday.

"The Anything Box" first appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, January, 1956, and was included in the 2nd *SF Annual*.

I SUPPOSE it was about the second week of school that I noticed Sue-lynn particularly. Of course, I'd noticed her name before and checked her out automatically for maturity and ability and probable performance the way most teachers do with their students during the first weeks of school. She had checked out mature and capable and no worry as to performance as I had pigeonholed her—setting aside for the moment the little nudge that said, "Too quiet"—with my other no-worrys until the fluster and flurry of the first days had died down a little.

I remember my noticing day. I had collapsed into my chair for a brief respite from guiding hot little hands through the intricacies of keeping a crayola within reason-

able bounds and the room was full of the relaxed, happy hum of a pleased class as they worked away, not realizing that they were rubbing "blue" into their memories as well as onto their papers. I was meditating on how individual personalities were beginning to emerge among the 35 or so heterogeneous first graders I had, when I noticed Sue-lynn —really noticed her—for the first time.

She had finished her paper—far ahead of the others as usual—and was sitting at her table facing me. She had her thumbs touching in front of her on the table and her fingers curving as though they held something between them—something large enough to keep her fingertips apart and angular enough to bend her fingers as if for corners. It was something pleasant that she held—pleasant and precious. You could tell that by the softness of her hold. She was leaning forward a little, her lower ribs pressed against the table, and she was looking, completely absorbed, at the table between her hands. Her face was relaxed and happy. Her mouth curved in a tender half-smile, and as I watched, her lashes lifted and she looked at me with a warm share-the-pleasure look. Then her eyes blinked and the shutters came down inside them. Her hand flicked into the desk and out. She pressed her thumbs to her forefingers and rubbed them slowly together. Then she laid one hand over the other on the table and looked down at them with the air of complete denial and ignorance children can assume so devastatingly.

The incident caught my fancy and I began to notice Sue-lynn. As I consciously watched her, I saw that she spent most of her free time staring at the table between her hands, much too unobtrusively to catch my busy attention. She hurried through even the fun-est of fun papers and then lost herself in looking. When Davie pushed her down at recess, and blood streamed from her knee to her ankle, she took her bandages and her tear-smudged face to that comfort she had so readily—if you'll pardon the expression—at hand, and emerged minutes later, serene and dry-eyed. I think Davie pushed her down because of her Looking. I know the day before he had come up to me, red-faced and squirming.

"Teacher," he blurted. "She Looks!"

"Who looks?" I asked absently, checking the vocabulary list in my book, wondering how on earth I'd missed *where,*

one of those annoying *wh* words that throw the children for a loss.

"Sue-lynn. She Looks and Looks!"

"At you?" I asked.

"Well . . ." He rubbed a forefinger below his nose, leaving a clean streak on his upper lip, accepted the proffered Kleenex and put it in his pocket. "She looks at her desk and tells lies. She says she can see . . ."

"Can see what?" My curiosity picked up its ears.

"Anything," said Davie. "It's her Anything Box. She can see anything she wants to."

"Does it hurt you for her to Look?"

"Well," he squirmed. Then he burst out: "She says she saw me with a dog biting me because I took her pencil—she said." He started a pellmell verbal retreat. "She *thinks* I took her pencil. I only found—" His eyes dropped. "I'll give it back."

"I hope so," I smiled. "If you don't want her to look at you, then don't do things like that."

"Durn girls," he muttered and clomped back to his seat.

So I think he pushed her down the next day to get back at her for the dog-bite.

Several times after that I wandered to the back of the room, casually in her vicinity, but always she either saw or felt me coming and the quick sketch of her hand disposed of the evidence. Only once I thought I caught a glimmer of something—but her thumb and forefinger brushed in sunlight, and it must have been just that.

Children don't retreat for no reason at all, and, though Sue-lynn did not follow any overt pattern of withdrawal, I started to wonder about her. I watched her on the playground, to see how she tracked there. That only confused me more.

She had a very regular pattern. When the avalanche of children first descended at recess, she avalanched along with them and nothing in the shrieking, running, dodging mass resolved itself into a withdrawn Sue-lynn. But after ten minutes or so, she emerged from the crowd, tousle-haired, rosy-cheeked, smutched with dust, one shoelace dangling and, through some alchemy that I coveted for myself, she suddenly became untousled, undusty and unsmutched. And

there she was, serene and composed on the narrow little step at the side of the flight of stairs just where they disappeared into the base of the pseudo-Corinthian column that graced Our Door and her cupped hands received whatever they received and her absorption in what she saw became so complete that the bell came as a shock every time.

And each time, before she joined the rush to Our Door, her hand would sketch a gesture to her pocket, if she had one, or to the tiny ledge that extended between the hedge and the building. Apparently she always had to put the Anything Box away, but never had to go back to get it.

I was so intrigued by her putting whatever it was on the ledge that once I actually went over and felt along the grimy little outset. I sheepishly followed my children into the hall, wiping the dust from my fingertips, and Sue-lynn's eyes brimmed amusement at me without her mouth's smiling. Her hands mischievously squared in front of her and her thumbs caressed a solidness as the line of children swept into the room.

I smiled too because she was so pleased with having outwitted me. This seemed to be such a gay withdrawal that I let my worry die down. Better this manifestation than any number of other ones that I could name.

Some day, perhaps, I'll learn to keep my mouth shut. I wish I had before that long afternoon when we primary teachers worked together in a heavy cloud of ditto fumes, the acrid smell of India ink, drifting cigarette smoke and the constant current of chatter, and I let Alpha get me started on what to do with our behaviour problems. She was all raunched up about the usual rowdy loudness of her boys and the eternal clack of her girls, and I—bless my stupidity—gave her Sue-lynn as an example of what should be our deepest concern rather than the outbursts from our active ones.

"You mean she just sits and looks at nothing?" Alpha's voice grated into her questioning tone.

"Well, I can't see anything," I admitted. "But apparently she can."

"But that's having hallucinations!" Her voice went up a notch. "I read a book once—"

"Yes." Marlene leaned across the desk to flick ashes into the ash tray. "So we have heard and heard and heard."

"Well!" sniffed Alpha. "It's better than *never* reading a book."

"We're waiting," Marlene leaked smoke from her nostrils, "for the day when you read another book. This one must have been uncommonly long."

"Oh, I don't know." Alpha's forehead wrinkled with concentration. "It was only about—" Then she reddened and turned her face angrily away from Marlene.

"Apropos of *our* discussion—" she said pointedly. "It sounds to me like that child has a deep personality disturbance. Maybe even a psychotic—whatever—" Her eyes glistened faintly as she turned the thought over.

"Oh, I don't know," I said, surprised into echoing her words at my sudden need to defend Sue-lynn. "There's something about her. She doesn't have that apprehensive, hunched-shoulder, don't-hit-me-again air about her that so many withdrawn children have." And I thought achingly of one of mine from last year that Alpha had now and was verbally bludgeoning back into silence after all my work with him. "She seems to have a happy, adjusted personality, only with this odd little . . . *plus.*"

"Well, I'd be worried if she were mine," said Alpha. "I'm glad all my kids are so normal." She sighed complacently. "I guess I really haven't anything to kick about. I seldom ever have problem children except wigglers and yakkers, and a holler and a smack can straighten them out."

Marlene caught my eye mockingly, tallying Alpha's class with me, and I turned away with a sigh. To be so happy—well, I suppose ignorance does help.

"You'd better do something about that girl," Alpha shrilled as she left the room. "She'll probably get worse and worse as time goes on. Deteriorating, I think the book said."

I had known Alpha a long time and I thought I knew how much of her talk to discount, but I began to worry about Sue-lynn. Maybe this *was* a disturbance that was more fundamental than the usual run-of-the-mill that I had met up with. Maybe a child *can* smile a soft, contented smile and still have little maggots of madness flourishing somewhere inside.

Or, by gorry! I said to myself defiantly, maybe she *does* have an Anything Box. Maybe she *is* looking at something

precious. Who am I to say no to anything like that?

An Anything Box! What could you see in an Anything Box? Heart's desire? I felt my own heart lurch—just a little—the next time Sue-lynn's hands curved. I breathed deeply to hold me in my chair. If it was *her* Anything Box, I wouldn't be able to see my heart's desire in it. Or would I? I propped my cheek up on my hand and doodled aimlessly on my time-schedule sheet. How on earth, I wondered—not for the first time—do I manage to get myself off on these tangents?

Then I felt a small presence at my elbow and turned to meet Sue-lynn's wide eyes.

"Teacher?" The word was hardly more than a breath.

"Yes?" I could tell that for some reason Sue-lynn was loving me dearly at the moment. Maybe because her group had gone into new books that morning. Maybe because I had noticed her new dress, the ruffles of which made her feel very feminine and lovable, or maybe just because the late autumn sun lay so golden across her desk. Anyway, she was loving me to overflowing, and since, unlike most of the children, she had no casual hugs or easy moist kisses, she was bringing her love to me in her encompassing hands.

"See my box, Teacher? It's my Anything Box."

"Oh, my!" I said. "May I hold it?"

After all, I have held—tenderly or apprehensively or bravely—tiger magic, live rattlesnakes, dragon's teeth, poor little dead butterflies and two ears and a nose that dropped off Sojie one cold morning—none of which I could see any more than I could the Anything Box. But I took the squareness from her carefully, my tenderness showing in my fingers and my face.

And I received weight and substance and actuality!

Almost I let it slip out of my surprised fingers, but Sue-lynn's apprehensive breath helped me catch it and I curved my fingers around the precious warmness and looked down, down, past a faint shimmering, down into Sue-lynn's Anything Box.

I was running barefoot through the whispering grass. The swirl of my skirts caught the daisies as I rounded the gnarled appletree at the corner. The warm wind lay along each of my cheeks and chuckled in my ears. My heart outstripped

my flying feet and melted with a rush of delight into warmness as his arms—

I closed my eyes and swallowed hard, my palms tight against the Anything Box. "It's beautiful!" I whispered. "It's wonderful, Sue-lynn. Where did you get it?"

Her hands took it back hastily. "It's mine," she said defiantly. "It's mine."

"Of course," I said. "Be careful now. Don't drop it."

She smiled faintly as she sketched a motion to her pocket. "I won't." She patted the pocket on her way back to her seat.

Next day she was afraid to look at me at first for fear I might say something or look something or in some way remind her of what must seem like a betrayal to her now, but after I only smiled my usual smile, with no added secret knowledge, she relaxed.

A night or so later when I leaned over my moon-drenched window sill and let the shadow of my hair hide my face from such ebullient glory, I remembered about the Anything Box. Could I make one for myself? Could I square off this aching waiting, this out-reaching, this silent cry inside me, and make it into an Anything Box? I freed my hands and brought them together thumb to thumb, framing a part of the horizon's darkness between my upright forefingers. I stared into the empty square until my eyes watered. I sighed, and laughed a little, and let my hands frame my face as I leaned out into the night. To have magic so near—to feel it tingle off my fingertips and then to be so bound that I couldn't receive it. I turned away from the window—turning my back on brightness.

It wasn't long after this that Alpha succeeded in putting sharp points of worry back in my thoughts of Sue-lynn. We had ground duty together, and one morning when we shivered while the kids ran themselves rosy in the crisp air, she sizzed in my ear.

"Which one is it? The abnormal one, I mean."

"I don't have any abnormal children," I said, my voice sharpening before the sentence ended because I suddenly realized whom she meant.

"Well, I call it abnormal to stare at nothing." You could almost taste the acid in her words. "Who is it?"

"Sue-lynn," I said reluctantly. "She's playing on the bars now."

Alpha surveyed the upside-down Sue-lynn whose brief skirts were belled down from her bare pink legs and half covered her face as she swung from one of the bars by her knees. Alpha clutched her wizened blue hands together and breathed on them. "She looks normal enough," she said.

"She *is* normal!" I snapped.

"*Well,* bite my head off!" cried Alpha. "You're the one that said she wasn't, not me—or is it 'not I'? I never could remember. Not me? Not I?"

The bell saved Alpha from a horrible end. I never knew a person so serenely unaware of essentials and so sensitive to trivia. But she had succeeded in making me worry about Sue-lynn again, and the worry exploded into distress a few days later.

Sue-lynn came to school sleepy-eyed and quiet. She didn't finish any of her work and she fell asleep during rest time. I cussed TV and Drive-Ins and assumed a night's sleep would put it right. But next day Sue-lynn burst into tears and slapped Davie clear off his chair.

"Why Sue-lynn!" I gathered Davie up in all his astonishment and took Sue-lynn's hand. She jerked it away from me and flung herself at Davie again. She got two handfuls of his hair and had him out of my grasp before I knew it. She threw him bodily against the wall with a flip of her hands, then doubled up her fists and pressed them to her streaming eyes. In the shocked silence of the room, she stumbled over to Isolation and, seating herself, back to the class, on the little chair, she leaned her head into the corner and sobbed quietly in big gulping sobs.

"What on earth goes on?" I asked the stupefied Davie who sat spraddle-legged on the floor fingering a detached tuft of hair. "What did you do?"

"I only said 'Robber Daughter,'" said Davie. "It said so in the paper. My mamma said her daddy's a robber. They put him in jail cause he robbered a gas station." His bewildered face was trying to decide whether or not to cry. Everything had happened so fast that he didn't know yet if he was hurt.

"It isn't nice to call names," I said weakly. "Get back into your seat. I'll take care of Sue-lynn later."

He got up and sat gingerly down in his chair, rubbing his ruffled hair, wanting to make more of a production of the situation but not knowing how. He twisted his face experimentally to see if he had tears available and had none.

"Durn girls," he muttered and tried to shake his fingers free of a wisp of hair.

I kept my eye on Sue-lynn for the next half hour as I busied myself with the class. Her sobs soon stopped and her rigid shoulders relaxed. Her hands were softly in her lap and I knew she was taking comfort from her Anything Box. We had our talk together later, but she was so completely sealed off from me by her misery that there was no communication between us. She sat quietly watching me as I talked, her hands trembling in her lap. It shakes the heart, somehow, to see the hands of a little child quiver like that.

That afternoon I looked up from my reading group, startled, as though by a cry, to catch Sue-lynn's frightened eyes. She looked around bewildered and then down at her hands again—her empty hands. Then she darted to the Isolation corner and reached under the chair. She went back to her seat slowly, her hands squared to an unseen weight. For the first time, apparently, she had had to go get the Anything Box. It troubled me with a vague unease for the rest of the afternoon.

Through the days that followed while the trial hung fire, I had Sue-lynn in attendance bodily, but that was all. She sank into her Anything Box at every opportunity. And always, if she had put it away somewhere, she had to go back for it. She roused more and more reluctantly from these waking dreams, and there finally came a day when I had to shake her to waken her.

I went to her mother, but she couldn't or wouldn't understand me, and made me feel like a frivolous gossip-monger taking her mind away from her husband, despite the fact that I didn't even mention him—or maybe because I didn't mention him.

"If she's being a bad girl, spank her," she finally said, wearily shifting the weight of a whining baby from one hip

to another and pushing her tousled hair off her forehead. "Whatever you do is all right by me. My worrier is all used up. I haven't got any left for the kids right now."

Well, Sue-lynn's father was found guilty and sentenced to the State Penitentiary and school was less than an hour old the next day when Davie came up, clumsily a-tiptoe, braving my wrath for interrupting a reading group, and whispered hoarsely, "Sue-lynn's asleep with her eyes open again, Teacher."

We went back to the table and Davie slid into his chair next to a completely unaware Sue-lynn. He poked her with a warning finger. "I told you I'd tell on you."

And before our horrified eyes, she toppled, as rigidly as a doll, sideways off the chair. The thud of her landing relaxed her and she lay limp on the green asphalt tile—a thin paper-doll of a girl, one hand still clenched open around something. I pried her fingers loose and almost wept to feel enchantment dissolve under my heavy touch. I carried her down to the nurse's room and we worked over her with wet towels and prayer and she finally opened her eyes.

"Teacher," she whispered weakly.

"Yes, Sue-lynn." I took her cold hands in mine.

"Teacher, I almost got in my Anything Box."

"No," I answered. "You couldn't. You're too big."

"Daddy's there," she said. "And where we used to live."

I took a long, long look at her wan face. I hope it was genuine concern for her that prompted my next words. I hope it wasn't envy or the memory of the niggling nagging of Alpha's voice that put firmness in my voice as I went on. "That's play-like," I said. "Just for fun."

Her hands jerked protestingly in mine. "Your Anything Box is just for fun. It's like Davie's cowpony that he keeps in his desk or Sojie's jet plane, or when the big bear chases all of you at recess. It's fun-for-play, but it's not for real. You mustn't think it's for real. It's only play."

"No!" she denied. *"No!"* she cried frantically and, hunching herself up on the cot, peering through her tear-swollen eyes, she scrabbled under the pillow and down beneath the rough blanket that covered her.

"Where is it?" she cried. "Where is it? Give it back to me, Teacher!"

She flung herself toward me and pulled open both my clenched hands.

"Where did you put it? Where did you put it?"

"There is no Anything Box," I said flatly, trying to hold her to me and feeling my heart breaking along with hers.

"You took it!" she sobbed. "You took it away from me!" And she wrenched herself out of my arms.

"Can't you give it back to her?" whispered the nurse. "If it makes her feel so bad? Whatever it is—"

"It's just imagination," I said, almostly sullenly. "I can't give her back something that doesn't exist."

Too young! I thought bitterly. Too young to learn that heart's desire is only play-like.

Of course the doctor found nothing wrong. Her mother dismissed the matter as a fainting spell and Sue-lynn came back to class next day, thin and listless, staring blankly out the window, her hands palm down on the desk. I swore by the pale hollow of her cheek that never, *never* again would I take any belief from anyone without replacing it with something better. What had I given Sue-lynn? What had she better than I had taken from her? How did I know but that her Anything Box was on purpose to tide her over rough spots in her life like this? And what now, now that I had taken it from her?

Well, after a time she began to work again, and later, to play. She came back to smiles, but not to laughter. She puttered along quite satisfactorily except that she was a candle blown out. The flame was gone wherever the brightness of belief goes. And she had no more sharing smiles for me, no overflowing love to bring to me. And her shoulder shrugged subtly away from my touch.

Then one day I suddenly realized that Sue-lynn was searching our class room. Stealthily, casually, day by day she was searching, covering every inch of the room. She went through every puzzle box, every lump of clay, every shelf and cupboard, every box and bag. Methodically she checked behind every row of books and in every child's desk until finally, after almost a week, she had been through everything in the place except my desk. Then she began to materialize suddenly at my elbow every time I opened a drawer. And her eyes would probe quickly and

sharply before I slid it shut again. But if I tried to intercept her looks, they slid away and she had some legitimate errand that had brought her up to the vicinity of the desk.

She believes it again, I thought hopefully. She won't accept the fact that her Anything Box is gone. She wants it again.

But it *is* gone, I thought drearily. It's really-for-true gone.

My head was heavy from troubled sleep, and sorrow was a weariness in all my movements. Waiting is sometimes a burden almost too heavy to carry. While my children hummed happily over their fun-stuff, I brooded silently out the window until I managed a laugh at myself. It was a shaky laugh that threatened to dissolve into something else, so I brisked back to my desk.

As good a time as any to throw out useless things, I thought, and to see if I can find that colored chalk I put away so carefully. I plunged my hands into the wilderness of the bottom right-hand drawer of my desk. It was deep with a huge accumulation of anything—just anything—that might need a temporary hiding place. I knelt to pull out left-over Jack Frost pictures, and a broken bean shooter, a chewed red ribbon, a roll of cap-gun ammunition, one striped sock, six Numbers papers, a rubber dagger, a copy of *The Gospel According to St. Luke,* a miniature coal shovel, patterns for jack-o'-lanterns, and a pink plastic pelican. I retrieved my Irish linen hankie I thought lost forever and Sojie's report card that he had told me solemnly had blown out of his hand and landed on a jet and broke the sound barrier so loud that it busted all to flitters. Under the welter of miscellany, I felt a squareness. Oh, happy! I thought, this *is* where I put the colored chalk! I cascaded papers off both sides of my lifting hands and shook the box free.

We were together again. Outside, the world was an enchanting wilderness of white, the wind shouting softly through the windows, tapping wet, white fingers against the warm light. Inside all the worry and waiting, the apartness and loneliness were over and forgotten, their hugeness dwindled by the comfort of a shoulder, the warmth of clasping hands—and nowhere, nowhere was the fear of parting, nowhere the need to do without again. This was the happy ending. This was—

This was Sue-lynn's Anything Box!

My racing heart slowed as the dream faded . . . and rushed again at the realization. I had it here! In my junk drawer! It had been here all the time!

I stood up shakily, concealing the invisible box in the flare of my skirts. I sat down and put the box carefully in the center of my desk, covering the top of it with my palms lest I should drown again in delight. I looked at Sue-lynn. She was finishing her fun paper, competently but unjoyously. Now would come her patient sitting with quiet hands until told to do something else.

Alpha would approve. And very possibly, I thought, Alpha would, for once in her limited life, be right. We may need "hallucinations" to keep us going—all of us but the Alphas—but when we go so far as to try to force ourselves, physically, into the Neverneverland of heart's desire . . .

I remembered Sue-lynn's thin rigid body toppling doll-like off its chair. Out of her deep need she had found—or created? Who could tell?—something too dangerous for a child. I could so easily bring the brimming happiness back to her eyes—but at what a possible price!

No, I had a duty to protect Sue-lynn. Only maturity—the maturity born of the sorrow and loneliness that Sue-lynn was only beginning to know—could be trusted to use an Anything Box safely and wisely.

My heart thudded as I began to move my hands, letting the palms slip down from the top to shape the sides of—

I had moved them back again before I really saw, and I have now learned almost to forget that glimpse of what heart's desire is like when won at the cost of another's heart.

I sat there at the desk trembling and breathless, my palms moist, feeling as if I had been on a long journey away from the little schoolroom. Perhaps I had. Perhaps I had been shown all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

"Sue-lynn," I called. "Will you come up here when you're through?"

She nodded unsmilingly and snipped off the last paper from the edge of Mistress Mary's dress. Without another look at her handiwork, she carried the scissors safely to the

scissors box, crumpled the scraps of paper in her hand and came up to the waste basket by the desk.

"I have something for you, Sue-lynn," I said, uncovering the box.

Her eyes dropped to the desk top. She looked indifferently up at me. "I did my fun paper already."

"Did you like it?"

"Yes." It was a flat lie.

"Good," I lied right back. "But look here." I squared my hands around the Anything Box.

She took a deep breath and the whole of her little body stiffened.

"I found it," I said hastily, fearing anger. "I found it in the bottom drawer."

She leaned her chest against my desk, her hands caught tightly between, her eyes intent on the box, her face white with the aching want you see on children's faces pressed to Christmas windows.

"Can I have it?" she whispered.

"It's yours," I said, holding it out.

Still she leaned against her hands, her eyes searching my face. "Can I have it?" she asked again.

"Yes!" I was impatient with this anticlimax. "But—"

Her eyes flickered. She had sensed my reservation before I had. "But you must never try to get into it again."

"OK," she said, the word coming out on a long relieved sigh. "OK, Teacher."

She took the box and tucked it lovingly into her small pocket. She turned from the desk and started back to her table. My mouth quirked with a small smile. It seemed to me that everything about her had suddenly turned upward—even the ends of her straight taffy-colored hair. The subtle flame about her that made her Sue-lynn was there again. She scarcely touched the floor as she walked.

I sighed heavily and traced on the desk top with my finger a probable size for an Anything Box. What would Sue-lynn choose to see first? How like a drink after a drought it would seem to her.

I was startled as a small figure materialized at my elbow. It was Sue-lynn, her fingers carefully squared before her.

"Teacher," she said softly, all the flat emptiness gone

from her voice. "Any time you want to take my Anything Box, you just say so."

I groped through my astonishment and incredulity for words. She couldn't possibly have had time to look into the Box yet.

"Why, thank you, Sue-lynn," I managed. "Thanks a lot. I would like very much to borrow it some time."

"Would you like it now?" she asked, proffering it.

"No, thank you," I said, around the lump in my throat. "I've had a turn already. You go ahead."

"OK," she murmured. Then—"Teacher?"

"Yes?"

Shyly she leaned against me, her cheek on my shoulder. She looked up at me with her warm, unshuttered eyes, then both arms were suddenly around my neck in a brief awkward embrace.

"Watch out!" I whispered laughing into the collar of her blue dress. "You'll lose it again!"

"No I won't," she laughed back, patting the flat pocket of her dress. "Not ever, ever again!"

PRIMA BELLADONNA

J. G. Ballard

J. G. Ballard is the most controversial author in science fiction today: doubly controversial, because American fans and critics are still arguing over his latest novel, *The Crystal World* (1966), while British readers are battling over his more recent surrealistic short fiction ("condensed novels") now appearing in *New Worlds, Encounter,* and *Ambit,* but not yet published in the U.S.

Born in Shanghai in 1930, Ballard was repatriated to England at the age of sixteen, after his release from a Japanese internment camp. He read medicine at Cambridge, and won the annual short-story competition there in 1951. "Prima Belladonna" was the first story he sold, in 1956. He now has six short-story collections in print in the U.S. and four in England, as well as four novels. His most recent American book was *The Impossible Man* (Berkley, 1966). Two new collections are scheduled shortly, by Berkley, and by Doubleday.

"Prima Belladonna" originally appeared in *Science Fantasy,* Dec., 1956, and was reprinted in the 2nd Annual and in the author's collections, *Billenium* (U.S., 1962) and *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare* (U.K., 1963).

I FIRST MET JANE CIRACYLIDES during the Recess, that world slump of boredom, lethargy and high summer which carried us all so blissfully through ten unforgettable years, and I suppose that may have had a lot to do with what went on between us. Certainly I can't believe I could make myself as ridiculous now, but then again, it might have been just Jane herself.

Whatever else they said about her, everyone had to agree she was a beautiful girl, even if her genetic background was a little mixed. The gossips at Vermillion Sands

soon decided there was a good deal of mutant in her, because she had a rich patina-golden skin and what looked like insects for eyes, but that didn't bother either myself or any of my friends, one or two of whom, like Tony Miles and Harry Devine, have never since been quite the same to their wives.

We spent most of our time in those days on the wide cool balcony of my apartment off Beach Drive, drinking beer—we always kept a useful supply stacked in the refrigerator of my music shop on the street level—yarning in a desultory way and playing i-Go, a sort of decelerated chess which was popular then. None of the others ever did any work; Harry was an architect and Tony Miles sometimes sold a few ceramics to the tourists, but I usually put a couple of hours in at the shop each morning, getting off the foreign orders and turning the beer.

One particularly hot lazy day I'd just finished wrapping up a delicate soprano mimosa wanted by the Hamburg Oratorio Society when Harry phoned down from the balcony.

"Parker's Choro-Flora?" he said. "You're guilty of overproduction. Come on up here. Tony and I have something beautiful to show you."

When I went up I found them grinning happily like two dogs who had just discovered an interesting tree.

"Well?" I asked. "Where is it?"

Tony tilted his head slightly. "Over there," he indicated.

I looked up and down the street, and across the face of the apartment house opposite.

"Careful," he warned me. "Don't gape at her."

I slid into one of the wicker chairs and craned my head round cautiously.

"Fourth floor," Harry elaborated slowly, out of the side of his mouth. "One left from the balcony opposite. Happy now?"

"Dreaming," I told him, taking a long slow focus on her. "I wonder what else she can do?"

Harry and Tony sighed thankfully. "Well?" Tony asked.

"She's out of my league," I said. "But you two shouldn't have any trouble. Go over and tell her how much she needs you."

Harry groaned. "Don't you realize, this one is poetic,

emergent, something straight out of the primal apocalyptic sea. She's probably divine."

The woman was strolling around the lounge, re-arranging the furniture, wearing almost nothing except a large abstract metallic hat. Even in shadow the long sinuous lines of her thighs and shoulders gleamed gold and burning. She was a walking galaxy of light. Vermillion Sands had never seen anything like her.

"The approach has got to be equivocal," Harry continued, gazing into his beer. "Shy, almost mystical. Nothing urgent or grabbing."

The woman stooped down to unpack a suitcase and the metal vanes of her hat fluttered over her face. I didn't bother to remind Harry that Betty, his wife and a girl of considerable spirit, would have firmly restrained him from anything that wasn't mystical.

"She must use up about a kilowatt," I calculated. "What do you think her chemistry is?"

"Who cares," Harry said. "It doesn't matter to me if it's siliconic."

"In this heat?" I said. "She'd ignite."

The woman walked out onto the balcony, saw us staring at her, looked around for a moment and then went in again.

We sat back and looked thoughtfully at each other, like three triumvirs deciding how to divide an empire, not saying too much, and one eye watching for any chance of a double-deal.

Five minutes later the singing started.

At first I thought it was one of the azalea trios in trouble with an alkaline pH, but the frequencies were too high. They were almost out of the audible range, a thin tremolo quaver which came out of nowhere and rose up the back of the skull.

Harry and Tony frowned at me.

"Your livestock's unhappy about something," Tony told me. "Can you quieten it down?"

"It's not the plants," I told him. "Can't be."

The sound mounted in intensity, scraping the edge off my occipital bones. I was about to go down to the shop when Harry and Tony leaped out of their chairs and dived back against the wall.

"For chrissake, Steve, look out!" Tony yelled at me. He

pointed wildly at the table I was leaning on, picked up a chair and smashed it down on the glass top.

I stood up and brushed the fragments out of my hair.

"What the hell's the matter?" I asked them.

Tony was looking down at the tangle of wickerwork tied round the metal struts of the table. Harry came forward and took my arm gingerly.

"That was close. You all right?"

"It's gone," Tony said flatly. He looked carefully over the balcony floor and down over the rail into the street.

"What was it?" I asked.

Harry peered at me closely. "Didn't you see it? It was about three inches from you. Emperor Scorpion, big as a lobster." He sat down weakly on a beer crate. "Must have been a sonic one. The noise has gone now."

After they'd left I cleared up the mess and had a quiet beer to myself. I could have sworn nothing had got onto the table.

On the balcony opposite, wearing a gown of shimmering ionized fiber, the golden woman was watching me.

I found out who she was the next morning. Tony and Harry were down at the beach with their wives, probably enlarging on the scorpion, and I was in the shop tuning up a Khan-Arachnid orchid with the UV lamp. It was a difficult bloom, with a normal full range of twenty-four octaves, but like all the tetracot $K_3 + 25\ C_5\ A_9$ chorotropes, unless it got a lot of exercise it tended to relapse into neurotic minor key transpositions which were the devil to break. And as the senior bloom in the shop it naturally affected all the others. Invariably when I opened the shop in the mornings it sounded like a madhouse, but as soon as I'd fed the Arachnid and straightened out one of two pH gradients the rest promptly took their cues from it and dimmed down quietly in their control tanks, two-time, three-four, the multi-tones, all in perfect harmony.

There were only about a dozen true Arachnids in captivity; most of the others were either mutes or grafts from dicot stems, and I was lucky to have mine at all. I'd bought the place five years earlier from an old half-deaf man called Sayers, and the day before he left he moved a lot of rogue stock out to the garbage disposal scoop behind the apart-

ment block. Reclaiming some of the tanks, I'd come across the Arachnid, thriving on a diet of algae and perished rubber tubing.

Why Sayers had wanted to throw it away I'd never discovered. Before he came to Vermillion Sands he'd been a curator at the old Kew Conservatoire where the first choroflora had been bred, and had worked under the Director, Dr. Mandel, who as a young botanist of twenty-five had discovered the prime Arachnid in the Guiana forest. The orchid took its name from the Khan-Arachnid spider which pollinated the flower, simultaneously laying its own eggs in the fleshy ovule, guided, or as Mandel always insisted, actually mesmerized to it by the vibrations which the orchid's calyx emitted at pollination-time. The first Arachnid orchids beamed out only a few random frequencies, but by cross-breeding and maintaining them artificially at the pollination stage Mandel had produced a strain that spanned a maximum of twenty-four octaves.

Not that he's ever been able to hear them. At the climax of his life's work Mandel, like Beethoven, was stone deaf, but apparently by merely looking at a blossom he could listen to its music. Strangely, though, after he went deaf he never looked at an Arachnid.

That morning I could almost understand why. The orchid was in a vicious mood. First it refused to feed, and I had to coax it along in a fluoraldehyde flush, and then it started going ultra-sonic, which meant complaints from all the dog owners in the area. Finally it tried to fracture the tank by resonating.

The whole place was in uproar, and I was almost resigned to shutting them down and waking them all by hand individually—a back-breaking job with eighty tanks in the shop—when everything suddenly died away to a murmur.

I looked round and saw the golden-skinned woman walk in.

"Good morning," I said. "They must like you."

She laughed pleasantly. "Hello. Weren't they behaving?"

Under the black beach robe her skin was a softer, more mellow gold, and it was her eyes that held me. I could just see them under the wide-brimmed hat. Insect legs wavered delicately round two points of purple light.

She walked over to a bank of mixed ferns and stood looking at them, her ample hips cocked to one side.

The ferns reached out toward her and trebled eagerly in their liquid fluted voices.

"Aren't they sweet?" she said, stroking the fronds gently. "They need so much affection."

Her voice was low in the register, a breath of cool sand pouring, with a lilt that gave it music.

"I've just come to Vermillion Sands," she said, "and my apartment seems awfully quiet. Perhaps if I had a flower, one would be enough, I shouldn't feel so lonely."

I couldn't take my eyes off her.

"Yes," I agreed, brisk and business-like. "What about something colorful? This Sumatra Samphire, say? It's a pedigree mezzo-soprano from the same follicle as the Bayreuth Festival Prima Belladonna."

"No," she said. "It looks rather cruel."

"Or this Louisiana Lute Lily? If you thin out its SO_2 it'll play some beautiful madrigals. I'll show you how to do it."

She wasn't listening to me. Slowly her hands raised in front of her breasts so that she almost seemed to be praying; she moved toward the counter on which the Arachnid stood.

"How beautiful it is," she said, gazing at the rich yellow and purple leaves hanging from the scarlet-ribbed vibrocalyx.

I followed her across the floor and switched on the Arachnid's audio so that she could hear it. Immediately the plant came to life. The leaves stiffened and filled with color and the calyx inflated, its ribs sprung tautly. A few sharp disconnected notes spat out.

"Beautiful, but evil," I said.

"Evil?" she repeated. "No, proud." She stepped closer to the orchid and looked down into its huge malevolent head. The Arachnid quivered and the spines on its stem arched and flexed menacingly.

"Careful," I warned her. "It's sensitive to the faintest respiratory sounds."

"Quiet," she said, waving me back. "I think it wants to sing."

"Those are only key fragments," I told her. "It doesn't perform. I use it as a frequency—"

"Listen!" She held my arm and squeezed it tightly.

A low rhythmic fusion of melody had been coming from the plants around the shop, and mounting above them I heard a single stronger voice calling out, at first a thin high-pitched reed of sound that began to pulse and deepen and finally swelled into full baritone, raising the other plants in chorus about itself.

I'd never heard the Arachnid sing before and I was listening to it open-eared when I felt a glow of heat burn against my arm. I turned round and saw the woman staring intently at the plant, her skin aflame, the insects in her eyes writhing insanely. The Arachnid stretched out toward her, calyx erect, leaves like blood-red sabers.

I stepped round her quickly and switched off the argon feed. The Arachnid sank to a whimper, and around us there was a nightmarish babel of broken notes and voices toppling from high C's and L's into discord. Then only a faint whispering of leaves moved over the silence.

The woman gripped the edge of the tank and gathered herself. Her skin dimmed and the insects in her eyes slowed to a delicate wavering.

"Why did you turn it off?" she asked heavily.

"I'm sorry," I said. "But I've got ten thousand dollars worth of stock here and that sort of twelve-tone emotional storm can blow a lot of valves. Most of these plants aren't equipped for grand opera."

She watched the Arachnid as the gas drained out of its calyx, and one by one its leaves buckled and lost their color.

"How much is it?" she asked me, opening her bag.

"It's not for sale," I said. "Frankly I've no idea how it picked up those bars—"

"Will a thousand dollars be enough?" she asked, her eyes fixed on me steadily.

"I can't," I told her. "I'd never be able to tune the others without it. Anyway," I added, trying to smile, "that Arachnid would be dead in ten minutes if you took it out of its vivarium. All these cylinders and leads would look a little odd inside your lounge."

"Yes, of course," she agreed, suddenly smiling back at me. "I was stupid." She gave the orchid a last backward

glance and strolled away across the floor to the long Tchaikovsky section popular with the tourists.

" 'Pathétique,' " she read off a label at random. "I'll take this."

I wrapped up the scabia and slipped the instructional booklet into the crate, keeping my eye on her all the time.

"Don't look so alarmed," she said with amusement. "I've never heard anything like that before."

I wasn't alarmed. It was just that thirty years at Vermillion Sands had narrowed my horizons.

"How long are you staying at Vermillion Sands?" I asked.

"I open at the Casino tonight," she said. She told me her name was Jane Ciracylides and that she was a specialty singer.

"Why don't you look in?" she asked, her eyes fluttering mischievously. "I come on at eleven. You may find it interesting."

I did. The next morning Vermillion Sands hummed. Jane created a sensation. After her performance 300 people swore they'd seen everything from a choir of angels taking the vocal in the music of the spheres to Alexander's Ragtime Band. As for myself, perhaps I'd listened to too many flowers, but at least I knew where the scorpion on the balcony had come from.

Tony Miles had heard Sophie Tucker singing the St. Louis Blues, and Harry the elder Bach conducting the B Minor Mass.

They came round to the shop and argued over their respective performances while I wrestled with the flowers.

"Amazing," Tony exclaimed. "How does she do it? Tell me."

"The Heidelberg score," Harry ecstased. "Sublime, absolute." He looked irritably at the flowers. "Can't you keep these things quiet? They're making one hell of a row."

They were, and I had a shrewd idea why. The Arachnid was completely out of control, and by the time I'd clamped it down in a weak saline it had blown out over $300 worth of shrubs.

"The performance at the Casino last night was nothing on the one she gave here yesterday," I told them. "The

Ring of the Nibelungs played by Stan Kenton. That Arachnid went insane. I'm sure it wanted to kill her."

Harry watched the plant convulsing its leaves in rigid spasmic movements.

"If you ask me it's in an advanced state of rut. Why should it want to kill her?"

"Not literally. Her voice must have overtones that irritate its calyx. None of the other plants minded. They cooed like turtle doves when she touched them."

Tony shivered happily.

Light dazzled in the street outside.

I handed Tony the broom. "Here, lover, brace yourself on that. Miss Ciracylides is dying to meet you."

Jane came into the shop, wearing a flame yellow cocktail skirt and another of her hats.

I introduced her to Harry and Tony.

"The flowers seem very quiet this morning," she said. "What's the matter with them?"

"I'm cleaning out the tanks," I told her. "By the way, we all want to congratulate you on last night. How does it feel to be able to name your fiftieth city?"

She smiled shyly and sauntered away round the shop. As I knew she would, she stopped by the Arachnid and leveled her eyes at it.

I wanted to see what she'd say, but Harry and Tony were all around her, and soon got her up to my apartment, where they had a hilarious morning playing the fool and raiding my scotch.

"What about coming out with us after the show tonight?" Tony asked her. "We can go dancing at the Flamingo."

"But you're both married," Jane protested coyly. "Aren't you worried about your reputations?"

"Oh, we'll bring the girls," Harry said airily. "And Steve here can come along and hold your coat."

We played i-Go together. Jane said she'd never played the game before, but she had no difficulty picking up the rules, and when she started sweeping the board with us I knew she was cheating. Admittedly it isn't every day that you get a chance to play i-Go with a golden-skinned woman with insects for eyes, but nevertheless I was annoyed. Harry and Tony, of course, didn't mind.

"She's charming," Harry said, after she'd left. "Who cares? It's a stupid game anyway."

"I care," I said. "She cheats."

The next three or four days at the shop were an audio-vegetative armageddon. Jane came in every morning to look at the Arachnid, and her presence was more than the flower could bear. Unfortunately I couldn't starve the plants down below their thresholds. They needed exercise and they had to have the Arachnid to lead them. But instead of running through its harmonic scales the orchid only screeched and whined. It wasn't the noise, which only a couple of dozen people complained about, but the damage being done to their vibratory chords that worried me. Those in the 17th Century catalogues stood up well to the strain, and the moderns were immune, but the Romantics burst their calyxes by the score. By the third day after Jane's arrival I'd lost $200 worth of Beethoven and more Mendelssohn and Schubert than I could bear to think about.

Jane seemed oblivious to the trouble she was causing me.

"What's wrong with them all?" she asked, surveying the chaos of gas cylinders and drip feeds spread across the floor.

"I don't think they like you," I told her. "At least the Arachnid doesn't. Your voice may move men to strange and wonderful visions, but it throws that orchid into acute melancholia."

"Nonsense," she said, laughing at me. "Give it to me and I'll show you how to look after it."

"Are Tony and Harry keeping you happy?" I asked her. I was annoyed I couldn't go down to the beach with them and instead had to spend my time draining tanks and titrating up norm solutions, none of which ever worked.

"They're very amusing," she said. "We play i-Go and I sing for them. But I wish you could come out more often."

After another two weeks I had to give up. I decided to close the plants down until Jane had left Vermillion Sands. I knew it would take me three months to rescore the stock, but I had no alternative.

The next day I received a large order for mixed coloratura herbaceous from the Santiago Garden Choir. They wanted delivery in three weeks.

"I'm sorry," Jane said, when she heard I wouldn't be able to fill the order. "You must wish that I'd never come to Vermillion Sands."

She stared thoughtfully into one of the darkened tanks.

"Couldn't I score them for you?" she suggested.

"No, thanks," I said, laughing, "I've had enough of that already."

"Don't be silly, of course I could."

I shook my head.

Tony and Harry told me I was crazy.

"Her voice has a wide enough range," Tony said. "You admit it yourself."

"What have you got against her?" Harry asked. "She cheats at i-Go?"

"It's nothing to do with that," I said. "But her voice has a wider range than you think."

We played i-Go at Jane's apartment. Jane won ten dollars from each of us.

"I am lucky," she said, very pleased with herself. "I never seem to lose." She counted up the bills and put them away carefully in her bag, her golden skin glowing.

Then Santiago sent me a repeat query.

I found Jane down among the cafés, holding off a siege of admirers.

"Have you given in yet?" she asked me, smiling at the young men.

"I don't know what you're doing to me," I said, "but anything is worth trying."

Back at the shop I raised a bank of perennials up past their thresholds. Jane helped me attach the gas and fluid lines.

"We'll try these first," I said. "Frequencies 543-785. Here's the score."

Jane took off her hat and began to ascend the scale, her voice clear and pure. At first the Columbine hesitated and Jane went down again and drew them along with her. They went up a couple of octaves together and then the plants stumbled and went off at a tangent of stepped chords.

"Try K sharp," I said. I fed a little chlorous acid into the tank and the Columbine followed her up eagerly, the infracalyxes warbling delicate variations on the treble clef.

"Perfect," I said.

It took us only four hours to fill the order.

"You're better than the Arachnid," I congratulated her. "How would you like a job? I'll fit you out with a large cool tank and all the chlorine you can breathe."

"Careful," she told me. "I may say yes. Why don't we rescore a few more of them while we're about it?"

"You're tired," I said. "Let's go and have a drink."

"Let me try the Arachnid," she suggested. "That would be more of a challenge."

Her eyes never left the flower. I wondered what they'd do if I left them together. Try to sing each other to death?

"No," I said. "Tomorrow perhaps."

We sat on the balcony together, glasses at our elbows, and talked the afternoon away.

She told me little about herself, but I gathered that her father had been a mining engineer in Peru and her mother a dancer at a Lima vu-tavern. They'd wandered from deposit to deposit, the father digging his concessions, the mother signing on at the nearest bordello to pay the rent.

"She only sang, of course," Jane added. "Until my father came." She blew bubbles into her glass. "So you think I give them what they want at the Casino. By the way, what do you see?"

"I'm afraid I'm your one failure," I said. "Nothing. Except you."

She dropped her eyes. "That sometimes happens," she said. "I'm glad this time."

A million suns pounded inside me. Until then I'd been reserving judgment on myself.

Harry and Tony were polite, if disappointed.

"I can't believe it," Harry said sadly. "I won't. How did you do it?"

"That mystical left-handed approach, of course," I told him. "All ancient seas and dark wells."

"What's she like?" Tony asked eagerly. "I mean, does she burn, or just tingle?"

Jane sang at the Casino every night from 11 to 3, but apart from that I suppose we were always together. Sometimes in the late afternoons we'd drive out along the beach to the Scented Desert and sit alone by one of the pools, watching the sun fall away behind the reefs and hills, lulling

ourselves on the heavy rose-sick air. And when the wind began to blow cool across the sand we'd slip down into the water, bathe ourselves and drive back to town, filling the streets and café terraces with jasmine and musk-rose and helianthemum.

On other evenings we'd go down to one of the quiet bars at Lagoon West, and have supper out on the flats, and Jane would tease the waiters and sing honeybirds and angel-cakes to the children who came in across the sand to watch her.

I realize now that I must have achieved a certain notoriety along the beach, but I didn't mind giving the old women—and beside Jane they all seemed to be old women—something to talk about. During the Recess no one cared very much about anything, and for that reason I never questioned myself too closely over my affair with Jane Ciracylides. As I sat on the balcony with her looking out over the cool early evenings or felt her body glowing beside me in the darkness I allowed myself few anxieties.

Absurdly, the only disagreement I ever had with her was over her cheating.

I remember that I once taxed her with it.

"Do you know you've taken over $500 from me, Jane? You're still doing it. Even now!"

She laughed impishly. "Do I cheat? I'll let you win one day."

"But why do you?" I insisted.

"It's more fun to cheat," she said. "Otherwise it's so boring."

"Where will you go when you leave Vermillion Sands?" I asked her.

She looked at me in surprise. "Why do you say that? I don't think I shall ever leave."

"Don't tease me, Jane. You're a child of another world than this."

"My father came from Peru," she reminded me.

"But you didn't get your voice from him," I said. "I wish I could have heard your mother sing. Had she a better voice than yours, Jane?"

"She thought so. My father couldn't stand either of us."

That was the evening I last saw Jane. We'd changed, and in the half an hour before she left for the Casino we sat on

the balcony and I listened to her voice, like a spectral fountain, pour its golden luminous notes into the air. The music remained with me even after she'd gone, hanging faintly in the darkness around her chair.

I felt curiously sleepy, almost sick on the air she'd left behind, and at 11:30, when I knew she'd be appearing on stage at the Casino, I went out for a walk along the beach and a coffee.

As I left the elevator I heard music coming from the shop.

At first I thought I'd left one of the audio switches on, but I knew the voice only too well.

The windows of the shop had been shuttered, so I got in through the passage which led from the garage courtyard round at the back of the apartment house.

The lights had been turned out, but a brilliant glow filled the shop, throwing a golden fire onto the tanks along the counters. Across the ceiling liquid colors danced in reflection.

The music I had heard before, but only in overture.

The Arachnid had grown to three times its size. It towered nine feet high out of the shattered lid of the control tank, leaves tumid and inflamed, its calyx as large as a bucket, raging insanely.

Arched forward into it, her head thrown back, was Jane.

I ran over to her, my eyes filling with light, and grabbed her arm, trying to pull her away from it.

"Jane!" I shouted over the noise. "Get down!"

She flung my hand away. In her eyes, fleetingly, was a look of shame.

While I was sitting on the stairs in the entrance Tony and Harry drove up.

"Where's Jane?" Harry asked. "Has anything happened to her? We were down at the Casino." They both turned toward the music. "What the hell's going on?"

Tony peered at me suspiciously. "Steve, anything wrong?"

Harry dropped the bouquet he was carrying and started toward the rear entrance.

"Harry!" I shouted after him. "Get back!"

Tony held my shoulder. "Is Jane in there?"

I caught them as they opened the door into the shop.

"Good God!" Harry yelled. "Let go of me, you fool!" He struggled to get away from me. "Steve, it's trying to kill her!"

I jammed the door shut and held them back.

I never saw Jane again. The three of us waited in my apartment. When the music died away we went down and found the shop in darkness. The Arachnid had shrunk to its normal size.

The next day it died.

Where Jane went to I don't know. Not long afterward the Recess ended, and the big government schemes came along and started up all the clocks and kept us too busy working off the lost time to worry about a few bruised petals. Harry told me that Jane had been seen on her way through Red Beach, and I heard recently that someone very like her was doing the nightclubs this side out of Pernambuco.

So if any of you around there keep a choro-florist's and have a Khan-Arachnid orchid, look out for a golden-skinned woman with insects for eyes. Perhaps she'll play i-Go with you, and I'm sorry to have to say it, but she'll always cheat.

CASEY AGONISTES

Richard McKenna

Richard Milton McKenna (1912–1964) was the author of the best-selling Harper prize novel, *The Sand Pebbles* (1962). Born in Idaho, McKenna had "a desert and cowboy type youth" and joined the Navy promptly at eighteen. He spent most of ten years stationed in China, decided to become a writer while on postwar assignment to the Public Information Office. In 1956, three years after his discharge (as Chief Machinist's Mate), he graduated from the University of North Carolina, got married the next day, and began writing.

He was a slow, painstaking writer. His unfinished second novel, *The Sons of Martha,* was published posthumously by Harper and Row. His handful of short stories have been widely reprinted, and one, previously unpublished, appeared in Damon Knight's 1966 *Orbit,* and received a Nebula Award in 1967.

"Casey Agonistes" was McKenna's first published story, in the September, 1958, *Fantasy & Science Fiction.* It was reprinted in the 4th SF Annual and in the anthology, *The Dark Side* (Doubleday, 1965). Another story, "Mine Own Ways", was in the 6th Annual.

YOU CAN'T JUST PLAIN DIE. You got to do it by the book.

That's how come I'm here in this TB ward with nine other recruits. Basic training to die.

You do it by stages. First a big ward, you walk around and go out and they call you mister. Then, if you got what it takes, a promotion to this isolation ward and they call you charles. You can't go nowhere, you meet the masks, and you get the feel of being dead.

Being dead is being weak and walled off. You hear car noises and see little doll-people down on the sidewalks, but when they come to visit you they wear white masks and

nightgowns and talk past you in the wrong voices. They're scared you'll rub some off on them. You would, too, if you knew how.

Nobody ever visits me. I had practice being dead before I come here. Maybe that's how I got to be charles so quick.

It's easy, playing dead here. You eat your pills, make out to sleep in the quiet hours and drink your milk like a good little charles. You grin at their phony joshing about how healthy you look and feel. You all know better, but them's the rules.

Sick call is when they really make you know it. It's a parade—the head doctor and nurse, the floor nurse Mary Howard and two interns, all in masks and nightgowns. Mary pushes the wheeled rack with our fever charts on it. The doc is a tall skinhead with wooden eyes and pinchnose glasses. The head nurse is fat, with little pig eyes and a deep voice.

The doc can't see, hear, smell or touch you. He looks at your reflection in the chart and talks about you like you was real, but it's Mary that pulls down the cover and opens your pajama coat, and the interns poke and look and listen and tell the doc what they see and hear. He asks them questions for you to answer. You tell them how good you feel and they tell him. He ain't supposed to get contaminated.

Mary's small, dark and sweet and the head nurse gives her a bad time. One intern is small and dark like Mary, with soft black eyes and very gentle. The other one is pink and chubby.

The doc's voice is high and thin, like he ain't all there below decks. The head nurse snaps at Mary, snips at the interns, and puts a kind of dog wiggle in her voice when she talks to the doc.

I'm glad not to know what's under any of their masks, except maybe Mary's, because I can likely imagine better faces for them than God did. The head nurse makes rounds, riding the book. When she catches us out of line, like smoking or being up in a quiet hour, she gives Mary hell.

She gives us hell too, like we was babies. She kind of hints that if we ain't respectful to her and obey her rules maybe she won't let us die after all.

Christ, how I hate that hag! I hope I meet her in hell.

That's how it struck me, first day or two in isolation. I'd looked around for old shipmates, like a guy does, but didn't

see any. On the third day one recognized me. I thought I knew that gravel voice, but even after he told me I couldn't hardly believe it was old Slop Chute Hewitt.

He was skin and bones and his blue eyes had a kind of puzzled look like I saw in them once years ago when a big limey sucker punched him in Nagasaki Joe's. When I remembered that, it made me know, all right.

He said glad to see me there and we both laughed. Some of the others shuffled over in striped bathrobes and all of a sudden I was in like Flynn, knowing Slop Chute. I found out they called the head doc Uncle Death. The fat nurse was Mama Death. The blond intern was Pink Waldo, the dark one Curly Waldo, and Mary was Mary. Knowing things like that is a kind of password.

They said Curly Waldo was sweet on Mary, but he was a poor Italian. Pink Waldo come of good family and was trying to beat him out. They were pulling for Curly Waldo.

When they left, Slop Chute and me talked over old times in China. I kept seeing him like he was on the *John D. Edwards,* sitting with a cup of coffee topside by the after fireroom hatch, while his snipes turned to down below. He wore bleached dungarees and shined shoes and he looked like a lord of the earth. His broad face and big belly. The way he stoked chow into himself in the guinea pullman—that's what give him his name. The way he took aboard beer and samshu in the Kongmoon Happiness Garden. The way he swung the little ne-sans dancing in the hotels on Skibby Hill. Now . . . Godalmighty! It made me know.

But he still had the big jack lantern grin.

"Remember little Connie that danced at the Palais?" he asked.

I remember her, half Portygee, cute as hell.

"You know, Charley, now I'm headed for scrap, the onliest one damn thing I'm sorry for is I didn't shack with her when I had the chance."

"She was nice," I said.

"She was green fire in the velvet, Charley. I had her a few times when I was on the *Monocacy.* She wanted to shack and I wouldn't never do it. Christ, Christ, I wish I did, now!"

"I ain't sorry for anything, that I can think of."

"You'll come to it, sailor. For every guy there's some one

thing. Remember how Connie used to put her finger on her nose like a Jap girl?"

"Now, Mr. Noble, you mustn't keep arthur awake in quiet hour. Lie down yourself, please."

It was Mama Death, sneaked up on us.

"Now rest like a good boy, charles, and we'll have you home before you know it," she told me on her way out.

I thought a thought at her.

The ward had green-gray linoleum, high, narrow windows, a spar-color overhead, and five bunks on a side. My bunk was at one end next to the solarium. Slop Chute was across from me in the middle. Six of us was sailors, three soldiers, and there was one marine.

We got mucho sack time, training for the long sleep. The marine bunked next to me and I saw a lot of him.

He was a strange guy. Name of Carnahan, with a pointed nose and a short upper lip and a go-to-hell stare. He most always wore his radio earphones and he was all the time grinning and chuckling like he was in a private world from the rest of us.

It wasn't the program that made him grin, either, like I thought first. He'd do it even if some housewife was yapping about how to didify the dumplings. He carried on worst during sick call. Sometimes Uncle Death looked across almost like he could hear it direct.

I asked him about it and he put me off, but finally he told me. Seems he could hypnotize himself to see a big ape and then make the ape clown around. He told me I might could get to see it too. I wanted to try, so we did.

"He's there," Carnahan would say. "Sag your eyes, look out the corners. He won't be plain at first.

"Just *expect* him, he'll come. Don't want him to do anything. You just *feel*. He'll do what's natural," he kept telling me.

I got where I could see the ape—Casey, Carnahan called him—in flashes. Then one day Mama Death was chewing out Mary and I saw him plain. He come up behind Mama and—I busted right out laughing.

He looked like a bowlegged man in an ape suit covered with red-brown hair. He grinned and made faces with a

mouth full of big yellow teeth and he was furnished like John Keeno himself. I roared.

"Put on your phones so you'll have an excuse for laughing," Carnahan whispered. "Only you and me can see him, you know."

Fixing to be dead, you're ready for God knows what, but Casey was sure something.

"Hell, no, he ain't real," Carnahan said. "We ain't so real ourselves any more. That's why we can see him."

Carnahan told me okay to try and let Slop Chute in on it. It ended we cut the whole gang in, going slow so the masks wouldn't get suspicious.

It bothered Casey at first, us all looking at him. It was like we all had a string on him and he didn't know who to mind. He backed and filled and tacked and yawed all over the ward not able to steer himself. Only when Mama Death was there and Casey went after her, then it was like all the strings pulled the same way.

The more we watched him the plainer and stronger he got till finally he started being his own man. He came and went as he pleased and we never knew what he'd do next except that there'd be a laugh in it. Casey got more and more there for us, but he never made a sound.

He made a big difference. We all wore our earphones and giggled like idiots. Slop Chute wore his big sideways grin more often. Old Webster almost stopped griping.

There was a man filling in for a padre came to visitate us every week. Casey would sit on his knee and wiggle and drool, with one finger between those strong, yellow teeth. The man said the radio was a Godsend to us patient spirits in our hour of trial. He stopped coming.

Casey made a real show out of sick call. He kissed Mama Death smack on her mask, danced with her and bit her on the rump. He rode piggy back on Uncle Death. He even took a hand in Mary's romance.

One Waldo always went in on each side of a bunk to look, listen and feel for Uncle. Mary could go on either side. We kept count of whose side she picked and how close she stood to him. That's how we figured Pink Waldo was ahead.

Well, Casey started to shoo her gently in by Curly Waldo and then crowd her closer to him. And, you know, the count

began to change in Curly's favor. Casey had something.

If no masks were around to bedevil, Casey would dance and turn handsprings. He made us all feel good.

Uncle Death smelled a rat and had the radio turned off during sick call and quiet hours. But he couldn't cut off Casey.

Something went wrong with Roby, the cheerful black boy next to Slop Chute. The masks were all upset about it and finally Mary come told him on the sly. He wasn't going to make it. They were going to flunk him back to the big ward and maybe back to the world.

Mary's good that way. We never see her face, of course, but I always imagine for her a mouth like Venus has, in that picture you see her standing in the shell.

When Roby had to go, he come around to each bunk and said good-by. Casey stayed right behind him with his tongue stuck out. Roby kept looking around for Casey, but of course he couldn't see him.

He turned around, just before he left the ward, and all of a sudden Casey was back in the middle and scowling at him. Roby stood looking at Casey with the saddest face I ever saw him wear. Then Casey grinned and waved a hand. Roby grinned back and tears run down his black face. He waved and shoved off.

Casey took to sleeping in Roby's bunk till another recruit come in.

One day two masked orderlies loaded old Webster the whiner onto a go-to-Jesus cart and wheeled him off to x-ray. They said. But later one came back and wouldn't look at us and pushed Webster's locker out and we knew. The masks had him in a quiet room for the graduation exercises.

They always done that, Slop Chute told me, so's not to hurt the morale of the guys not able to make the grade yet. Trouble was, when a guy went to x-ray on a go-to-Jesus cart he never knew till he got back whether he was going to see the gang again.

Next morning when Uncle Death fell in for sick call Casey come bouncing down the ward and hit him a haymaker plumb on the mask.

I swear the bald-headed bastard staggered. I know his glasses fell off and Pink Waldo caught them. He said some-

thing about a moment of vertigo, and made a quick job of sick call. Casey stayed right behind him and kicked his stern post every step he took.

Mary favored Curly Waldo's side that day without any help from Casey.

After that Mama Death really got ugly. She slobbered loving care all over us to keep us from knowing what we was there for. We got baths and back rubs we didn't want. Quiet hour had to start on the dot and be really quiet. She was always reading Mary off in whispers, like she knew it bothered us.

Casey followed her around aping her duck waddle and poking her behind now and again. We laughed and she thought it was at her and I guess it was. So she got Uncle Death to order the routine temperatures taken rectally, which she knew we hated. We stopped laughing and she knocked off the rectal temperatures. It was a kind of unspoken agreement. Casey give her a worse time than ever, but we saved our laughing till she was gone.

Poor Slop Chute couldn't do anything about his big, lopsided grin that was louder than a belly laugh. Mama give him a real bad time. She arthured the hell out of him.

He was coming along first rate, had another hemorrhage, and they started taking him to the clinic on a go-to-Jesus cart instead of in a chair. He was supposed to use ducks and a bedpan instead of going to the head, but he saved it up and after lights out we used to help him walk to the head. That made his reflection in the chart wrong and got him in deeper with Uncle Death.

I talked to him a lot, mostly about Connie. He said he dreamed about her pretty often now.

"I figure it means I'm near ready for the deep six, Charley."

"Figure you'll see Connie then?"

"No. Just hope I won't have to go on thinking about her then. I want it to be all night in and no reveille."

"Yeah," I said, "me too. What ever become of Connie?"

"I heard she ate poison right after the Reds took over Shanghai. I wonder if she ever dreamed about me?"

"I bet she did, Slop Chute," I said. "She likely used to

wake up screaming and she ate the poison just to get rid of you."

He put on his big grin.

"You regret something too, Charley. You find it yet?"

"Well, maybe," I said. "Once on a stormy night at sea on the *Black Hawk* I had a chance to push King Brody over the side. I'm sorry now I didn't."

"Just come to you?"

"Hell, no, it come to me three days later when he give me a week's restriction in Tsingtao. I been sorry ever since."

"No. It'll smell you out, Charley. You wait."

Casey was shadow boxing down the middle of the ward as I shuffled back to my bunk.

It must've been spring because the days were longer. One night, right after the nurse come through, Casey and Carnahan and me helped Slop Chute walk to the head. While he was there he had another hemorrhage.

Carnahan started for help but Casey got in the way and motioned him back and we knew Slop Chute didn't want it.

We pulled Slop Chute's pajama top off and steadied him. He went on his knees in front of the bowl and the soft, bubbling cough went on for a long time. We kept flushing it. Casey opened the door and went out to keep away the nurse.

Finally it pretty well stopped. Slop Chute was too weak to stand. We cleaned him up and I put my pajama top on him, and we stood him up. If Casey hadn't took half the load, we'd'a never got him back to his bunk.

Godalmighty! I used to carry hundred-kilo sacks of cement like they was nothing.

We went back and cleaned up the head. I washed out the pajama top and draped it on the radiator. I was in a cold sweat and my face burned when I turned in.

Across the ward Casey was sitting like a statue beside Slop Chute's bunk.

Next day was Friday, because Pink Waldo made some crack about fish to Curly Waldo when they formed up for sick call. Mary moved closer to Curly Waldo and gave Pink Waldo a cold look. That was good.

Slop Chute looked waxy, and Uncle Death seemed to see it because a gleam come into his wooden eyes. Both Waldos

listened all over Slop Chute and told uncle what they heard in their secret language. Uncle nodded, and Casey thumbed his nose at him.

No doubt about it, the ways was greased for Slop Chute. Mama Death come back soon as she could and began to loosen the chocks. She slobbered arthurs all over Slop Chute and flittered around like women do when they smell a wedding. Casey give her extra special hell, and we all laughed right out and she hardly noticed.

That afternoon two orderly-masks come with a go-to-Jesus cart and wanted to take Slop Chute to x-ray. Casey climbed on the cart and scowled at them.

Slop Chute told 'em shove off, he wasn't going.

They got Mary and she told Slop Chute please go, it was doctor's orders.

Sorry, no, he said.

"Please, for me, Slop Chute," she begged.

She knows our right names—that's one reason we love her. But Slop Chute shook his head, and his big jaw bone stuck out.

Mary—she had to then—called Mama Death. Mama waddled in, and Casey spit in her mask.

"Now, arthur, what is this, arthur, you know we want to help you get well and go home, arthur," she arthured at Slop Chute. "Be a good boy now, arthur, and go along to the clinic."

She motioned the orderlies to pick him up anyway. Casey hit one in the mask and Slop Chute growled, "Sheer off, you bastards!"

The orderlies hesitated.

Mama's little eyes squinted and she wiggled her hands at them. "Let's not be naughty, arthur. Doctor knows best, arthur."

The orderlies looked at Slop Chute and at each other. Casey wrapped his arms and legs around Mama Death and began chewing on her neck. He seemed to mix right into her, someway, and she broke and run out of the ward.

She come right back, though, trailing Uncle Death. Casey met him at the door and beat hell out of him all the way to Slop Chute's bunk. Mama sent Mary for the chart, and Uncle Death studied Slop Chute's reflection for a minute. He looked pale and swayed a little from Casey's beating.

He turned toward Slop Chute and breathed in deep and Casey was on him again. Casey wrapped his arms and legs around him and chewed at his mask with those big yellow teeth. Casey's hair bristled and his eyes were red as the flames of hell.

Uncle Death staggered back across the ward and fetched up against Carnahan's bunk. The other masks were scared spitless, looking all around, kind of knowing.

Casey pulled away, and Uncle Death said maybe he was wrong, schedule it for tomorrow. All the masks left in a hurry except Mary. She went back to Slop Chute and took his hand.

"I'm sorry, Slop Chute," she whispered.

"Bless you, Connie," he said, and grinned. It was the last thing I ever heard him say.

Slop Chute went to sleep, and Casey sat beside his bunk. He motioned me off when I wanted to help Slop Chute to the head after lights out. I turned in and went to sleep.

I don't know what woke me. Casey was moving around fidgety-like, but of course not making a sound. I could hear the others stirring and whispering in the dark too.

Then I heard a muffled noise—the bubbling cough again, and spitting. Slop Chute was having another hemorrhage and he had his head under the blankets to hide the sound. Carnahan started to get up. Casey waved him down.

I saw a deeper shadow high in the dark over Slop Chute's bunk. It came down ever so gently and Casey would push it back up again. The muffled coughing went on.

Casey had a harder time pushing back the shadow. Finally he climbed on the bunk straddle of Slop Chute and kept a steady push against it.

The blackness came down anyway, little by little. Casey strained and shifted his footing. I could hear him grunt and hear his joints crack.

I was breathing forced draft with my heart like to pull off its bed bolts. I heard other bedsprings creaking. Somebody across from me whimpered low, but it was sure never Slop Chute that done it.

Casey went to his knees, his hands forced almost level with his head. He swung his head back and forth and I saw his lips curled back from the big teeth clenched tight to-

gether. . . . Then he had the blackness on his shoulders like the weight of the whole world.

Casey went down on hands and knees with his back arched like a bridge. Almost I thought I heard him grunt . . . and he gained a little.

Then the blackness settled heavier, and I heard Casey's tendons pull out and his bones snap. Casey and Slop Chute disappeared under the blackness, and it overflowed from there over the whole bed . . . and more . . . and it seemed to fill the whole ward.

It wasn't like going to sleep, but I don't know anything it was like.

The masks must've towed off Slop Chute's hulk in the night, because it was gone when I woke up.

So was Casey.

Casey didn't show up for sick call and I knew then how much he meant to me. With him around to fight back I didn't feel as dead as they wanted me to. Without him I felt deader than ever. I even almost liked Mama Death when she charlesed me.

Mary came on duty that morning with a diamond on her third finger and a brighter sparkle in her eye. It was a little diamond, but it was Curly Waldo's and it kind of made up for Slop Chute.

I wished Casey was there to see it. He would've danced all around her and kissed her nice, the way he often did. Casey loved Mary.

It was Saturday, I know, because Mama Death come in and told some of us we could be wheeled to a special church hooraw before breakfast next morning if we wanted. We said no thanks. But it was a hell of a Saturday without Casey. Sharkey Brown said it for all of us—"With Casey gone, this place is like a morgue again."

Not even Carnahan could call him up.

"Sometimes I think I feel him stir, and then again I ain't sure," he said. "It beats hell where he's went to."

Going to sleep that night was as much like dying as it could be for men already dead.

Music from far off woke me up when it was just getting

light. I was going to try to cork off again, when I saw Carnahan was awake.

"Casey's around somewhere," he whispered.

"Where?" I asked, looking around. "I don't see him."

"I feel him," Carnahan said. "He's around."

The others began to wake up and look around. It was like the night Casey and Slop Chute went under. Then something moved in the solarium. . . .

It was Casey.

He come in the ward slow and bashful-like, jerking his head all around, with his eyes open wide, and looking scared we was going to throw something at him. He stopped in the middle of the ward.

"Yea, Casey!" Carnahan said in a low-clear voice.

Casey looked at him sharp.

"Yea, Casey!" we all said. "Come aboard, you hairy old bastard!"

Casey shook hands with himself over his head and went into his dance. He grinned . . . and I swear to God it was Slop Chute's big, lopsided grin he had on.

For the first time in my whole damn life I wanted to cry.

A DEATH IN THE HOUSE

Clifford D. Simak

Clifford D. Simak left his job as news editor of the Minneapolis *Star* in 1959 to initiate an educational program, the Science Reading Series, for the *Star*'s sister paper, the *Tribune*. The program is now used in 3,500 classrooms, and has won him a Westinghouse—American Association for the Advancement of Science Award (1966) and a Minnesota Academy of Science Award (1967) to put next to his 1953 International Fantasy Award (for *City*, the novel-length collection of his "Webster Family" stories), and his two "Hugo's" (for the novelette, "The Big Front Yard", in 1958, and the novel, *Way Station*, 1963).

Born in 1904 on a Wisconsin farm, Simak worked his way through a one-year teacher's training course, then taught rural school to earn enough to enter the University of Wisconsin; but the depression hit early in the midwest farm country, and in 1929 he left college for his first newspaper job, on the Iron River, Michigan, *Reporter*. In 1931, when his first science-fiction story was published, he was editor of the *Reporter*. Over the next few years, he changed jobs and markets regularly, producing only a handful of science-fiction stories; but by 1939, when he started on the *Star*, he had settled down to (what was to remain for twenty years) a fairly steady production of four or five science-fiction stories a year.

He has published twelve novels and short-story collections, and three books of non-fiction. Most recent: *Trilobite, Dinosaur and Man* (St. Martin's Press, 1966) and *Why Call Them Back from Heaven?* (Doubleday, 1967). At present, he divides his time between a weekly science column for the *Star*, work on his Science Reader Series, and turning out approximately one science-fiction novel a year. A new novel, *The Werewolf Project*, is due from Putnam's shortly.

"A Death in the House" was first published in *Galaxy*, October, 1959, and reprinted in the 5th SF Annual and in *Ideas in Literature* (Merrill, 1966).

OLD MOSE ABRAMS was out hunting cows when he found the alien. He didn't know it was an alien, but it was alive and it was in a lot of trouble and Old Mose, despite everything the neighbors said about him, was not the kind of man who could bear to leave a sick thing out there in the woods.

It was a horrid-looking thing, green and shiny, with some purple spots on it, and it was repulsive even twenty feet away. And it stank.

It had crawled, or tried to crawl, into a clump of hazel brush, but hadn't made it. The head part was in the brush and the rest lay out there naked in the open. Every now and then the parts that seemed to be arms and hands clawed feebly at the ground, trying to force itself deeper in the brush, but it was too weak; it never moved an inch.

It was groaning, too, but not too loud—just the kind of keening sound a lonesome wind might make around a wide, deep eave. But there was more in it than just the sound of winter wind; there was a frightened, desperate note that made the hair stand up on Old Mose's nape.

Old Mose stood there for quite a spell, making up his mind what he ought to do about it, and a while longer after that working up his courage, although most folks offhand would have said that he had plenty. But this was the sort of situation that took more than just ordinary screwed-up courage. It took a lot of foolhardiness.

But this was a wild, hurt thing and he couldn't leave it there, so he walked up to it and knelt down, and it was pretty hard to look at, though there was a sort of fascination in its repulsiveness that was hard to figure out—as if it were so horrible that it dragged one to it. And it stank in a way that no one had ever smelled before.

Mose, however, was not finicky. In the neighborhood, he was not well known for fastidity. Ever since his wife had died almost ten years before, he had lived alone on his untidy farm and the housekeeping that he did was the scandal of all the neighbor women. Once a year, if he got around

to it, he sort of shoveled out the house, but the rest of the year he just let things accumulate.

So he wasn't as upset as some might have been with the way the creature smelled. But the sight of it upset him, and it took him quite a while before he could bring himself to touch it, and when he finally did, he was considerably surprised. He had been prepared for it to be either cold or slimy, or maybe even both. But it was neither. It was warm and hard and it had a clean feel to it, and he was reminded of the way a green corn stalk would feel.

He slid his hand beneath the hurt thing and pulled it gently from the clump of hazel brush and turned it over so he could see its face. It hadn't any face. It had an enlargement at the top of it, like a flower on top of a stalk, although its body wasn't any stalk, and there was a fringe around this enlargement that wiggled like a can of worms, and it was then that Mose almost turned around and ran.

But he stuck it out.

He squatted there, staring at the no-face with the fringe of worms, and he got cold all over and his stomach doubled up on him and he was stiff with fright—and the fright got worse when it seemed to him that the keening of the thing was coming from the worms.

Mose was a stubborn man. One had to be stubborn to run a runty farm like this. Stubborn and insensitive in a lot of ways. But not insensitive, of course, to a thing in pain.

Finally he was able to pick it up and hold it in his arms and there was nothing to it, for it didn't weigh much. Less than a half-grown shoat, he figured.

He went up the woods path with it, heading back for home, and it seemed to him the smell of it was less. He was hardly scared at all and he was warm again and not cold all over.

For the thing was quieter now and keening just a little. And although he could not be sure of it, there were times when it seemed as if the thing were snuggling up to him, the way a scared and hungry baby will snuggle to any grown person that comes and picks it up.

Old Mose reached the buildings and he stood out in the yard a minute, wondering whether he should take it to the barn or house. The barn, of course, was the natural place

for it, for it wasn't human—it wasn't even as close to human as a dog or cat or sick lamb would be.

He didn't hesitate too long, however. He took it into the house and laid it on what he called a bed, next to the kitchen stove. He got it straightened out all neat and orderly and pulled a dirty blanket over it, and then went to the stove and stirred up the fire until there was some flame.

Then he pulled up a chair beside the bed and had a good, hard, wondering look at this thing he had brought home. It had quieted down a lot and seemed more comfortable than it had out in the woods. He tucked the blanket snug around it with a tenderness that surprised himself. He wondered what he had that it might eat, and even if he knew, how he'd manage feeding it, for it seemed to have no mouth.

"But you don't need to worry none," he told it. "Now that I got you under a roof, you'll be all right. I don't know too much about it, but I'll take care of you the best I can."

By now it was getting on toward evening, and he looked out the window and saw that the cows he had been hunting had come home by themselves.

"I got to go get the milking done and the other chores," he told the thing lying on the bed, "but it won't take me long. I'll be right back."

Old Mose loaded up the stove so the kitchen would stay warm and he tucked the thing in once again, then got his milk pails and went down to the barn.

He fed the sheep and pigs and horses and he milked the cows. He hunted eggs and shut the chicken house. He pumped a tank of water.

Then he went back to the house.

It was dark now and he lit the oil lamp on the table, for he was against electricity. He'd refused to sign up when REA had run out the line and a lot of the neighbors had gotten sore at him for being unco-operative. Not that he cared, of course.

He had a look at the thing upon the bed. It didn't seem to be any better, or any worse, for that matter. If it had been a sick lamb or an ailing calf, he could have known right off how it was getting on, but this thing was different. There was no way to tell.

He fixed himself some supper and ate it and wished he

knew how to feed the thing. And he wished, too, that he knew how to help it. He'd got it under shelter and he had it warm, but was that right or wrong for something like this? He had no idea.

He wondered if he should try to get some help, then felt squeamish about asking help when he couldn't say exactly what had to be helped. But then he wondered how he would feel himself if he were in a far, strange country, all played out and sick, and no one to get him any help because they didn't know exactly what he was.

That made up his mind for him and he walked over to the phone. But should he call a doctor or a veterinarian? He decided to call the doctor because the thing was in the house. If it had been in the barn, he would have called the veterinarian.

He was on a rural line and the hearing wasn't good and he was halfway deaf, so he didn't use the phone too often. He had told himself at times it was nothing but another aggravation and there had been a dozen times he had threatened to have it taken out. But now he was glad he hadn't.

The operator got old Doctor Benson and they couldn't hear one another too well, but Mose finally made the doctor understand who was calling and that he needed him and the doctor said he'd come.

With some relief, Mose hung up the phone and was just standing there, not doing anything, when he was struck by the thought that there might be others of these things down there in the woods. He had no idea what they were or what they might be doing or where they might be going, but it was pretty evident that the one upon the bed was some sort of stranger from a very distant place. It stood to reason that there might be more than one of them, for far traveling was a lonely business and anyone—or anything—would like to have some company along.

He got the lantern down off the peg and lit it and went stumping out the door. The night was as black as a stack of cats and the lantern light was feeble, but that made not a bit of difference, for Mose knew this farm of his like the back of his hand.

He went down the path into the woods. It was a spooky place, but it took more than woods at night to spook Old Mose. At the place where he had found the thing, he looked

around, pushing through the brush and holding the lantern high so he could see a bigger area, but he didn't find another one of them.

He did find something else, though—a sort of outsize birdcage made of metal lattice work that had wrapped itself around an eight-inch hickory tree. He tried to pull it loose, but it was jammed so tight that he couldn't budge it.

He sighted back the way it must have come. He could see where it had plowed its way through the upper branches of the trees, and out beyond were stars, shining bleakly with the look of far away.

Mose had no doubt that the thing lying on his bed beside the kitchen stove had come in this birdcage contraption. He marveled some at that, but he didn't fret himself too much, for the whole thing was so unearthly that he knew he had little chance of pondering it out.

He walked back to the house and he scarcely had the lantern blown out and hung back on its peg than he heard a car drive up.

The doctor, when he came up to the door, became a little grumpy at seeing Old Mose standing there.

"You don't look sick to me," the doctor said. "Not sick enough to drag me clear out here at night."

"I ain't sick," said Mose.

"Well, then," said the doctor, more grumpily than ever, "what did you mean by phoning me?"

"I got someone who is sick," said Mose. "I hope you can help him. I would have tried myself, but I don't know how to go about it."

The doctor came inside and Mose shut the door behind him.

"You got something rotten in here?" asked the doctor.

"No, it's just the way he smells. It was pretty bad at first, but I'm getting used to it by now."

The doctor saw the thing lying on the bed and went over to it. Old Mose heard him sort of gasp and could see him standing there, very stiff and straight. Then he bent down and had a good look at the critter on the bed.

When he straightened up and turned around to Mose, the only thing that kept him from being downright angry was that he was so flabbergasted.

"Mose," he yelled, "what *is* this?"

"I don't know," said Mose. "I found it in the woods and it was hurt and wailing and I couldn't leave it there."

"You think it's sick?"

"I know it is," said Mose. "It needs help awful bad. I'm afraid it's dying."

The doctor turned back to the bed again and pulled the blanket down, then went and got the lamp so that he could see. He looked the critter up and down, and he prodded it with a skittish finger, and he made the kind of mysterious clucking sound that only doctors make.

Then he pulled the blanket back over it again and took the lamp back to the table.

"Mose," he said, "I can't do a thing for it."

"But you're a doctor!"

"A human doctor, Mose. I don't know what this thing is, but it isn't human. I couldn't even guess what is wrong with it, if anything. And I wouldn't know what could be safely done for it even if I could diagnose its illness. I'm not even sure it's an animal. There are a lot of things about it that argue it's a plant."

Then the doctor asked Mose straight out how he came to find it and Mose told him exactly how it happened. But he didn't tell him anything about the birdcage, for when he thought about it, it sounded so fantastic that he couldn't bring himself to tell it. Just finding the critter and having it here was bad enough, without throwing in the birdcage.

"I tell you what," the doctor said. "You got something here that's outside all human knowledge. I doubt there's ever been a thing like this seen on Earth before. I have no idea what it is and I wouldn't try to guess. If I were you, I'd get in touch with the university up at Madison. There might be someone there who could get it figured out. Even if they couldn't they'd be interested. They'd want to study it."

Mose went to the cupboard and got the cigar box almost full of silver dollars and paid the doctor. The doctor put the dollars in his pocket, joshing Mose about his eccentricity.

But Mose was stubborn about his silver dollars. "Paper money don't seem legal, somehow," he declared. "I like the feel of silver and the way it clinks. It's got authority."

The doctor left and he didn't seem as upset as Mose had

been afraid he might be. As soon as he was gone, Mose pulled up a chair and sat down beside the bed.

It wasn't right, he thought, that the thing should be so sick and no one to help—no one who knew any way to help it.

He sat in the chair and listened to the ticking of the clock, loud in the kitchen silence, and the crackling of the wood burning in the stove.

Looking at the thing lying on the bed, he had an almost fierce hope that it could get well again and stay with him. Now that its birdcage was all banged up, maybe there'd be nothing it could do but stay. And he hoped it would, for already the house felt less lonely.

Sitting in the chair between the stove and bed, Mose realized how lonely it had been. It had not been quite so bad until Towser died. He had tried to bring himself to get another dog, but he never had been able to. For there was no dog that would take the place of Towser and it had seemed unfaithful to even try. He could have gotten a cat, of course, but that would remind him too much of Molly; she had been very fond of cats, and until the time she died, there had always been two or three of them underfoot around the place.

But now he was alone. Alone with his farm and his stubbornness and his silver dollars. The doctor thought, like all the rest of them, that the only silver Mose had was in the cigar box in the cupboard. There wasn't one of them who knew about the old iron kettle piled plumb full of them, hidden underneath the floor boards of the living room. He chuckled at the thought of how he had them fooled. He'd give a lot to see his neighbors' faces if they could only know. But he was not the one to tell them. If they were to find it out, they'd have to find it out themselves.

He nodded in the chair and finally he slept, sitting upright, with his chin resting on his chest and his crossed arms wrapped around himself as if to keep him warm.

When he woke, in the dark before the dawn, with the lamp flickering on the table and the fire in the stove burned low, the alien had died.

There was no doubt of death. The thing was cold and rigid and the husk that was its body was rough and drying

out—as a corn stalk in the field dries out, whipping in the wind once the growing had been ended.

Mose pulled the blanket up to cover it, and although this was early to do the chores, he went out by lantern light and got them done.

After breakfast, he heated water and washed his face and shaved, and it was the first time in years he'd shaved any day but Sunday. Then he put on his one good suit and slicked down his hair and got the old jalopy out of the machine shed and drove into town.

He hunted up Eb Dennison, the town clerk, who also was the secretary of the cemetery association.

"Eb," he said, "I want to buy a lot."

"But you've got a lot," protested Eb.

"That plot," said Mose, "is a family plot. There's just room for me and Molly."

"Well, then," asked Eb, "why another one? You have no other members of the family."

"I found someone in the woods," said Mose. "I took him home and he died last night. I plan to bury him."

"If you found a dead man in the woods," Eb warned him, "you better notify the coroner and sheriff."

"In time I may," said Mose, not intending to. "Now how about that plot?"

Washing his hands of the affair entirely, Eb sold him the plot.

Having bought his plot, Mose went to the undertaking establishment run by Albert Jones.

"Al," he said, "there's been a death out at the house. A stranger I found out in the woods. He doesn't seem to have anyone and I aim to take care of it."

"You got a death certificate?" asked Al, who subscribed to none of the niceties affected by most funeral parlor operators.

"Well, no, I haven't."

"Was there a doctor in attendance?"

"Doc Benson came out last night."

"He should have made you out one. I'll give him a ring."

He phoned Doctor Benson and talked with him a while and got red around the gills. He finally slammed down the phone and turned on Mose.

"I don't know what you're trying to pull off," he fumed,

"but Doc tells me this thing of yours isn't even human. I don't take care of dogs or cats or—"

"This ain't no dog or cat."

"I don't care what it is. It's got to be human for me to handle it. And don't go trying to bury it in the cemetery, because it's against the law."

Considerably discouraged, Mose left the undertaking parlor and trudged slowly up the hill toward the town's one and only church.

He found the minister in his study working on a sermon. Mose sat down in a chair and fumbled his battered hat around and around in his work-scarred hands.

"Parson," he said, "I'll tell you the story from first to last," and he did. He added, "I don't know what it is. I guess no one else does, either. But it's dead and in need of decent burial and that's the least that I can do. I can't bury it in the cemetery, so I suppose I'll have to find a place for it on the farm. I wonder if you could bring yourself to come out and say a word or two."

The minister gave the matter some deep consideration.

"I'm sorry, Mose," he said at last. "I don't believe I can. I am not sure at all the church would approve of it."

"This thing may not be human," said Old Mose, "but it is one of God's critters."

The minister thought some more, and did some wondering out loud, but made up his mind finally that he couldn't do it.

So Mose went down the street to where his car was waiting and drove home, thinking about what heels some humans are.

Back at the farm again, he got a pick and shovel and went into the garden, and there, in one corner of it, he dug a grave. He went out to the machine shed to hunt up some boards to make the thing a casket, but it turned out that he had used the last of the lumber to patch up the hog pen.

Mose went to the house and dug around in a chest in one of the back rooms which had not been used for years, hunting for a sheet to use as a winding shroud, since there would be no casket. He couldn't find a sheet, but he did unearth an old white linen table cloth. He figured that would do, so he took it to the kitchen.

He pulled back the blanket and looked at the critter

lying there in death and a sort of lump came into his throat at the thought of it—how it had died so lonely and so far from home without a creature of its own to spend its final hours with. And naked, too, without a stitch of clothing and with no possession, with not a thing to leave behind as a remembrance of itself.

He spread the table cloth out on the floor beside the bed and lifted the thing and laid it on the table cloth. As he laid it down, he saw the pocket in it—if it was a pocket—a sort of slitted flap in the center of what could be its chest. He ran his hand across the pocket area. There was a lump inside it. He crouched for a long moment beside the body, wondering what to do.

Finally he reached his fingers into the flap and took out the thing that bulged. It was a ball, a little bigger than a tennis ball, made of cloudy glass—or, at least, it looked like glass. He squatted there, staring at it, then took it to the window for a better look.

There was nothing strange at all about the ball. It was just a cloudy ball of glass and it had a rough, dead feel about it, just as the body had.

He shook his head and took it back and put it where he'd found it and wrapped the body securely in the cloth. He carried it to the garden and put it in the grave. Standing solemnly at the head of the grave, he said a few short words and then shoveled in the dirt.

He had meant to make a mound above the grave and he had intended to put up a cross, but at the last he didn't do either one of these. There would be snoopers. The word would get around and they'd be coming out and hunting for the spot where he had buried this thing he had found out in the woods. So there must be no mound to mark the place and no cross as well. Perhaps it was for the best, he told himself, for what could he have carved or written on the cross?

By this time it was well past noon and he was getting hungry, but he didn't stop to eat, because there were other things to do. He went out into the pasture and caught up Bess and hitched her to the stoneboat and went down into the woods.

He hitched her to the birdcage that was wrapped around the tree and she pulled it loose as pretty as you please. Then

he loaded it on the stoneboat and hauled it up the hill and stowed it in the back of the machine shed, in the far corner by the forge.

After that, he hitched Bess to the garden plow and gave the garden a cultivating that it didn't need so it would be fresh dirt all over and no one could locate where he'd dug the grave.

He was just finishing the plowing when Sheriff Doyle drove up and got out of the car. The sheriff was a soft-spoken man, but he was no dawdler. He got right to the point.

"I hear," he said, "you found something in the woods."

"That I did," said Mose.

"I hear it died on you."

"Sheriff, you heard right."

"I'd like to see it, Mose."

"Can't. I buried it. And I ain't telling where."

"Mose," the sheriff said, "I don't want to make you trouble, but you did an illegal thing. You can't go finding people in the woods and just bury them when they up and die on you."

"You talk to Doc Benson?"

The sheriff nodded. "He said it wasn't any kind of thing he'd ever seen before. He said it wasn't human."

"Well, then," said Mose, "I guess that lets you out. If it wasn't human, there could be no crime against a person. And if it wasn't owned, there ain't any crime against property. There's been no one around to claim they owned the thing, is there?"

The sheriff rubbed his chin. "No, there hasn't. Maybe you're right. Where did you study law?"

"I never studied law. I never studied nothing. I just use common sense."

"Doc said something about the folks up at the university might want to look at it."

"I tell you, Sheriff," said Mose. "This thing came here from somewhere and it died. I don't know where it came from and I don't know what it was and I don't hanker none to know. To me it was just a living thing that needed help real bad. It was alive and it had its dignity and in death it commanded some respect. When the rest of you

refused it decent burial, I did the best I could. And that is all there is to it."

"All right, Mose," the sheriff said, "if that's how you want it."

He turned around and stalked back to the car. Mose stood beside old Bess hitched to her plow and watched him drive away. He drove fast and reckless as if he might be angry.

Mose put the plow away and turned the horse back to the pasture and by now it was time to do chores again.

He got the chores all finished and made himself some supper and after supper sat beside the stove, listening to the ticking of the clock, loud in the silent house, and the crackle of the fire.

All night long the house was lonely.

The next afternoon, as he was plowing corn, a reporter came and walked up the row with him and talked with him when he came to the end of the row. Mose didn't like this reporter much. He was too flip and he asked some funny questions, so Mose clammed up and didn't tell him much.

A few days later, a man showed up from the university and showed him the story the reporter had gone back and written. The story made fun of Mose.

"I'm sorry," the professor said. "These newspapermen are unaccountable. I wouldn't worry too much about anything they write."

"I don't," Mose told him.

The man from the university asked a lot of questions and made quite a point about how important it was that he should see the body.

But Mose only shook his head. "It's at peace," he said. "I aim to leave it that way."

The man went away disgusted, but still quite dignified.

For several days there were people driving by and dropping in, the idly curious, and there were some neighbors Mose hadn't seen for months. But he gave them all short shrift and in a little while they left him alone and he went on with his farming and the house stayed lonely.

He thought again that maybe he should get a dog, but he thought of Towser and he couldn't do it.

One day, working in the garden, he found the plant that

grew out of the grave. It was a funny-looking plant and his first impulse was to root it out.

But he didn't do it, for the plant intrigued him. It was a kind he'd never seen before and he decided he would let it grow, for a while at least, to see what kind it was. It was a bulky, fleshy plant, with heavy, dark-green, curling leaves, and it reminded him in some ways of the skunk cabbage that burgeoned in the woods come spring.

There was another visitor, the queerest of the lot. He was a dark and intense man who said he was the president of a flying saucer club. He wanted to know if Mose had talked with the thing he'd found out in the woods and seemed terribly disappointed when Mose told him he hadn't. He wanted to know if Mose had found a vehicle the creature might have traveled in and Mose lied to him about it. He was afraid, the wild way the man was acting, that he might demand to search the place, and if he had, he'd likely have found the birdcage hidden in the machine shed back in the corner by the forge. But the man got to lecturing Mose about withholding vital information.

Finally Mose had taken all he could of it, so he stepped into the house and picked up the shotgun from behind the door. The president of the flying saucer club said good-by rather hastily and got out of there.

Farm life went on as usual, with the corn laid by and the haying started and out in the garden the strange plant kept on growing and now was taking shape. Old Mose couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the sort of shape it took and he spent long evening hours just standing in the garden, watching it and wondering if his loneliness were playing tricks on him.

The morning came when he found the plant standing at the door and waiting for him. He should have been surprised, of course, but he really wasn't, for he had lived with it, watching it of eventide, and although he had not dared admit it even to himself, he had known what it was.

For here was the creature he'd found in the woods, no longer sick and keening, no longer close to death, but full of life and youth.

It was not the same entirely, though. He stood and looked at it and could see the differences—the little differences that might have been those between youth and age, or

between a father and a son, or again the differences expressed in an evolutionary pattern.

"Good morning," said Mose, not feeling strange at all to be talking to the thing. "It's good to have you back."

The thing standing in the yard did not answer him. But that was not important; he had not expected that it would. The one important point was that he had something he could talk to.

"I'm going out to do the chores," said Mose. "You want to tag along?"

It tagged along with him and it watched him as he did the chores and he talked to it, which was a vast improvement over talking to himself.

At breakfast, he laid an extra plate for it and pulled up an extra chair, but it turned out the critter was not equipped to use a chair, for it wasn't hinged to sit.

Nor did it eat. That bothered Mose at first, for he was hospitable, but he told himself that a big, strong, strapping youngster like this one knew enough to take care of itself, and he probably didn't need to worry too much about how it got along.

After breakfast, he went out to the garden, with the critter accompanying him, and sure enough, the plant was gone. There was a collapsed husk lying on the ground, the outer covering that had been the cradle of the creature at his side.

Then he went to the machine shed and the creature saw the birdcage and rushed over to it and looked it over minutely. Then it turned around to Mose and made a sort of pleading gesture.

Mose went over to it and laid his hands on one of the twisted bars and the critter stood beside him and laid its hands on, too, and they pulled together. It was no use. They could move the metal some, but not enough to pull it back in shape again.

They stood and looked at one another, although looking may not be the word, for the critter had no eyes to look with. It made some funny motions with its hands, but Mose couldn't understand. Then it lay down on the floor and showed him how the birdcage ribs were fastened to the base.

It took a while for Mose to understand how the fastening

worked and he never did know exactly why it did. There wasn't, actually, any reason that it should work that way.

First you applied some pressure, just the right amount at the exact and correct angle, and the bar would move a little. Then you applied some more pressure, again the exact amount and at the proper angle, and the bar would move some more. You did this three times and the bar came loose, although there was, God knows, no reason why it should.

Mose started a fire in the forge and shoveled in some coal and worked the bellows while the critter watched. But when he picked up the bar to put it in the fire, the critter got between him and the forge and wouldn't let him near. Mose realized then he couldn't—or wasn't supposed to—heat the bar to straighten it and he never questioned the entire rightness of it. For, he told himself, this thing must surely know the proper way to do it.

So he took the bar over to the anvil and started hammering it back into shape again, cold, without the use of fire, while the critter tried to show him the shape it should be. It took quite a while, but finally it was straightened out to the critter's satisfaction.

Mose figured they'd have themselves a time getting the bar back in place again, but it slipped on as slick as could be.

Then they took off another bar and this one went faster, now that Mose had the hang of it.

But it was hard and grueling labor. They worked all day and only straightened out five bars.

It took four solid days to get the bars on the birdcage hammered into shape and all the time the hay was waiting to be cut.

But it was all right with Mose. He had someone to talk to and the house had lost its loneliness.

When they got the bars back in place, the critter slipped into the cage and starting fooling with a dingus on the roof of it that looked like a complicated basket. Mose, watching, figured that the basket was some sort of control.

The critter was discouraged. It walked around the shed looking for something and seemed unable to find it. It came back to Mose and made its despairing, pleading gesture. Mose showed it iron and steel; he dug into a carton where

he kept bolts and clamps and bushings and scraps of metal and other odds and ends, finding brass and copper and even some aluminum, but it wasn't any of these.

And Mose was glad—a bit ashamed for feeling glad, but glad all the same.

For it had been clear to him that when the birdcage was all ready, the critter would be leaving him. It had been impossible for Mose to stand in the way of the repair of the cage, or to refuse to help. But now that it apparently couldn't be, he found himself well pleased.

Now the critter would have to stay with him and he'd have someone to talk to and the house would not be lonely. It would be welcome, he told himself, to have folks again. The critter was almost as good a companion as Towser.

Next morning, while Mose was fixing breakfast, he reached up in the cupboard to get the box of oatmeal and his hand struck the cigar box and it came crashing to the floor. It fell over on its side and the lid came open and the dollars went free-wheeling all around the kitchen.

Out of the corner of his eye, Mose saw the critter leaping quickly in pursuit of one of them. It snatched it up and turned to Mose, with the coin held between its fingers, and a sort of thrumming noise was coming out of the nest of worms on top of it.

It bent and scooped up more of them and cuddled them and danced a sort of jig, and Mose knew, with a sinking heart, that it had been silver the critter had been hunting.

So Mose got down on his hands and knees and helped the critter gather up all the dollars. They put them back into the cigar box and Mose picked up the box and gave it to the critter.

The critter took it and hefted it and had a disappointed look. Taking the box over to the table, it took the dollars out and stacked them in neat piles and Mose could see it was very disappointed.

Perhaps, after all, Mose thought, it had not been silver the thing had been hunting for. Maybe it had made a mistake in thinking that the silver was some other kind of metal.

Mose got down the oatmeal and poured it into some water and put it on the stove. When it was cooked and the

coffee was ready, he carried his breakfast to the table and sat down to eat.

The critter still was standing across the table from him, stacking and restacking the piles of silver dollars. And now it showed him with a hand held above the stacks, that it needed more of them. This many stacks, it showed him, and each stack so high.

Mose sat stricken, with a spoon full of oatmeal halfway to his mouth. He thought of all those other dollars, the iron kettle packed with them, underneath the floor boards in the living room. And he couldn't do it; they were the only thing he had—except the critter now. And he could not give them up so the critter could go and leave him too.

He ate his bowl of oatmeal without tasting it and drank two cups of coffee. And all the time the critter stood there and showed him how much more it needed.

"I can't do it for you," Old Mose said. "I've done all you can expect of any living being. I found you in the woods and I gave you warmth and shelter. I tried to help you, and when I couldn't, at least I gave you a place to die in. I buried you and protected you from all those other people and I did not pull you up when you started growing once again. Surely you can't expect me to keep on giving endlessly."

But it was no good. The critter could not hear him and he did not convince himself.

He got up from the table and walked into the living room with the critter trailing him. He loosened the floor boards and took out the kettle, and the critter, when it saw what was in the kettle, put its arms around itself and hugged in happiness.

They lugged the money out to the machine shed and Mose built a fire in the forge and put the kettle in the fire and started melting down that hard-saved money.

There were times he thought he couldn't finish the job, but he did.

The critter got the basket out of the birdcage and put it down beside the forge and dipped out the molten silver with an iron ladle and poured it here and there into the basket, shaping it in place with careful hammer taps.

It took a long time, for it was exacting work, but finally it was done and the silver almost gone. The critter lugged

the basket back into the birdcage and fastened it in place.

It was almost evening now and Mose had to go and do the chores. He half expected the thing might haul out the birdcage and be gone when he came back to the house. And he tried to be sore at it for its selfishness—it had taken from him and had not tried to pay him back—it had not, so far as he could tell, even tried to thank him. But he made a poor job of being sore at it.

It was waiting for him when he came from the barn carrying two pails full of milk. It followed him inside the house and stood around and he tried to talk to it. But he didn't have the heart to do much talking. He could not forget that it would be leaving, and the pleasure of its present company was lost in his terror of the loneliness to come.

For now he didn't even have his money to help ward off the loneliness.

As he lay in bed that night, strange thoughts came creeping in upon him—the thought of an even greater loneliness than he had ever known upon this runty farm, the terrible, devastating loneliness of the empty wastes that lay between the stars, a driven loneliness while one hunted for a place or person that remained a misty thought one could not define, but which it was most important one should find.

It was a strange thing for him to be thinking, and quite suddenly he knew it was no thought of his, but of this other that was in the room with him.

He tried to raise himself, he fought to raise himself, but he couldn't do it. He held his head up a moment, then fell back upon the pillow and went sound asleep.

Next morning, after Mose had eaten breakfast, the two of them went to the machine shed and dragged the birdcage out. It stood there, a weird alien thing, in the chill brightness of the dawn.

The critter walked up to it and started to slide between two of the bars, but when it was halfway through, it stepped out again and moved over to confront Old Mose.

"Good-by, friend," said Mose. "I'll miss you."

There was a strange stinging in his eyes.

The other held out its hand in farewell, and Mose took it and there was something in the hand he grasped, something round and smooth that was transferred from its hand to his.

The thing took its hand away and stepped quickly to the birdcage and slid between the bars. The hands reached for the basket and there was a sudden flicker and the birdcage was no longer there.

Mose stood lonely in the barnyard, looking at the place where there was no birdcage and remembering what he had felt or thought—or been told?—the night before as he lay in bed.

Already the critter would be there, out between the stars, in that black and utter loneliness, hunting for a place or thing or person that no human mind could grasp.

Slowly Mose turned around to go back to the house, to get the pails and go down to the barn to get the milking done.

He remembered the object in his hand and lifted his still-clenched fist in front of him. He opened his fingers and the little crystal ball lay there in his palm—and it was exactly like the one he'd found in the slitted flap in the body he had buried in the garden. Except that one had been dead and cloudy and this one had the living glow of a distant-burning fire.

Looking at it, he had the strange feeling of a happiness and comfort such as he had seldom known before, as if there were many people with him and all of them were friends.

He closed his hand upon it and the happiness stayed on —and it was all wrong, for there was not a single reason that he should be happy. The critter finally had left him and his money was all gone and he had no friends, but still he kept on feeling good.

He put the ball into his pocket and stepped spryly for the house to get the milking pails. He pursed up his whiskered lips and began to whistle and it had been a long, long time since he had even thought to whistle.

Maybe he was happy, he told himself, because the critter had not left without stopping to take his hand and try to say good-by.

And a gift, no matter how worthless it might be, how cheap a trinket, still had a basic value in simple sentiment. It had been many years since anyone had bothered to give him a gift.

It was dark and lonely and unending in the depths of space with no Companion. It might be long before another was obtainable.

It perhaps was a foolish thing to do, but the old creature had been such a kind savage, so fumbling and so pitiful and eager to help. And one who travels far and fast must likewise travel light. There had been nothing else to give.

SPACE-TIME FOR SPRINGERS

Fritz Leiber

Fritz Leiber is the author of seven novels and five short-story collections; since the appearance of his first story in 1939, he has published close to 200 magazine stories, almost all science fiction and fantasy, and a large number of critical and scholarly articles on the combined fields. His work has appeared in more than fifty anthologies, a number of stories have been dramatized for television, and his memorable novel, *Conjure Wife*, was made into a movie under the title *Burn, Witch, Burn*.

Born in Chicago in 1910, Leiber spent his first years touring with his actor-parents in Robert B. Mantell's Shakespeare Company. Later, he lived with two maiden aunts in Chicago during the school year and spent summers at his parents' off-season home on the Jersey shore. He began writing while at the University of Chicago (Philosophy, Phi Beta Kappa), creating with Harry Fischer the background of the first "Grey Mouser" stories.

He spent a year studying for the Episcopal ministry, two years acting in his father's Shakespeare Company, and two years in the movies, during which time he initiated a close correspondence with H. P. Lovecraft, a major influence on his early work. Other jobs included a year of teaching at Occidental College, and editorial work on an encyclopedia and at *Science Digest*. Since 1957 he has devoted his full time to writing.

His first book was a collection, *Night's Black Agents* (Arkham House, 1947), followed shortly by the novel, *Gather Darkness*. He has received two "Hugo" awards: for *The Big Time* (1958) and *The Wanderer* (1964). Most recent titles: *The Night of the Wolf* (Ballantine, 1966), and a "novelization," *Tarzan and the Valley of Gold*.

He is currently working on a book on the fantasy novel for the University of Southern Illinois Press and completing a novel version of some of the "Mouser" stories. A new short-story collection will be published shortly by Rupert Hart-Davis in England.

Seven Leiber stories have appeared in the *SF Annuals*: "The Beat

Cluster," in the 7th Annual, also appeared in the short-story collection, *A Pail of Air*. "The Man Who Made Friends with Electricity" was in the 8th Annual; "237 Talking Statues, Etc." in the 9th; "Be of Good Cheer" the 10th; "Moon Duel", the 11th. "Mariana", from the 5th Annual, is also included in this volume. "Space-Time for Springers" was first published in *Star Science Fiction #4* (Ballantine, 1958), and reprinted in *Star of Stars* (1960); and in the 4th SF Annual.

GUMMITCH WAS A SUPERKITTEN, as he knew very well, with an I.Q. of about 160. Of course, he didn't talk. But everybody knows that I.Q. tests based on language ability are very one-sided. Besides, he would talk as soon as they started setting a place for him at table and pouring him coffee. Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra ate horsemeat from pans on the floor and they didn't talk. Baby dined in his crib on milk from a bottle and he didn't talk. Sissy sat at table but they didn't pour her coffee and she didn't talk—not one word. Father and Mother (whom Gummitch had nicknamed Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here) sat at table and poured each other coffee and they *did* talk. Q.E.D.

Meanwhile, he would get by very well on thought projection and intuitive understanding of all human speech—not even to mention cat patois, which almost any civilized animal could play by ear. The dramatic monologues and Socratic dialogues, the quiz and panel-show appearances, the felidological expedition to darkest Africa (where he would uncover the real truth behind lions and tigers), the exploration of the outer planets—all these could wait. The same went for the books for which he was ceaselessly accumulating material: *The Encylopedia of Odors, Anthropofeline Psychology, Invisible Signs and Secret Wonders, Space-Time for Springers, Slit Eyes Look at Life,* et cetera. For the present it was enough to live existence to the hilt and soak up knowledge, missing no experience proper to his age level—to rush about with tail aflame.

So to all outward appearances Gummitch was just a vividly normal kitten, as shown by the succession of nicknames he bore along the magic path that led from blue-eyed

infancy toward puberty: Little One, Squawker, Portly, Bumble (for purring not clumsiness), Old Starved-to-Death, Fierso, Loverboy (affection not sex), Spook and Catnik. Of these only the last perhaps requires further explanation: the Russians had just sent Muttnik up after Sputnik, so that when one evening Gummitch streaked three times across the firmament of the living room floor in the same direction, past the fixed stars of the humans and the comparatively slow-moving heavenly bodies of the two older cats, and Kitty-Come-Here quoted the line from Keats:

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;

it was inevitable that Old Horsemeat would say, "Ah—Catnik!"

The new name lasted all of three days, to be replaced by Gummitch, which showed signs of becoming permanent.

The little cat was on the verge of truly growing up, at least so Gummitch overheard Old Horsemeat comment to Kitty-Come-Here. A few short weeks, Old Horsemeat said, and Gummitch's fiery flesh would harden, his slim neck thicken, the electricity vanish from everything but his fur, and all his delightful kittenish qualities rapidly give way to the earth-bound singlemindedness of a tom. They'd be lucky, Old Horsemeat concluded, if he didn't turn completely surly like Ashurbanipal.

Gummitch listened to these predictions with gay unconcern and with secret amusement from his vantage point of superior knowledge, in the same spirit that he accepted so many phases of his outwardly conventional existence: the murderous sidelong looks he got from Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra as he devoured his own horsemeat from his own little tin pan, because they sometimes were given canned catfood but he never; the stark idiocy of Baby, who didn't know the difference between a live cat and a stuffed teddy bear and who tried to cover up his ignorance by making goo-goo noises and poking indiscriminately at all eyes; the far more serious—because cleverly hidden—maliciousness of Sissy, who had to be watched out for

warily—especially when you were alone—and whose retarded—even warped—development, Gummitch knew, was Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here's deepest, most secret, worry (more of Sissy and her evil ways soon); the limited intellect of Kitty-Come-Here, who despite the amounts of coffee she drank was quite as featherbrained as kittens are supposed to be and who firmly believed, for example, that kittens operated in the same space-time as other beings—that to get from *here* to *there* they had to cross the space *between*—and similar fallacies; the mental stodginess of even Old Horsemeat, who although he understood quite a bit of the secret doctrine and talked intelligently to Gummitch when they were alone, nevertheless suffered from the limitations of his status—a rather nice old god but a maddeningly slow-witted one.

But Gummitch could easily forgive all this massed inadequacy and downright brutishness in his felino-human household, because he was aware that he alone knew the real truth about himself and about other kittens and babies as well, the truth which was hidden from weaker minds, the truth that was as intrinsically incredible as the germ theory of disease or the origin of the whole great universe in the explosion of a single atom.

As a baby kitten Gummitch had believed that Old Horsemeat's two hands were hairless kittens permanently attached to the ends of Old Horsemeat's arms but having an independent life of their own. How he had hated and loved those two five-legged sallow monsters, his first playmates, comforters and battle-opponents!

Well, even that fantastic discarded notion was but a trifling fancy compared to the real truth about himself!

The forehead of Zeus split open to give birth to Minerva. Gummitch had been born from the waist-fold of a dirty old terrycloth bathrobe, Old Horsemeat's basic garment. The kitten was intuitively certain of it and had proved it to himself as well as any Descartes or Aristotle. In a kitten-size tuck of that ancient bathrobe the atoms of his body had gathered and quickened into life. His earliest memories were of snoozing wrapped in terrycloth, warmed by Old Horsemeat's heat. Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here were his true parents. The other theory of his origin, the one he heard Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here recount

from time to time—that he had been the only surviving kitten of a litter abandoned next door, that he had had the shakes from vitamin deficiency and lost the tip of his tail and the hair on his paws and had to be nursed back to life and health with warm yellowish milk-and-vitamins fed from an eyedropper—that other theory was just one of those rationalizations with which mysterious nature cloaks the birth of heroes, perhaps wisely veiling the truth from minds unable to bear it, a rationalization as false as Kitty-Come-Here and Old Horsemeat's touching belief that Sissy and Baby were their children rather than the cubs of Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra.

The day that Gummitch had discovered by pure intuition the secret of his birth he had been filled with a wild instant excitement. He had only kept it from tearing him to pieces by rushing out to the kitchen and striking and devouring a fried scallop, torturing it fiendishly first for twenty minutes.

And the secret of his birth was only the beginning. His intellectual faculties aroused, Gummitch had two days later intuited a further and greater secret: since he was the child of humans he would, upon reaching this maturation date of which Old Horsemeat had spoken, turn not into a sullen tom but into a godlike human youth with reddish golden hair the color of his present fur. He would be poured coffee; and he would instantly be able to talk, probably in all languages. While Sissy (how clear it was now!) would at approximately the same time shrink and fur out into a sharp-clawed and vicious she-cat dark as her hair, sex and self-love her only concerns, fit harem-mate for Cleopatra, concubine to Ashurbanipal.

Exactly the same was true, Gummitch realized at once, for all kittens and babies, all humans and cats, wherever they might dwell. Metamorphosis was as much a part of the fabric of their lives as it was of the insects'. It was also the basic fact underlying all legends of werewolves, vampires and witches' familiars.

If you just rid your mind of preconceived notions, Gummitch told himself, it was all very logical. Babies were stupid, fumbling, vindictive creatures without reason or speech. What more natural than that they should grow up

into mute sullen selfish beasts bent only on rapine and reproduction? While kittens were quick, sensitive, subtle, supremely alive. What other destiny were they possibly fitted for except to become the deft, word-speaking, book-writing, music-making, meat-getting-and-dispensing masters of the world? To dwell on the physical differences, to point out that kittens and men, babies and cats, are rather unlike in appearance and size, would be to miss the forest for the trees—very much as if an entomologist should proclaim metamorphosis a myth because his microscope failed to discover the wings of a butterfly in a caterpillar's slime or a golden beetle in a grub.

Nevertheless it was such a mind-staggering truth, Gummitch realized at the same time, that it was easy to understand why humans, cats, babies and perhaps most kittens were quite unaware of it. How safely explain to a butterfly that he was once a hairy crawler, or to a dull larva that he will one day be a walking jewel? No, in such situations the delicate minds of man- and feline-kind are guarded by a merciful mass amnesia, such as Velikovsky has explained prevents us from recalling that in historical times the Earth was catastrophically bumped by the planet Venus operating in the manner of a comet before settling down (with a cosmic sigh of relief, surely!) into its present orbit.

This conclusion was confirmed when Gummitch in the first fever of illumination tried to communicate his great insight to others. He told it in cat patois, as well as that limited jargon permitted, to Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra and even, on the off chance, to Sissy and Baby. They showed no interest whatever, except that Sissy took advantage of his unguarded preoccupation to stab him with a fork.

Later, alone with Old Horsemeat, he projected the great new thoughts, staring with solemn yellow eyes at the old god, but the latter grew markedly nervous and even showed signs of real fear, so Gummitch desisted. ("You'd have sworn he was trying to put across something as deep as the Einstein theory or the doctrine of original sin," Old Horsemeat later told Kitty-Come-Here.)

But Gummitch was a man now in all but form, the kitten reminded himself after these failures, and it was part of his destiny to shoulder secrets alone when necessary. He won-

dered if the general amnesia would affect him when he metamorphosed. There was no sure answer to this question, but he hoped not—and sometimes felt that there was reason for his hopes. Perhaps he would be the first true kitten-man, speaking from a wisdom that had no locked doors in it.

Once he was tempted to speed up the process by the use of drugs. Left alone in the kitchen, he sprang onto the table and started to lap up the black puddle in the bottom of Old Horsemeat's coffee cup. It tasted foul and poisonous and he withdrew with a little snarl, frightened as well as revolted. The dark beverage would not work its tongue-loosening magic, he realized, except at the proper time and with the proper ceremonies. Incantations might be necessary as well. Certainly unlawful tasting was highly dangerous.

The futility of expecting coffee to work any wonders by itself was further demonstrated to Gummitch when Kitty-Come-Here, wordlessly badgered by Sissy, gave a few spoonfuls to the little girl, liberally lacing it first with milk and sugar. Of course Gummitch knew by now that Sissy was destined shortly to turn into a cat and that no amount of coffee would ever make her talk, but it was nevertheless instructive to see how she spat out the first mouthful, drooling a lot of saliva after it, and dashed the cup and its contents at the chest of Kitty-Come-Here.

Gummitch continued to feel a great deal of sympathy for his parents in their worries about Sissy and he longed for the day when he would metamorphose and be able as an acknowledged man-child truly to console them. It was heart-breaking to see how they each tried to coax the little girl to talk, always attempting it while the other was absent, how they seized on each accidentally wordlike note in the few sounds she uttered and repeated it back to her hopefully, how they were more and more possessed by fears not so much of her retarded (they thought) development as of her increasingly obvious maliciousness, which was directed chiefly at Baby . . . though the two cats and Gummitch bore their share. Once she had caught Baby alone in his crib and used the sharp corner of a block to dot Baby's large-domed, lightly downed head with triangular red marks. Kitty-Come-Here had discovered her doing it, but

the woman's first action had been to rub Baby's head to obliterate the marks so that Old Horsemeat wouldn't see them. That was the night Kitty-Come-Here hid the abnormal psychology books.

Gummitch understood very well that Kitty-Come-Here and Old Horsemeat, honestly believing themselves to be Sissy's parents, felt just as deeply about her as if they actually were and he did what little he could under the present circumstances to help them. He had recently come to feel a quite independent affection for Baby—the miserable little proto-cat was so completely stupid and defenseless—and so he unofficially constituted himself the creature's guardian, taking his naps behind the door of the nursery and dashing about noisily whenever Sissy showed up. In any case he realized that as a potentially adult member of a felino-human household he had his natural responsibilities.

Accepting responsibilities was as much a part of a kitten's life, Gummitch told himself, as shouldering unsharable intuitions and secrets, the number of which continued to grow from day to day.

There was, for instance, the Affair of the Squirrel Mirror.

Gummitch had early solved the mystery of ordinary mirrors and of the creatures that appeared in them. A little observation and sniffing and one attempt to get behind the heavy wall-job in the living room had convinced him that mirror beings were insubstantial or at least hermetically sealed into their other world, probably creatures of pure spirit, harmless imitative ghosts—including the silent Gummitch Double who touched paws with him so softly yet so coldly.

Just the same, Gummitch had let his imagination play with what would happen if one day, while looking into the mirror world, he should let loose his grip on his spirit and let it slip into the Gummitch Double while the other's spirit slipped into his body—if, in short, he should change places with the scentless ghost kitten. Being doomed to a life consisting wholly of imitation and completely lacking in opportunities to show initiative—except for the behind-the-scenes judgment and speed needed in rushing from one mirror to another to keep up with the real Gummitch

—would be sickeningly dull, Gummitch decided, and he resolved to keep a tight hold on his spirit at all times in the vicinity of mirrors.

But that isn't telling about the Squirrel Mirror. One morning Gummitch was peering out the front bedroom window that overlooked the roof of the porch. Gummitch had already classified windows as semi-mirrors having two kinds of space on the other side: the mirror world and that harsh region filled with mysterious and dangerously organized-sounding noises called the outer world, into which grownup humans reluctantly ventured at intervals, donning special garments for the purpose and shouting loud farewells that were meant to be reassuring but achieved just the opposite effect. The coexistence of two kinds of space presented no paradox to the kitten who carried in his mind the 27-chapter outline of *Space-Time for Springers*—indeed, it constituted one of the minor themes of the book.

This morning the bedroom was dark and the outer world was dull and sunless, so the mirror world was unusually difficult to see. Gummitch was just lifting his face toward it, nose twitching, his front paws on the sill, when what should rear up on the other side, exactly in the space that the Gummitch Double normally occupied, but a dirty brown, narrow-visaged image with savagely low forehead, dark evil wall-eyes, and a huge jaw filled with shovel-like teeth.

Gummitch was enormously startled and hideously frightened. He felt his grip on his spirit go limp, and without volition he teleported himself three yards to the rear, making use of that faculty for cutting corners in space-time, traveling by space-warp in fact, which was one of his powers that Kitty-Come-Here refused to believe in and that even Old Horsemeat accepted only on faith.

Then, not losing a moment, he picked himself up by his furry seat, swung himself around, dashed downstairs at top speed, sprang to the top of the sofa, and stared for several seconds at the Gummitch Double in the wall-mirror—not relaxing a muscle strand until he was completely convinced that he was still himself and had not been transformed into the nasty brown apparition that had confronted him in the bedroom window.

"Now what do you suppose brought that on?" Old Horsemeat asked Kitty-Come-Here.

Later Gummitch learned that what he had seen had been a squirrel, a savage, nut-hunting being belonging wholly to the outer world (except for forays into attics) and not at all to the mirror one. Nevertheless he kept a vivid memory of his profound momentary conviction that the squirrel had taken the Gummitch Double's place and been about to take his own. He shuddered to think what would have happened if the squirrel had been actively interested in trading spirits with him. Apparently mirrors and mirror-situations, just as he had always feared, were highly conducive to spirit transfers. He filed the information away in the memory cabinet reserved for dangerous, exciting and possibly useful information, such as plans for climbing straight up glass (diamond-tipped claws!) and flying higher than the trees.

These days his thought cabinets were beginning to feel filled to bursting and he could hardly wait for the moment when the true rich taste of coffee, lawfully drunk, would permit him to speak.

He pictured the scene in detail: the family gathered in conclave at the kitchen table, Ashurbanipal and Cleopatra respectfully watching from floor level, himself sitting erect on chair with paws (or would they be hands?) lightly touching his cup of thin china, while Old Horsemeat poured the thin black steaming stream. He knew the Great Transformation must be close at hand.

At the same time he knew that the other critical situation in the household was worsening swiftly. Sissy, he realized now, was far older than Baby and should long ago have undergone her own somewhat less glamorous though equally necessary transformation (the first tin of raw horsemeat could hardly be as exciting as the first cup of coffee). Her time was long overdue. Gummitch found increasing horror in this mute vampirish being inhabiting the body of a rapidly growing girl, though inwardly equipped to be nothing but a most bloodthirsty she-cat. How dreadful to think of Old Horsemeat and Kitty-Come-Here having to care all their lives for such a monster! Gummitch told himself that if any opportunity for alleviating his parents' mis-

ery should ever present itself to him, he would not hesitate for an instant.

Then one night, when the sense of Change was so burstingly strong in him that he knew tomorrow must be the Day, but when the house was also exceptionally unquiet with boards creaking and snapping, taps adrip, and curtains mysteriously rustling at closed windows (so that it was clear that the many spirit worlds including the mirror one must be pressing very close), the opportunity came to Gummitch.

Kitty-Come-Here and Old Horsemeat had fallen into especially sound, drugged sleeps, the former with a bad cold, the latter with one unhappy highball too many (Gummitch knew he had been brooding about Sissy). Baby slept too, though with uneasy whimperings and joggings—moonlight shone full on his crib past a window shade which had whirringly rolled itself up without human or feline agency. Gummitch kept vigil under the crib, with eyes closed but with widely excited mind pressing outward to every boundary of the house and even stretching here and there into the outer world. On this night of all nights sleep was unthinkable.

Then suddenly he became aware of footsteps, footsteps so soft they must, he thought, be Cleopatra's.

No, softer than that, so soft they might be those of the Gummitch Double escaped from the mirror world at last and padding up toward him through the darkened halls. A ribbon of fur rose along his spine.

Then into the nursery Sissy came prowling. She looked slim as an Egyptian princess in her long, thin, yellow nightgown and as sure of herself, but the cat was very strong in her tonight, from the flat intent eyes to the dainty canine teeth slightly bared—one look at her now would have sent Kitty-Come-Here running for the telephone number she kept hidden, the telephone number of the special doctor—and Gummitch realized he was witnessing a monstrous suspension of natural law in that this being should be able to exist for a moment without growing fur and changing round pupils for slit eyes.

He retreated to the darkest corner of the room, suppressing a snarl.

Sissy approached the crib and leaned over Baby in the

moonlight, keeping her shadow off him. For a while she gloated. Then she began softly to scratch his cheek with a long hatpin she carried, keeping away from his eye, but just barely. Baby awoke and saw her and Baby didn't cry. Sissy continued to scratch, always a little more deeply. The moonlight glittered on the jeweled end of the pin.

Gummitch knew he faced a horror that could not be countered by running about or even spitting and screeching. Only magic could fight so obviously supernatural a manifestation. And this was also no time to think of consequences, no matter how clearly and bitterly etched they might appear to a mind intensely awake.

He sprang up onto the other side of the crib, not uttering a sound, and fixed his golden eyes on Sissy's in the moonlight. Then he moved forward straight at her evil face, stepping slowly, not swiftly, using his extraordinary knowledge of the properties of space *to walk straight through her hand and arm as they flailed the hatpin at him.* When his nose-tip finally paused a fraction of an inch from hers, his eyes had not blinked once, and she could not look away. Then he unhesitatingly flung his spirit into her like a fistful of flaming arrows and he worked the Mirror Magic.

Sissy's moonlit face, feline and terrified, was in a sense the last thing that Gummitch, the real Gummitch-kitten, ever saw in this world. For the next instant he felt himself enfolded by the foul, black blinding cloud of Sissy's spirit, which his own had displaced. At the same time he heard the little girl scream, very loudly but even more distinctly, *"Mommy!"*

That cry might have brought Kitty-Come-Here out of her grave, let alone from sleep merely deep or drugged. Within seconds she was in the nursery, closely followed by Old Horsemeat, and she had caught up Sissy in her arms and the little girl was articulating the wonderful word again and again, and miraculously following it with the command—there could be no doubt, Old Horsemeat heard it too—"Hold me tight!"

Then Baby finally dared to cry. The scratches on his cheek came to attention and Gummitch, as he had known must happen, was banished to the basement amid cries of horror and loathing, chiefly from Kitty-Come-Here.

The little cat did not mind. No basement would be one-tenth as dark as Sissy's spirit that now enshrouded him for always, hiding all the file drawers and the labels on all the folders, blotting out forever even the imagining of the scene of first coffee-drinking and first speech.

In a last intuition, before the animal blackness closed in utterly, Gummitch realized that the spirit, alas, is not the same thing as the consciousness and that one may lose—sacrifice—the first and still be burdened with the second.

Old Horsemeat had seen the hatpin (and hid it quickly from Kitty-Come-Here) and so he knew that the situation was not what it seemed and that Gummitch was at the very least being made into a sort of scapegoat. He was quite apologetic when he brought the tin pans of food to the basement during the period of the little cat's exile. It was a comfort to Gummitch, albeit a small one. Gummitch told himself, in his new black halting manner of thinking, that after all a cat's best friend is his man.

From that night Sissy never turned back in her development. Within two months she had made three years' progress in speaking. She became an outstandingly bright, light-footed, high-spirited little girl. Although she never told anyone this, the moonlit nursery and Gummitch's magnified face were her first memories. Everything before that was inky blackness. She was always very nice to Gummitch in a careful sort of way. She could never stand to play the game "Owl Eyes."

After a few weeks Kitty-Come-Here forgot her fears and Gummitch once again had the run of the house. But by then the transformation Old Horsemeat had always warned about had fully taken place. Gummitch was a kitten no longer but an almost burly tom. In him it took the psychological form not of sullenness or surliness but an extreme dignity. He seemed at times rather like an old pirate brooding on treasures he would never live to dig up, shores of adventure he would never reach. And sometimes when you looked into his yellow eyes you felt that he had in him all the materials for the book *Slit Eyes Look at Life*—three or four volumes at least—although he would never write it. And that was natural when you come to think of it, for as Gummitch knew very well, bitterly well indeed, his fate was to be the only kitten in the world that did not grow up to be a man.

PELT

Carol Emshwiller

Carol Emshwiller is more typical of the writers who came into science fiction in the sixties than of most of the others in this volume. Graduated from the University of Michigan in 1949, she went to France on a Fulbright to study art; when she switched to writing, she began with science fiction, published some fifteen stories between 1956–1961. Her work was distinctive from the beginning; by 1961, she was considerably "far-out" for the then-standards of the science-fiction magazines, and turned her sights to the literary and *avant-garde* markets. Her work has appeared recently in *Transatlantic Review, Cavalier,* and the one-shot *City Sampler*. She is married to Ed Emshwiller, the science-fiction illustrator and producer of experimental films (*Relativity, Life Lines, Thanatopsis,* etc.); they live with their three children in Wantagh, Long Island.

"Pelt", originally published in *Fantasy & Science Fiction,* November, 1958, was reprinted in the 4th *SF* Annual. "Day at the Beach", from the *5th* Annual, also appears in this anthology.

SHE WAS A WHITE DOG with a wide face and eager eyes, and this was the planet, Jaxa, in winter.

She trotted well ahead of the master, sometimes nose to ground, sometimes sniffing the air, and she didn't care if they were being watched or not. She knew that strange things skulked behind iced trees, but strangeness was her job. She had been trained for it, and crisp, glittering Jaxa was, she felt, exactly what she *had* been trained for, *born* for.

I love it, I love it . . . that was in her pointing ears, her waving tail . . . I *love* this place.

It was a world of ice, a world with the sound of breaking

goblets. Each time the wind blew they came shattering down by the trayful, and each time one branch brushed against another, it was: Skoal, Down the hatch, To the Queen . . . tink, tink, tink. And the sun was reflected as if from a million cut-glass punch bowls under a million crystal chandeliers.

She wore four little black boots, and each step she took sounded like two or three more goblets gone, but the sound was lost in the other tinkling, snapping, cracklings of the silver, frozen forest about her.

She had figured out at last what that hovering scent was. It had been there from the beginning, the landing two days ago, mingling with Jaxa's bitter air and seeming to be just a part of the smell of the place, she found it in crisscrossing trails about the squatting ship, and hanging, heavy and recent, in hollows behind flat-branched, piney-smelling bushes. She thought of honey and fat men and dry fur when she smelled it.

There was something big out there, and more than one of them, more than two. She wasn't sure how many. She had a feeling this was something to tell the master, but what was the signal, the agreed upon noise for: We are being watched? There was a whisper of sound, short and quick, for: Sighted close, come and shoot. And there was a noise for danger (all these through her throat mike to the receiver at the master's ear), a special, howly bark: Awful, awful—there is something awful going to happen. There was even a noise, a low, rumble of sound for: Wonderful, wonderful fur—drop everything and come after *this* one. (And she knew a good fur when she saw one. She had been trained to know.) But there was no sign for: We are being watched.

She'd whined and barked when she was sure about it, but that had got her a pat on the head and a rumpling of the neck fur. "You're doing fine, Baby. This world is our oyster, all ours. All we got to do is pick up the pearls. Jaxa's what we've been waiting for." And Jaxa was, so she did her work and didn't try to tell him any more, for what was one more strange thing in one more strange world?

She was on the trail of something now, and the master was behind her, out of sight. He'd better hurry. He'd better hurry or there'll be waiting to do, watching the thing, what-

ever it is, steady on until he comes, holding tight back, and that will be hard. Hurry, hurry.

She could hear the whispered whistle of a tune through the receiver at her ear and she knew he was not hurrying but just being happy. She ran on, eager, curious. She did not give the signal for hurry, but she made a hurry sound of her own, and she heard him stop whistling and whisper back into the mike, "So, so, Queen of Venus. The furs are waiting to be picked. No hurry, Baby." But morning was to her for hurry. There was time later to be tired and slow.

That fat-man honeyish smell was about, closer and strong. Her curiosity became two pronged—this smell or that? What *is* the big thing that watches? She kept to the trail she was on, though. Better to be sure, and this thing was not so elusive, not twisting and doubling back, but up ahead and going where it was going.

She topped a rise and half slid, on thick furred rump, down the other side, splattering ice. She snuffled at the bottom to be sure of the smell again, and then, nose to ground, trotted past a thick and tangled hedgerow.

She was thinking through her nose now. The world was all smell, crisp air and sour ice and turpentine pine . . . and this animal, a urine and brown grass thing . . . and then, strong in front of her, honey-furry-fat man.

She felt it looming before she raised her head to look, and there it was, the smell in person, some taller than the master and twice as wide. Counting his doubled suit and all, twice as wide.

This was a fur! Wonderful, wonderful. But she just stood, looking up, mouth open and lips pulled back, the fur on the back of her neck rising more from the suddenness than from fear.

It was silver and black, a tiger-striped thing, and the whitish parts glistened and caught the light as the ice of Jaxa did, and sparkled and dazzled in the same way. And there, in the center of the face, was a large and terrible orange eye, rimmed in black with black radiating lines crossing the forehead and rounding the head. That spot of orange dominated the whole figure, but it was a flat, blind eye, unreal, grown out of fur. At first she saw only that spot of color, but then she noticed under it two small, red glinting eyes and they were kind, not terrible.

This was the time for the call: Come, come and get the great fur, the huge-price-tag fur for the richest lady on earth to wear and be dazzling in and most of all to pay for. But there was something about the flat, black nose and the tender, bow-shaped lips and those kind eyes that stopped her from calling. Something masterlike. She was full of wondering and indecision and she made no sound at all.

The thing spoke to her then, and its voice was a deep lullaby sound of buzzing cellos. It gestured with a thick, fur-backed hand. It promised, offered, and asked; and she listened, knowing and not knowing.

The words came slowly. *This . . . is . . . world.*

Here is the sky, the earth, the ice. The heavy arms moved. The hands pointed.

We have watched you, little slave. What have you done that is free today? Take the liberty. Here is the earth for your four shoed feet, the sky of stars, the ice to drink. Do something free today. Do, do.

Nice voice, she thought, nice thing. It gives and gives . . . something.

Her ears pointed forward, then to the side, one and then the other, and then forward again. She cocked her head, but the real meaning would not come clear. She poked at the air with her nose. Say that again, her whole body said. I almost have it. I *feel* it. Say it once more and maybe then the sense of it will come.

But the creature turned and started away quickly, very quickly for such a big thing, and disappeared behind the trees and bushes. It seemed to shimmer itself away until the glitter was only the glitter of the ice and the black was only the thick, flat branches.

The master was close. She could hear his crackling steps coming up behind her.

She whined softly, more to herself than to him.

"Ho, the Queen, Aloora. Have you lost it?" She sniffed the ground again. The honey-furry smell was strong. She sniffed beyond, zigzagging. The trail was there. "Go to it, Baby." She loped off to a sound like Chinese wind chimes, businesslike again. Her tail hung guiltily, though, and she kept her head low. She had missed an important signal. She'd waited until it was too late. But was the thing a man, a master? Or a fur? She wanted to do the right thing. She

always tried and tried for that, but now she was confused.

She was getting close to whatever it was she trailed, but the hovering smell was still there too, though not close. She thought of gifts. She knew that much from the slow, lullaby words, and gifts made her think of bones and meat, not the dry fishy biscuit she always got on trips like this. A trickle of drool flowed from the side of her mouth and froze in a silver thread across her shoulder.

She slowed. The thing she trailed must be there, just behind the next row of trees. She made a sound in her throat . . . ready, steady . . . and she advanced until she was sure. She sensed the shape. She didn't really see it . . . mostly it was the smell and something more in the tinkling glassware noises. She gave the signal and stood still, a furry, square imitation of a pointer. Come, hurry. This waiting is the hardest part.

He followed, beamed to her radio. "Steady, Baby. Hold that pose. Good girl, good girl." There was only the slightest twitch of her tail as she wagged it, answering him in her mind.

He came up behind her and then passed, crouched, holding the rifle before him, elbows bent. He knelt then, and waited as if at a point of his own, rifle to shoulder. Slowly he turned with the moving shadow of the beast, and shot, twice in quick succession.

They ran forward then, together, and it was what she had expected—a deerlike thing, dainty hoofs, proud head, and spotted in three colors, large gray-green rounds on tawny yellow, with tufts of that same glittering silver scattered over.

The master took out a sharp, flat-bladed knife. He began to whistle out loud as he cut off the handsome head. His face was flushed.

She sat down near by, mouth open in a kind of smile, and she watched his face as he worked. The warm smell made the drool come at the sides of her mouth and drip out to freeze on the ice and on her paws, but she sat quietly, only watching.

Between the whistlings he grunted and swore and talked to himself, and finally he had the skin and the head in a tight, inside out bundle.

Then he came to her and patted her sides over the ribs

with the flat, slap sound, and he scratched behind her ears and held a biscuit to her on his thick-gloved palm. She swallowed it whole and then watched him as he squatted on his heels and himself ate one almost like it.

Then he got up and slung the bundle of skin and head across his back. "I'll take this one, Baby. Come on, let's get one more something before lunch." He waved her to the right. "We'll make a big circle," he said.

She trotted out, glad she was not carrying anything. She found a strong smell at a patch of discolored ice and urinated on it. She sniffed and growled at a furry, mammal-smelling bird that landed in the trees above her and sent down a shower of ice slivers on her head. She zigzagged and then turned and bit, lips drawn back in mock rage, at a branch that scraped her side.

She followed for a while the chattery sound of water streaming along under the ice, and left it where an oily, lambish smell crossed. Almost immediately she came upon them—six, small, greenish balls of wool with floppy, woolly feet. The honey-fat man smell was strong here too, but she signaled for the lambs, the Come and shoot sound, and she stood again waiting for the master. "*Good* girl!" His voice had a special praise. "By God, this place is a gold mine. Hold it, Queen of Venus. Whatever it is, don't let go."

There was a fifty-yard clear view here and she stood in plain sight of the little creatures, but they didn't notice. The master came slowly and cautiously, and knelt beside her. Just as he did, there appeared at the far end of the clearing a glittering, silver and black tiger-striped man.

She heard the sharp inward breath of the master and she felt the tenseness come to him. There was a new, faint whiff of sour sweat, a stiff silence and a special way of breathing. What she felt from him made the fur rise along her back with a mixture of excitement and fear.

The tiger thing held a small packet in one hand and was peering into it and pulling at the opening in it with a blunt finger. Suddenly there was a sweep of motion beside her and five fast, frantic shots sounded sharp in her ear. Two came after the honey-fat man had already fallen and lay like a huge decorated sack.

The master ran forward and she came at his heels. They stopped, not too close, and she watched the master looking

at the big, dead tiger head with the terrible eye. The master was breathing hard and seemed hot. His face was red and puffy looking, but his lips made a hard whitish line. He didn't whistle or talk. After a time he took out his knife. He tested the blade, making a small, bloody thread of a mark on his left thumb. Then he walked closer and she stood and watched him and whispered a questioning whine.

He stooped by the honey-fat man and it was that small, partly opened packet that he cut viciously through the center. Small round chunks fell out, bite-sized chunks of dried meat and a cheesy substance and some broken bits of clear, bluish ice.

The master kicked at them. His face was not red any more, but olive-pale. His thin mouth was open in a grin that was not a grin. He went about the skinning then.

He did not keep the flat-faced, heavy head nor the blunt-fingered hands.

The man had to make a sliding thing of two of the widest kind of flat branches to carry the new heavy fur, as well as the head and the skin of the deer. Then he started directly for the ship.

It was past eating time but she looked at his restless eyes and did not ask about it. She walked before him, staying close. She looked back often, watching him pull the sled thing by the string across his shoulder and she knew, by the way he held the rifle before him in both hands, that she should be wary.

Sometimes the damp-looking, inside-out bundle hooked on things, and the master would curse in a whisper and pull at it. She could see the bundle made him tired, and she wished he would stop for a rest and food as they usually did long before this time.

They went slowly, and the smell of honey-fat man hovered as it had from the beginning. They crossed the trails of many animals. They even saw another deer run off, but she knew that it was not a time for chasing.

Then another big silver and black tiger stood exactly before them. It appeared suddenly, as if actually it had been standing there all the time, and they had not been near enough to see it, to pick it out from its glistening background.

It just stood and looked and dared, and the master held his gun with both hands and looked too, and she stood between them glancing from one face to the other. She knew, after a moment, that the master would not shoot, and it seemed the tiger thing knew too, for it turned to look at her and it raised its arms and spread its fingers as if grasping at the forest on each side. It swayed a bit, like bigness off balance, and then it spoke in its tight-strung, cello tones. The words and the tone seemed the same as before.

Little slave, what have you done that is free today? Remember this is world. Do something free today. Do, do.

She knew that what it said was important to it, something she should understand, a giving and a taking away. It watched her, and she looked back with wide, innocent eyes, wanting to do the right thing, but not knowing what.

The tiger-fat man turned then, this time slowly, and left a wide back for the master and her to see, and then it half turned, throwing a quick glance over the heavy humped shoulder at the two of them. Then it moved slowly away into the trees and ice, and the master still held the gun with two hands and did not move.

The evening wind began to blow, and there sounded about them that sound of a million chandeliers tinkling and clinking like gigantic wind chimes. A furry bird, the size of a shrew and as fast, flew by between them with a miniature shriek.

She watched the master's face, and when he was ready she went along beside him. The soft sounds the honey-fat man had made echoed in her mind but had no meaning.

That night the master stretched the big skin on a frame and afterward he watched the dazzle of it. He didn't talk to her. She watched him a while and then she turned around three times on her rug and lay down to sleep.

The next morning the master was slow, reluctant to go out. He studied charts of other places, round or hourglass-shaped maps with yellow dots and labels, and he drank his coffee standing up looking at them. But finally they did go out, squinting into the ringing air.

It was her world. More each day, she felt it was so, right feel, right temperature, lovely smells. She darted on ahead as usual, yet not too far today, and sometimes she stopped

and waited and looked at the master's face as he came up. And sometimes she would whine a question before she went on . . . Why don't you walk brisk, brisk, and call me Queen of Venus, Aloora, Galaxa, or Bitch of Betelgeuse? Why don't you sniff like I do? Sniff, and you will be happy with this place . . . And she would run on again.

Trails were easy to find, and once more she found the oily lamb smell, and once more came upon them quickly. The master strode up beside her and raised his gun . . . but a moment later he turned, carelessly, letting himself make a loud noise, and the lambs ran. He made a face, and spit upon the ice. "Come on, Queen. Let's get out of here. I'm sick of this place."

He turned and made the signal to go back, pointing with his thumb above his head in two jerks of motion.

But why, why? This is morning now and our world. She wagged her tail and gave a short bark, and looked at him, dancing a little on her back paws, begging with her whole body. "Come on," he said.

She turned then, and took her place at his heel, head low, but eyes looking up at him, wondering if she had done something wrong, and wanting to be right and noticed and loved because he was troubled and preoccupied.

They'd gone only a few minutes on the way back when he stopped suddenly in the middle of a step, slowly put both feet flat upon the ground and stood like a soldier at a stiff, off-balance attention. There, lying in the way before them, was the huge, orange-eyed head and in front of it, as if at the end of outstretched arms, lay two leathery hands, the hairless palms up.

She made a growl deep in her throat and the master made a noise almost exactly like hers, but more a groan. She waited for him, standing as he stood, not moving, feeling his tenseness coming in to her. Yet it was just a head and two hands of no value, old ones they had had before and thrown away.

He turned and she saw a wild look in his eyes. He walked with deliberate steps, and she followed, in a wide circle about the spot. When they had skirted the place, he began to walk very fast.

They were not far from the ship. She could see its flat blackness as they drew nearer to the clearing where it was,

the burned, iceless pit of spewed and blackened earth. And then she saw that the silver tiger men were there, nine of them in a wide circle, each with the honey-damp fur smell, but each with a separate particular sweetness.

The master was still walking very fast, eyes down to watch his footing, and he did not see them until he was there in the circle before them all, standing there like nine upright bears in tiger suits.

He stopped and made a whisper of a groan, and he let the gun fall low in one hand so that it hung loose with the muzzle almost touching the ground. He looked from one to the other and she looked at him, watching his pale eyes move along the circle.

"Stay," he said, and then he began to go toward the ship at an awkward limp, running and walking at the same time, banging the gun handle against the air lock as he entered.

He had said, Stay. She sat watching the ship door and moving her front paws up and down because she wanted to be walking after him. He was gone only a few minutes, though, and when he came back it was without the gun and he was holding the great fur with cut pieces of thongs dangling like ribbons along its edges where it had been tied to the stretching frame. He went at that same run-walk, unbalanced by the heavy bundle, to one of them along the circle. Three gathered together before him and refused to take it back. They pushed it, bunched loosely, back across his arms again and to it they added another large and heavy package in a parchment bag, and the master stood, with his legs wide to hold it all.

Then one honey-fat man motioned with a fur-backed hand to the ship and the bundles, and then to the ship and the master, and then to the sky. He made two sharp sounds once, and then again. And another made two different sounds, and she felt the feeling of them . . . Take your things and go home. Take them, these and these, and go.

They turned to her then and one spoke and made a wide gesture. *This is world. The sky, the earth, the ice.*

They wanted her to stay. They gave her . . . was it their world? But what good was a world?

She wagged her tail hesitatingly, lowered her head and looked up at them . . . I do want to do right, to please every-

body, everybody, but . . . Then she followed the master into the ship.

The locks rumbled shut. "Let's get out of here," he said. She took her place, flat on her side, take-off position. The master snapped the flat plastic sheet over her, covering head and all and, in a few minutes, they roared off.

Afterward he opened the parchment bag. She knew what was in it. She knew he knew too, but she knew by the smell. He opened it and dumped out the head and the hands. His face was tight and his mouth stiff.

She saw him almost put the big head out the waste chute, but he didn't. He took it in to the place where he kept good heads and some odd paws or hoofs, and he put it by the others there.

Even she knew this head was different. The others were all slant-browed like she was and most had jutting snouts. This one seemed bigger than the big ones, with its heavy, ruffed fur and huge eye staring, and more grand than any of them, more terrible . . . and yet a flat face, with a delicate, black nose and tender lips.

The tenderest lips of all.

STRANGER STATION

Damon Knight

Damon Knight has worked at every conceivable job in science fiction: writer, editor, critic, translator, anthologist, illustrator, agent. A founder, and now sole Director, of the Milford Science Fiction Writer's Conference, he also helped to found, and became first President of, the Science Fiction Writers of America, and edited the first volume of its annual *Nebula Award Stories*. He is currently a consulting editor for Berkley Books, and editor of the Putnam-Berkley *Orbit* anthologies of original science-fiction.

Born in Oregon in 1922, Knight came to New York in the aftermath of a science-fiction fan convention in 1941—the same year his first story appeared in *Stirring Science Stories*. In 1950–51, he was editor of the magazine, *Worlds Beyond*, and his first book, *In Search of Wonder*, a volume of science-fiction criticism for which he received a "Hugo" award, was published in 1956. Since then he has published five novels and five story collections, and almost 20 anthologies. He now lives in Milford, Pa., and is married to author Kate Wilhelm. Latest books: *Worlds to Come*, a juvenile anthology (1967); and a new and enlarged edition of *In Search of Wonder* (Advent, 1967). A translation of a novel by René Barjavel, *Ashes, Ashes*, is due shortly.

Knight's stories have appeared in three SF Annuals: "The Country of the Kind" was in the 1st, and "The Handler" in the 5th. "Stranger Station", from the Dec., 1956, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, appeared in the 2nd Annual.

THE CLANG OF METAL echoed hollowly down through the Station's many vaulted corridors and rooms. Paul Wesson stood listening for a moment as the rolling echoes died away. The maintenance rocket was gone, heading back to Home; they had left him alone in Stranger Station.

Stranger Station! The name itself quickened his imagination. Wesson knew that both orbital stations had been named a century ago by the then British administration of the satellite service: "Home" because the larger, inner station handled the traffic of Earth and its colonies; "Stranger" because the outer station was designed specifically for dealings with foreigners . . . beings from outside the solar system. But even that could not diminish the wonder of Stranger Station, whirling out here alone in the dark—waiting for its once-in-two-decades visitor. . . .

One man, out of all Sol's billions, had the task and privilege of enduring the alien's presence when it came. The two races, according to Wesson's understanding of the subject, were so fundamentally different that it was painful for them to meet. Well, he had volunteered for the job, and he thought he could handle it—the rewards were big enough.

He had gone through all the tests, and against his own expectations he had been chosen. The maintenance crew had brought him up as dead weight, drugged in a survival hamper; they had kept him the same way while they did their work, and then had brought him back to consciousness. Now they were gone. He was alone.

. . . But not quite.

"Welcome to Stranger Station, Sergeant Wesson," said a pleasant voice. "This is your alpha network speaking. I'm here to protect and serve you in every way. If there's anything you want, just ask me."

Wesson had been warned, but he was still shocked at the human quality of it. The alpha networks were the last word in robot brains—computers, safety devices, personal servants, libraries, all wrapped up in one, with something so close to "personality" and "free will" that experts were still arguing the question. They were rare and fantastically expensive; Wesson had never met one before.

"Thanks," he said now, to the empty air. "Uh—what do I call you, by the way? I can't keep saying, 'Hey, alpha network.' "

"One of your recent predecessors called me Aunt Nettie."

Wesson grimaced. Alpha network—Aunt Nettie. He hated puns; that wouldn't do. "The Aunt part is all right," he said. "Suppose I call you Aunt Jane. That was my mother's sister; you sound like her, a little bit."

"I am honored," said the invisible mechanism politely. "Can I serve you any refreshments now? Sandwiches? A drink?"

"Not just yet," said Wesson.

He turned away. That seemed to end the conversation as far as the network was concerned. A good thing; it was all right to have it for company, speaking when spoken to, but if it got talkative . . .

The human part of the Station was in four segments: bedroom, living room, dining room, bath. The living room was comfortably large and pleasantly furnished in greens and tans: the only mechanical note in it was the big instrument console in one corner. The other rooms, arranged in a ring around the living room, were tiny: just space enough for Wesson, a narrow encircling corridor, and the mechanisms that would serve him. The whole place was spotlessly clean, gleaming and efficient in spite of its twenty-year layoff.

This is the gravy part of the run, Wesson told himself. The month before the alien came—good food, no work, and an alpha network for conversation. "Aunt Jane, I'll have a small steak now," he said to the network. "Medium rare, with hash-brown potatoes, onions and mushrooms, and a glass of lager. Call me when it's ready."

"Right," said the voice pleasantly. Out in the dining room, the autochef began to hum and cluck self-importantly. Wesson wandered over and inspected the instrument console. Airlocks were sealed and tight, said the dials; the air was cycling. The Station was in orbit, and rotating on its axis with a force at the perimeter, where Wesson was, of one *g*. The internal temperature of this part of the Station was an even 73°.

The other side of the board told a different story; all the dials were dark and dead. Sector Two, occupying a volume some eighty-eight thousand times as great as this one, was not yet functioning.

Wesson had a vivid mental image of the Station, from photographs and diagrams—a 500-foot duralumin sphere, onto which the shallow 30-foot disk of the human section had been stuck apparently as an afterthought. The whole cavity of the sphere, very nearly—except for a honeycomb of supply and maintenance rooms, and the all-important,

recently enlarged vats—was one cramped chamber for the alien. . . .

The steak was good, bubbling crisp outside the way he liked it, tender and pink inside. "Aunt Jane," he said with his mouth full, "this is pretty soft, isn't it?"

"The steak?" asked the voice, with a faintly anxious note.

Wesson grinned. "Never mind," he said. "Listen, Aunt Jane, you've been through this routine . . . how many times? Were you installed with the Station, or what?"

"I was not installed with the Station," said Aunt Jane primly. "I have assisted at three contacts."

"Um. Cigarette," said Wesson, slapping his pockets. The autochef hummed for a moment, and popped a pack of G.I.'s out of a vent. Wesson lit up. "All right," he said, "you've been through this three times. There are a lot of things you can tell me, right?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. What would you like to know?"

Wesson smoked, leaning back reflectively, green eyes narrowed. "First," he said, "read me the Pigeon report—you know, from the *Brief History*. I want to see if I remember it right."

"Chapter Two," said the voice promptly. "First contact with a non-Solar intelligence was made by Commander Ralph C. Pigeon on July 1, 1987, during an emergency landing in Titan. The following is an excerpt from his official report:

" 'While searching for a possible cause for our mental disturbance, we discovered what appeared to be a gigantic construction of metal on the far side of the ridge. Our distress grew stronger with the approach to this construction, which was polyhedral and approximately five times the length of the Cologne.

" 'Some of those present expressed a wish to retire, but Lt. Acuff and myself had a strong sense of being called or summoned in some indefinable way. Although our uneasiness was not lessened, we therefore agreed to go forward and keep radio contact with the rest of the party while they returned to the ship.

" 'We gained access to the alien construction by way of a large, irregular opening . . . The internal temperature was

minus seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit; the atmosphere appeared to consist of methane and ammonia . . . Inside the second chamber, an alien creature was waiting for us. We felt the distress which I have tried to describe, to a much greater degree than before, and also the sense of summoning or pleading . . . We observed that the creature was exuding a thick yellowish fluid from certain joints or pores in its surface. Though disgusted, I managed to collect a sample of this exudate, and it was later forwarded for analysis . . .'

"The second contact was made ten years later by Commodore Crawford's famous Titan Expedition—"

"No, that's enough," said Wesson. "I just wanted the Pigeon quote." He smoked, brooding. "It seems kind of chopped off, doesn't it? Have you got a longer version in your memory banks anywhere?"

There was a pause. "No," said Aunt Jane.

"There was more to it when I was a kid," Wesson complained nervously. "I read that book when I was twelve, and I remember a long description of the alien . . . that is, I remember its being there." He swung around. "Listen, Aunt Jane—you're a sort of universal watchdog, that right? You've got cameras and mikes all over the Station?"

"Yes," said the network, sounding—was it Wesson's imagination?—faintly injured.

"Well, what about Sector Two—you must have cameras up there, too, isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"All right, then you can tell me. What do the aliens look like?"

There was a definite pause. "I'm sorry, I can't tell you that," said Aunt Jane.

"No," said Wesson, "I didn't think you could. You've got orders not to, I guess, for the same reason those history books have been cut since I was a kid. Now, what would the reason be? Have you got any idea, Aunt Jane?"

There was another pause. "Yes," the voice admitted.

"Well?"

"I'm sorry, I can't—"

"—tell you that," Wesson repeated along with it. "All right. At least we know where we stand."

"Yes, sergeant. Would you like some dessert?"

"No dessert. One other thing. *What happens to Station watchmen, like me, after their tour of duty?"*

"They are upgraded to Class Seven, students with unlimited leisure, and receive outright gifts of seven thousand stellors, plus free Class One housing—"

"Yeah, I know all that," said Wesson, licking his dry lips. "But here's what I'm asking you. The ones you knew—what kind of shape were they in when they left here?"

"The usual human shape," said the voice brightly. "Why do you ask, sergeant?"

Wesson made a discontented gesture. "Something I remember from a bull session at the Academy. I can't get it out of my head; I know it had something to do with the Station. Just a part of a sentence—*'blind as a bat, and white bristles all over.'* Now, would that be a description of the alien . . . or the watchman when they came to take him away?"

Aunt Jane went into one of her heavy pauses. "All right, I'll save you the trouble," said Wesson. "You're sorry, you can't tell me that."

"I *am* sorry," said the robot, sincerely.

Aunt Jane was a model companion. She had a record library of thousands of hours of music; she had films to show him, and micro-printed books that he could read on the scanner in the living room; or if he preferred, she would read to him. She controlled the Station's three telescopes, and on request would give him a view of Earth, or the Moon, or Home. . . .

But there was no news. Aunt Jane would obligingly turn on the radio receiver if he asked her, but nothing except static came out. That was the thing that weighed most heavily on Wesson, as time passed: the knowledge that radio silence was being imposed on all ships in transit, on the orbital stations, and on the planet-to-space transmitters. It was an enormous, almost a crippling handicap. Some information could be transmitted over relatively short distances by photophone, but ordinarily the whole complex traffic of the spacelanes depended on radio.

But this coming alien contact was so delicate a thing that even a radio voice, out here where the Earth was only a tiny disk twice the size of the Moon, might upset it. It was

so precarious a thing, Wesson thought, that only one man could be allowed in the Station while the alien was there, and to give that man the company that would keep him sane, they had to install an alpha network. . . .

"Aunt Jane?"

The voice answered promptly, "Yes, Paul."

"This distress that the books talk about—you wouldn't know what it is, would you?"

"No, Paul."

"Because robot brains don't feel it, right?"

"Right, Paul."

"So tell me this—why do they need a man here at all? Why can't they get along with just you?"

A pause. "I don't know, Paul." The voice sounded faintly wistful.

He got up from the living-room couch and paced restlessly back and forth. "Let's have a look at Earth," he said. Obediently, the viewing screen on the console glowed into life: there was the blue Earth, swimming deep below him, in its first quarter, jewel-bright. "Switch it off," Wesson said.

"A little music?" suggested the voice, and immediately began to play something soothing, full of woodwinds.

"No," said Wesson. The music stopped.

Wesson's hands were trembling; he had a caged and frustrated feeling.

The fitted suit was in its locker beside the air lock. Wesson had been topside in it once or twice; there was nothing to see up there, just darkness and cold. But he had to get out of this squirrel-cage. He took the suit down.

"Paul," said Aunt Jane anxiously, "are you feeling nervous?"

"Yes," he snarled.

"Then don't go into Sector Two," said Aunt Jane.

"Don't tell me what to do, you hunk of tin!" said Wesson with sudden anger. He zipped up the front of his suit.

Aunt Jane was silent.

The air lock, an upright tube barely large enough for one man, was the only passage between Sector One and Sector Two. It was also the only exit from Sector One; to get here in the first place, Wesson had had to enter the big lock at the "south" pole of the sphere, and travel all the way down inside by drop-hole and catwalk. He had been drugged un-

conscious at the time, of course. When the time came, he would go out the same way; neither the maintenance rocket nor the tanker had any space, or time, to spare.

At the "north" pole opposite, there was a third air lock, this one so huge it could easily have held an interplanet freighter. But that was nobody's business—no human being's.

In the beam of Wesson's helmet lamp, the enormous central cavity of the Station was an inky gulf that sent back only remote, mocking glimmers of light. The near walls sparkled with hoar-frost. Sector Two was not yet pressurized; there was only a diffuse vapor that had leaked through the airseal, and had long since frozen into the powdery deposit that lined the walls. The metal rang cold under his shod feet; the vast emptiness of the chamber was the more depressing because it was airless, unwarmed and unlit. *Alone,* said his footsteps; *alone* . . .

He was thirty yards up the catwalk when his anxiety suddenly grew stronger. Wesson stopped in spite of himself, and turned clumsily, putting his back to the wall. The support of the solid wall was not enough. The catwalk seemed threatening to tilt underfoot, dropping him into the gulf.

Wesson recognized this drained feeling, this metallic taste at the back of his tongue. It was fear.

The thought ticked through his head, *They want me to be afraid.* But why? Why now? Of what?

Equally suddenly, he knew. The nameless pressure tightened, like a great fist closing, and Wesson had the appalling sense of something so huge that it had no limits at all, descending, with a terrible endless swift slowness. . . .

His first month was up.

The alien was coming.

As Wesson turned, gasping, the whole huge structure of the Station around him seemed to dwindle to the size of an ordinary room . . . and Wesson with it, so that he seemed to himself like a tiny insect, frantically scuttling down the walls toward safety.

Behind him as he ran, the Station *boomed.*

In the silent rooms, all the lights were burning dimly. Wesson lay still, looking at the ceiling. Up there, his imag-

ination formed a shifting, changing image of the alien—huge, shadowy, formlessly menacing.

Sweat had gathered in globules on his brow. He stared, unable to look away.

"That was why you didn't want me to go topside, huh, Aunt Jane?"

"Yes. The nervousness is the first sign. But you gave me a direct order, Paul."

"I know it," he said vaguely, still staring fixedly at the ceiling. "A funny thing . . . Aunt Jane?"

"Yes, Paul."

"You won't tell me what it looks like, right?"

"*No,* Paul."

"I don't want to know. Lord, I don't *want* to know . . . Funny thing, Aunt Jane, part of me is just pure funk—I'm so scared, I'm nothing but a jelly—"

"I know," said the voice gently.

"—and part is real cool and calm, as if it didn't matter. Crazy, the things you think about. You know?"

"What things, Paul?"

He tried to laugh. "I'm remembering a kids' party I went to twenty . . . twenty-five years ago. I was, let's see, I was nine. I remember, because that was the same year my father died.

"We were living in Dallas then, in a rented mobilehouse, and there was a family in the next tract with a bunch of redheaded kids. They were always throwing parties; nobody liked them much, but everybody always went."

"Tell me about the party, Paul."

He shifted on the couch. "This one, this one was a Hallowe'en party. I remember the girls had on black and orange dresses, and the boys mostly wore spirit costumes. I was about the youngest kid there, and I felt kind of out of place. Then all of a sudden one of the redheads jumps up in a skull mask, hollering, 'C'mon, everybody get ready for hidenseek.' And he grabs *me,* and says, '*You* be it,' and before I can even move, he shoves me into a dark closet. And I hear that door lock behind me."

He moistened his lips. "And then—you know, in the darkness—I feel something hit my *face.* You know, cold and clammy, like, I don't know, something dead. . . .

"I just hunched up on the floor of that closet, waiting for

that thing to touch me again. You know? That thing, cold and kind of gritty, hanging up there. You know what it was? A cloth glove, full of ice and bran cereal. A joke. Boy, that was one joke I never forgot. . . . Aunt Jane?"

"Yes, Paul."

"Hey, I'll bet you alpha networks make great psychs, huh? I could lie here and tell you anything, because you're just a machine—right?"

"Right, Paul," said the network sorrowfully.

"Aunt Jane, Aunt Jane . . . It's no use kidding myself along, I can *feel* that thing up there, just a couple of yards away."

"I know you can, Paul."

"I can't stand it, Aunt Jane."

"You can if you think you can, Paul."

He writhed on the couch. "It's—it's dirty, it's clammy. My God, is it going to be like that for *five months?* I can't, it'll kill me, Aunt Jane."

There was another thunderous boom, echoing down through the structural members of the Station. "What's that?" Wesson gasped. "The other ship—casting off?"

"Yes. Now he's alone, just as you are."

"Not like me. He can't be feeling what I'm feeling. Aunt Jane, you don't know . . ."

Up there, separated from him only by a few yards of metal, the alien's enormous, monstrous body hung. It was that poised weight, as real as if he could touch it, that weighed down his chest.

Wesson had been a space-dweller for most of his adult life, and knew even in his bones that if an orbital station ever collapsed, the "under" part would not be crushed but would be hurled away by its own angular momentum. This was not the oppressiveness of planetside buildings, where the looming mass above you seemed always threatening to fall: this was something else, completely distinct, and impossible to argue away.

It was the scent of danger, hanging unseen up there in the dark, waiting, cold and heavy. It was the recurrent nightmare of Wesson's childhood—the bloated unreal shape, no-color, no-size, that kept on hideously falling toward his face. . . . It was the dead puppy he had pulled out

of the creek, that summer in Dakota . . . wet fur, limp head, cold, cold, *cold*. . . .

With an effort, Wesson rolled over on the couch and lifted himself to one elbow. The pressure was an insistent chill weight on his skull; the room seemed to dip and swing around in slow circles.

Wesson felt his jaw muscles contorting with the strain as he knelt, then stood erect. His back and legs tightened; his mouth hung painfully open. He took one step, then another, timing them to hit the floor as it came upright.

The right side of the console, the one that had been dark, was lighted. Pressure in Sector Two, according to the indicator, was about one and a third atmospheres. The air lock indicator showed a slightly higher pressure of oxygen and argon; that was to keep any of the alien atmosphere from contaminating Sector One, but it also meant that the lock would no longer open from either side.

"Lemme see Earth," he gasped.

The screen lighted up as he stared into it. "It's a long way down," he said. A long, long way down to the bottom of that well. . . . He had spent ten featureless years as a servo tech in Home Station. Before that, he'd wanted to be a pilot, but had washed out the first years—couldn't take the math. But he had never once thought of going back to Earth.

"Aunt Jane, Aunt Jane, it's beautiful," he mumbled.

Down there, he knew, it was spring; and in certain places, where the edge of darkness retreated, it was morning: a watery blue morning like the sea light caught in an agate, a morning with smoke and mist in it; a morning of stillness and promise. Down there, lost years and miles away, some tiny dot of a woman was opening her microscopic door to listen to an atom's song. Lost, lost, and packed away in cotton wool, like a specimen slide: one spring morning on Earth.

Black miles above, so far that sixty Earths could have been piled one on another to make a pole for his perch, Wesson swung in his endless circle within a circle. Yet, vast as was the gulf beneath him, all this—Earth, Moon, orbital stations, ships; yes, the Sun and all the rest of his planets, too—was the merest sniff of space, to be pinched up between thumb and finger.

Beyond—there was the true gulf. In that deep night, galaxies lay sprawled aglitter, piercing a distance that could only be named in a meaningless number, a cry of dismay: O,O,O. . . .

Crawling and fighting, blasting with energies too big for them, men had come as far as Uranus. But if a man had been tall enough to lie with his boots toasting in the Sun and his head freezing at Pluto, still he would have been too small for that overwhelming emptiness. Here, not at Pluto, was the outermost limit of man's empire: here the Outside funneled down to meet it, like the pinched waist of an hour-glass: here, and only here, the two worlds came near enough to touch. Ours—and Theirs.

Down at the bottom of the board, now, the golden dials were faintly alight, the needles trembling ever so little on their pins.

Deep in the vats, the vats, the golden liquid was trickling down: *"Though disgusted, I took a sample of the exudate and it was forwarded for analysis. . . ."*

Space-cold fluid, trickling down the bitter walls of the tubes, forming little pools in the cups of darkness; goldenly agleam there, half-alive. The golden elixir. One drop of the concentrate would arrest aging for twenty years—keep your arteries soft, tonus good, eyes clear, hair pigmented, brain alert.

That was what the tests of Pigeon's sample had showed. That was the reason for the whole crazy history of the "alien trading post"—first a hut on Titan, then later, when people understood more about the problem, Stranger Station.

Once every twenty years, an alien would come down out of Somewhere, and sit in the tiny cage we had made for him, and make us rich beyond our dreams—rich with life . . . and still we did not know why.

Above him, Wesson imagined he could see that sensed body a-wallow in the glacial blackness, its bulk passively turning with the Station's spin, bleeding a chill gold into the lips of the tubes: drip, drop.

Wesson held his head. The pressure inside made it hard to think; it felt as if his skull were about to fly apart. "Aunt Jane," he said.

"Yes, Paul." The kindly, comforting voice: like a nurse.

The nurse who stands beside your cot while you have painful, necessary things done to you.

"Aunt Jane," said Wesson, "do you know why they keep coming back?"

"No," said the voice precisely. "It is a mystery."

Wesson nodded. "I had," he said, "an interview with Gower before I left Home. You know Gower? Chief of the Outworld Bureau. Came up especially to see me."

"Yes?" said Aunt Jane encouragingly.

"Said to me, 'Wesson, you got to find out. Find out if we can count on them to keep up the supply. You know? There's fifty million more of us,' he says, 'than when you were born. We need more of the stuff, and we got to know if we can count on it. Because,' he says, 'you know what would happen if it stopped?' Do you know, Aunt Jane?"

"It would be," said the voice, "a catastrophe."

"That's right," Wesson said respectfully. "It would. Like, he says to me, 'What if the people in the Nefud area were cut off from the Jordan Valley Authority? Why, there'd be millions dying of thirst in a week.

" 'Or what if the freighters stopped coming to Moon Base. Why,' he says, 'there'd be thousands starving and smothering.'

"He says, 'Where the water is, where you can get food and air, people are going to settle, and get married, you know? and have kids.'

"He says, 'If the so-called longevity serum stopped coming . . .' Says, 'Every twentieth adult in the Sol family is due for his shot this year.' Says, 'Of those, almost twenty per cent are one hundred fifteen or older.' Says, 'The deaths in that group, in the first year, would be at least three times what the actuarial tables call for.' " Wesson raised a strained face. "I'm thirty-four, you know?" he said. "That Gower, he made me feel like a baby."

Aunt Jane made a sympathetic noise.

"Drip, drip," said Wesson hysterically. The needles of the tall golden indicators were infinitesimally higher. "Every twenty years, we need more of the stuff, so somebody like me has to come out and take it for five lousy months. And one of *them* has to come out and sit there, and *drip*. *Why*, Aunt Jane? What for? Why should it matter to them whether we live a long time or not? Why do they keep on

coming back? What do they take *away* from here?"

But to these questions, Aunt Jane had no reply.

All day and every day, the lights burned cold and steady in the circular gray corridor around the rim of Sector One. The hard gray flooring had been deeply scuffed in that circular path before Wesson ever walked there: the corridor existed for that only, like a treadmill in a squirrel cage; it said "Walk," and Wesson walked. A man would go crazy if he sat still, with that squirming, indescribable pressure on his head; and so Wesson paced off the miles, all day and every day, until he dropped like a dead man in the bed at night.

He talked, too, sometimes to himself, sometimes to the listening alpha network; sometimes it was difficult to tell which. "Moss on a rock," he muttered, pacing. "Told him, wouldn't give twenty mills for any damn shell. . . . Little pebbles down there, all colors." He shuffled on in silence for a while. Abruptly: "I don't see *why* they couldn't have given me a cat."

Aunt Jane said nothing. After a moment Wesson went on, "Nearly everybody at Home has a cat, for God's sake, or a goldfish or something. You're all right, Aunt Jane, but I can't *see* you. My God, I mean if they couldn't send a man or woman for company, what I mean, my God, I never liked *cats*." He swung around the doorway into the bedroom, and absent-mindedly slammed his fist into the bloody place on the wall.

"But a cat would have been *something*," he said.

Aunt Jane was still silent.

"Don't pretend your damn feelings are hurt, I know you, you're only a damn machine," said Wesson. "Listen, Aunt Jane, I remember a cereal package one time that had a horse and a cowboy on the side. There wasn't much room, so about all you saw was their faces. It used to strike me funny how much they looked alike. Two ears on the top with hair in the middle. Two eyes. Nose. Mouth with teeth in it. I was thinking, we're kind of distant cousins, aren't we, us and the horses. But compared to that thing up there—we're *brothers*. You know?"

"Yes," said Aunt Jane, quietly.

"So I keep asking myself, why couldn't they have sent a

horse, or a cat, *instead* of a man? But I guess the answer is, because only a man could take what I'm taking. God, only a man. Right?"

"Right," said Aunt Jane, with deep sorrow.

Wesson stopped at the bedroom doorway again and shuddered, holding onto the frame. "Aunt Jane," he said in a low, clear voice, "you take pictures of *him* up there, don't you?"

"Yes, Paul."

"And you take pictures of me. And then what happens? After it's all over, who looks at the pictures?"

"I don't know," said Aunt Jane humbly.

"You don't know. But whoever looks at 'em, it doesn't do any good. Right? We got to find out, why, why, why . . . And we never do find out do we?"

"No," said Aunt Jane.

"But don't they figure that if the man who's going through it could see him, he might be able to tell something? That other people couldn't? Doesn't that make sense?"

"That's out of my hands, Paul."

He sniggered. "That's funny. Oh, that's funny." He chortled in his throat, reeling around the circuit.

"Yes, that's funny," said Aunt Jane.

"Aunt Jane, tell me what happens to the watchmen."

". . . I can't tell you that, Paul."

He lurched into the living room, sat down before the console, beat on its smooth, cold metal with his fists. "What are you, some kind of monster? Isn't there any blood in your veins, damn it, or oil or *anything?*"

"Please, Paul—"

"Don't you see, all I want to know, can they talk? Can they tell anything after their tour is over?"

". . . No, Paul."

He stood upright, clutching the console for balance. "They can't? No, I figured. And you know why?"

"No."

"Up there," said Wesson obscurely. "Moss on the rock."

"Paul, what?"

"We get changed," said Wesson, stumbling out of the room again. "We get changed. Like a piece of iron next to

a magnet. Can't help it. You—nonmagnetic, I guess. Goes right through you, huh, Aunt Jane? You don't get changed. You stay here, wait for the next one."

"Yes," said Aunt Jane.

"You know," said Wesson, pacing, "I can tell how he's lying up there. Head *that* way, tail the other. Am I right?"

". . . Yes," said Aunt Jane.

Wesson stopped. "Yes," he said intently. "So you *can* tell me what you see up there, can't you, Aunt Jane?"

"No. Yes. It isn't allowed."

"Listen, Aunt Jane, *we'll die* unless we can find out what makes those aliens tick! Remember that." Wesson leaned against the corridor wall, gazing up. "He's turning now—around this way. Right?"

"Right."

"Well, what else is he doing? Come on, Aunt Jane!"

A pause. "He is twitching his . . ."

"What?"

"I don't know the words."

"My God, my God," said Wesson, clutching his head, "of course there aren't any words." He ran into the living room, clutched the console and stared at the blank screen. He pounded the metal with his fist. "You've got to show me, Aunt Jane, come on and show me, show me!"

"It isn't allowed," Aunt Jane protested.

"You've got to do it just the same, or we'll *die,* Aunt Jane—millions of us, billions, and it'll be your fault, get it, *your fault,* Aunt Jane!"

"Please," said the voice. There was a pause. The screen flickered to life, for an instant only. Wesson had a glimpse of something massive and dark, but half transparent, like a magnified insect—a tangle of nameless limbs, whiplike filaments, claws, wings . . .

He clutched the edge of the console.

"Was that all right?" Aunt Jane asked.

"Of course! What do you think, it'll kill me to look at it? Put it back, Aunt Jane, put it back!"

Reluctantly, the screen lighted again. Wesson stared, and went on staring. He mumbled something.

"What?" said Aunt Jane.

"Life of my love, I loathe thee," said Wesson, staring. He roused himself after a moment and turned away. The

image of the alien stayed with him as he went reeling into the corridor again; he was not surprised to find that it reminded him of all the loathsome, crawling, creeping things the Earth was full of. That explained why he was not supposed to see the alien, or even know what it looked like—because that fed his hate. And it was all right for him to be afraid of the alien, but he was not supposed to hate it . . . why not? Why not?

His fingers were shaking. He felt drained, steamed, dried up and withered. The one daily shower Aunt Jane allowed him was no longer enough. Twenty minutes after bathing, the acid sweat dripped again from his armpits, the cold sweat was beaded on his forehead, the hot sweat was in his palms. Wesson felt as if there were a furnace inside him, out of control, all the dampers drawn. He knew that under stress, something of the kind did happen to a man: the body's chemistry was altered—more adrenalin, more glycogen in the muscles; eyes brighter, digestion retarded. That was the trouble—he was burning himself up, unable to fight the thing that tormented him, or to run from it.

After another circuit, Wesson's steps faltered. He hesitated, and went into the living room. He leaned over the console, staring. From the screen, the alien stared blindly up into space. Down in the dark side, the golden indicators had climbed: the vats were more than two-thirds filled.

. . . to *fight,* or *run* . . .

Slowly Wesson sank down in front of the console. He sat hunched, head bent, hands squeezed tight between his knees, trying to hold onto the thought that had come to him.

If the alien felt a pain as great as Wesson's—or greater—

Stress might alter the alien's body chemistry, too.

Life of my love, I loathe thee.

Wesson pushed the irrelevant thought aside. He stared at the screen, trying to envisage the alien, up there, wincing in pain and distress—sweating a golden sweat of horror. . . .

After a long time, he stood up and walked into the kitchen. He caught the table edge to keep his legs from carrying him on around the circuit. He sat down.

Humming fondly, the autochef slid out a tray of small glasses—water, orange juice, milk. Wesson put the water glass to his stiff lips; the water was cool, and hurt his throat. Then the juice, but he could drink only a little of it; then

he sipped the milk. Aunt Jane hummed approvingly.

Dehydrated—how long had it been since he had eaten, or drunk? He looked at his hands. They were thin bundles of sticks, ropy-veined, with hard yellow claws. He could see the bones of his forearms under the skin, and his heart's beating stirred the cloth at his chest. The pale hairs on his arms and thighs—were they blond, or white?

The blurred reflections in the metal trim of the dining room gave him no answers—only pale faceless smears of gray. Wesson felt light-headed and very weak, as if he had just ended a bout of fever. He fumbled over his ribs and shoulder-bones. He was thin.

He sat in front of the autochef for a few minutes more, but no food came out. Evidently Aunt Jane did not think he was ready for it, and perhaps she was right. *Worse for them than for us,* he thought dizzily. *That's why the Station's so far out; why radio silence, and only one man aboard. They couldn't stand it at all, otherwise. . . .* Suddenly he could think of nothing but sleep—the bottomless pit, layer after layer of smothering velvet, numbing and soft. . . . His leg muscles quivered and twitched when he tried to walk, but he managed to get to the bedroom and fall on the mattress. The resilient block seemed to dissolve under him. His bones were melting.

He woke with a clear head, very weak, thinking cold and clear: *When two alien cultures meet, the stronger must transform the weaker with love or hate.* "Wesson's Law," he said aloud. He looked automatically for pencil and paper, but there was none, and he realized he would have to tell Aunt Jane, and let her remember it.

"I don't understand," she said.

"Never mind, remember it anyway. You're good at that, aren't you?"

"Yes, Paul."

"All right. . . . I want some breakfast."

He thought about Aunt Jane, so nearly human, sitting up here in her metal prison, leading one man after another through the torments of hell . . . nursemaid, protector, torturer. They must have known that something would have to give. . . . But the alphas were comparatively new; nobody understood them very well. Perhaps they really

thought that an absolute prohibition could never be broken.

. . . the stronger must transform the weaker . . .

I'm *the stronger,* he thought. *And that's the way it's going to be.* He stopped at the console, and the screen was blank. He said angrily, "Aunt Jane!" And with a guilty start, the screen flickered into life.

Up there, the alien had rolled again in his pain. Now the great clustered eyes were staring directly into the camera; the coiled limbs threshed in pain: the eyes were staring, asking, pleading . . .

"No," said Wesson, feeling his own pain like an iron cap, and he slammed his hand down on the manual control. The screen went dark. He looked up, sweating, and saw the floral picture over the console.

The thick stems were like antennae, the leaves thoraxes, the buds like blind insect-eyes. The whole picture moved slightly, endlessly, in a slow waiting rhythm.

Wesson clutched the hard metal of the console and stared at the picture, with sweat cold on his brow, until it turned into a calm, meaningless arrangement of lines again. Then he went into the dining room, shaking, and sat down.

After a moment he said, "Aunt Jane, does it get worse?"

"No. From now on, it gets better."

"How long?" he asked vaguely.

"One month."

A month, getting "better" . . . that was the way it had always been, with the watchman swamped and drowned, his personality submerged. Wesson thought about the men who had gone before him—Class Seven citizenship, with unlimited leisure, and Class One housing, yes, sure . . . in a sanatorium.

His lips peeled back from his teeth, and his fists clenched hard. *Not me!* he thought.

He spread his hands on the cool metal to steady them. He said, "How much longer do they usually stay able to talk?"

"You are already talking longer than any of them." . . .

Then there was a blank. Wesson was vaguely aware, in snatches, of the corridor walls moving past, and the console glimpsed, and of a thunderous cloud of ideas that swirled around his head in a beating of wings. The aliens:

what did they want? And what happened to the watchmen in Stranger Station?

The haze receded a little, and he was in the dining room again, staring vacantly at the table. Something was wrong.

He ate a few spoonfuls of the gruel the autochef served him, then pushed it away; the stuff tasted faintly unpleasant. The machine hummed anxiously and thrust a poached egg at him, but Wesson got up from the table.

The Station was all but silent. The resting rhythm of the household machines throbbed in the walls, unheard. The blue-lit living room was spread out before him like an empty stage-setting, and Wesson stared as if he had never seen it before.

He lurched to the console and stared down at the pictured alien on the screen: heavy, heavy, asprawl with pain in the darkness. The needles of the golden indicators were high, the enlarged vats almost full. *It's too much for him,* Wesson thought with grim satisfaction. The peace that followed the pain had not descended as it was supposed to; no, not this time!

He glanced up at the painting over the console: heavy crustacean limbs that swayed gracefully.

He shook his head violently. *I won't let it; I won't give in!* He held the back of one hand close to his eyes. He saw the dozens of tiny cuneiform wrinkles stamped into the skin over the knuckles, the pale hairs sprouting, the pink shiny flesh of recent scars. *I'm human,* he thought. But when he let his hand fall onto the console, the bony fingers seemed to crouch like crustaceans' legs, ready to scuttle.

Sweating, Wesson stared into the screen. Pictured there, the alien met his eyes, and it was as if they spoke to each other, mind to mind, an instantaneous communication that needed no words. There was a piercing sweetness in it, a melting, dissolving luxury of change into something that would no longer have any pain. . . . A pull, a calling.

Wesson straightened up slowly, carefully, as if he held some fragile thing in his mind that must not be handled roughly, or it would disintegrate. He said hoarsely, "Aunt Jane!"

She made some responsive noise.

He said, "Aunt Jane, I've got the answer! The whole thing! Listen, now, wait—listen!" He paused a moment to

collect his thoughts. *"When two alien cultures meet, the stronger must transform the weaker with love or hate.* Remember? You said you didn't understand what that meant. I'll *tell* you what it means. When these—monsters—met Pigeon a hundred years ago on Titan, *they knew* we'd have to meet again. They're spreading out, colonizing, and so are we. We haven't got interstellar flight yet, but give us another hundred years, we'll *get* it. *We'll wind up out there, where they are.* And they can't stop us. Because they're not killers, Aunt Jane, it isn't in them. They're *nicer* than us. See, they're like the missionaries, and we're the South Sea Islanders. *They* don't kill their enemies, oh no—perish the thought!"

She was trying to say something, to interrupt him, but he rushed on. "Listen! The longevity serum—that was a lucky accident. But they played it for all it's worth. Slick and smooth—they come and give us the stuff free—they don't ask for a thing in return. Why not? Listen.

"They come here, and the shock of that first contact makes them sweat out that golden gook we need. Then, the last month or so, the pain always eases off. Why? Because the two minds, the human and alien, they stop fighting each other. Something gives way, it goes soft and there's a mixing together. And that's where you get the human casualties of this operation—the bleary men that come out of here not even able to talk human language any more. Oh, I suppose they're happy—happier than I am!—because they've got something big and wonderful inside 'em. Something that you and I can't even understand. But if you took them and put them together again with the aliens who spent time here, *they could all live together—they're adapted.*

"That's what they're aiming for!" He struck the console with his fist. "Not now—but a hundred, two hundred years from now! When we start expanding out to the stars—when we go a-conquering—we'll have already been conquered! Not by weapons, Aunt Jane, not by hate—by love! Yes, love! *Dirty, stinking, low-down, sneaking love!"*

Aunt Jane said something, a long sentence, in a high, anxious voice.

"What?" said Wesson irritably. He couldn't understand a word.

Aunt Jane was silent. "What, what?" Wesson demanded,

pounding the console. "Have you got it through your tin head, or not? *What?*"

Aunt Jane said something else, tonelessly. Once more, Wesson could not make out a single word.

He stood frozen. Warm tears started suddenly out of his eyes. "Aunt Jane—" he said. He remembered, *You are already talking longer than any of them.* Too late? Too late? He tensed, then whirled and sprang to the closet where the paper books were kept. He opened the first one his hand struck.

The black letters were alien squiggles on the page, little humped shapes, without meaning.

The tears were coming faster, he couldn't stop them: tears of weariness, tears of frustration, tears of hate. *"Aunt Jane!"* he roared.

But it was no good. The curtain of silence had come down over his head. He was one of the vanguard—the conquered men, the ones who would get along with their stranger brothers, out among the alien stars.

The console was not working any more; nothing worked when he wanted it. Wesson squatted in the shower stall, naked, with a soup bowl in his hands. Water droplets glistened on his hands and forearms; the pale short hairs were just springing up, drying.

The silvery skin of reflection in the bowl gave him back nothing but a silhouette, a shadow man's outline. He could not see his face.

He dropped the bowl and went across the living room, shuffling the pale drifts of paper underfoot. The black lines on the paper, when his eyes happened to light on them, were worm-shapes, crawling things, conveying nothing. He rolled slightly in his walk; his eyes were glazed. His head twitched, every now and then, sketching a useless motion to avoid pain.

Once the bureau chief, Gower, came to stand in his way. "You fool," he said, his face contorted in anger, "you were supposed to go on to the end, like the rest. Now look what you've done!"

"I found out, didn't I?" Wesson mumbled, and as he brushed the man aside like a cobweb, the pain suddenly grew more intense. Wesson clasped his head in his hands

with a grunt, and rocked to and fro a moment, uselessly, before he straightened and went on. The pain was coming in waves now, so tall that at their peak his vision dimmed out, violet, then gray.

It couldn't go on much longer. Something had to burst.

He paused at the bloody place and slapped the metal with his palm, making the sound ring dully up into the frame of the Station: *rroom, rroom.*

Faintly an echo came back: *boooom.*

Wesson kept going, smiling a faint and meaningless smile. He was only marking time now, waiting. Something was about to happen.

The dining-room doorway sprouted a sudden sill and tripped him. He fell heavily, sliding on the floor, and lay without moving beneath the slick gleam of the autochef.

The pressure was too great: the autochef's clucking was swallowed up in the ringing pressure, and the tall gray walls buckled slowly in. . . .

The Station lurched.

Wesson felt it through his chest, palms, knees, and elbows: the floor was plucked away for an instant and then swung back.

The pain in his skull relaxed its grip a little. Wesson tried to get to his feet.

There was an electric silence in the Station. On the second try, he got up and leaned his back against a wall. *Cluck,* said the autochef suddenly, hysterically, and the vent popped open, but nothing came out.

He listened, straining to hear. What?

The Station bounced beneath him, making his feet jump like a puppet's; the wall slapped his back hard, shuddered and was still; but far off through the metal cage came a long angry groan of metal, echoing, diminishing, dying. Then silence again.

The Station held its breath. All the myriad clickings and pulses in the walls were suspended; in the empty rooms the lights burned with a yellow glare, and the air hung stagnant and still. The console lights in the living room glowed like witchfires. Water in the dropped bowl, at the bottom of the shower stall, shone like quicksilver, waiting.

The third shock came. Wesson found himself on his hands and knees, the jolt still tingling in the bones of his

body, staring at the floor. The sound that filled the room ebbed away slowly and ran down into the silences: a resonant metallic hollow sound, shuddering away now along the girders and hull plates, rattling tinnily into bolts and fittings, diminishing, noiseless, gone. The silence pressed down again.

The floor leaped painfully under his body: one great resonant blow that shook him from head to foot.

A muted echo of that blow came a few seconds later, as if the shock had traveled across the Station and back. *The bed,* Wesson thought, and scrambled on hands and knees through the doorway, along a floor curiously tilted, until he reached the rubbery block.

The room burst visibly upward around him, squeezing the block flat. It dropped back as violently, leaving Wesson bouncing helpless on the mattress, his limbs flying. It came to rest, in a long reluctant groan of metal.

Wesson rolled up on one elbow, thinking incoherently, *Air, the air lock.* Another blow slammed him down into the mattress, pinched his lungs shut, while the room danced grotesquely over his head. Gasping for breath in the ringing silence, Wesson felt a slow icy chill rolling toward him across the room . . . and there was a pungent smell in the air. *Ammonia!* he thought; and the odorless, smothering methane with it.

His cell was breached. The burst membrane was fatal: the alien's atmosphere would kill him.

Wesson surged to his feet. The next shock caught him off balance, dashed him to the floor. He arose again, dazed and limping; he was still thinking confusedly, *The air lock, get out.*

When he was halfway to the door, all the ceiling lights went out at once. The darkness was like a blanket around his head. It was bitter cold now in the room, and the pungent smell was sharper. Coughing, Wesson hurried forward. The floor lurched under his feet.

Only the golden indicators burned now: full to the top, the deep vats brimming, golden-lipped, gravid, a month before the time. Wesson shuddered.

Water spurted in the bathroom, hissing steadily on the tiles, rattling in the plastic bowl at the bottom of the shower stall. The lights winked on and off again. In the din-

ing room, he heard the autochef clucking and sighing. The freezing wind blew harder: he was numb with cold to the hips. It seemed to Wesson abruptly that he was not at the top of the sky at all, but down, *down* at the bottom of the sea . . . trapped in this steel bubble, while the dark poured in.

The pain in his head was gone, as if it had never been there, and he understood what that meant: Up there, the great body was hanging like butcher's carrion in the darkness. Its death struggles were over, the damage done.

Wesson gathered a desperate breath, shouted, "Help me! The alien's dead! He kicked the Station apart—the methane's coming in! Get help, do you hear me? *Do you hear me?*"

Silence. In the smothering blackness, he remembered: *She can't understand me any more. Even if she's alive.*

He turned, making an animal noise in his throat. He groped his way on around the room, past the second doorway. Behind the walls, something was dripping with a slow cold tinkle and splash, a forlorn night sound. Small, hard floating things rapped against his legs. Then he touched a smooth curve of metal: the air lock.

Eagerly he pushed his feeble weight against the door. It didn't move. And it didn't move. Cold air was rushing out around the door frame, a thin knife-cold stream, but the door itself was jammed tight.

The suit! He should have thought of that before. If he just had some pure air to breathe, and a little warmth in his fingers . . . But the door of the suit locker would not move, either. The ceiling must have buckled.

And that was the end, he thought, bewildered. There were no more ways out. But there *had* to be— He pounded on the door until his arms would not lift any more; it did not move. Leaning against the chill metal, he saw a single light blink on overhead.

The room was a wild place of black shadows and swimming shapes—the book leaves, fluttering and darting in the air stream. Schools of them beat wildly at the walls, curling over, baffled, trying again; others were swooping around the outer corridor, around and around: he could see them whirling past the doorways, dreamlike, a white drift of silent paper in the darkness.

The acrid smell was harsher in his nostrils. Wesson choked, groping his way to the console again. He pounded it with his open hand: he wanted to see Earth.

But when the little square of brightness leaped up, it was the dead body of the alien that Wesson saw.

It hung motionless in the cavity of the Station, limbs dangling stiff and still, eyes dull. The last turn of the screw had been too much for it: but Wesson had survived . . .

For a few minutes.

The dead alien face mocked him; a whisper of memory floated into his mind: *We might have been brothers. . . .* All at once, Wesson passionately wanted to believe it—wanted to give in, turn back. That passed. Wearily he let himself sag into the bitter *now,* thinking with thin defiance, *It's done—hate wins. You'll have to stop this big giveaway—can't risk this happening again. And we'll hate you for that—and when we get out to the stars—*

The world was swimming numbly away out of reach. He felt the last fit of coughing take his body, as if it were happening to someone else beside him.

The last fluttering leaves of paper came to rest. There was a long silence in the drowned room.

Then:

"Paul," said the voice of the mechanical woman brokenly; "Paul," it said again, with the hopelessness of lost, unknown, impossible love.

SATELLITE PASSAGE
Theodore L. Thomas

Theodore L. Thomas is a patent attorney who started his writing career doing a weekly science column for the Stamford, Conn., *Advocate* in 1949, branched out into articles for the science-fiction magazines in 1952 (as "Leonard Lockhard", sometimes collaborating with another lawyer-writer, Charles L. Harness). His first fiction appeared in 1953; he has published about 70 stories in magazines, ranging from *Planet Stories* to *Playboy;* still writes for the *Advocate,* and also does a science column for *Fantasy & Science Fiction.* He has written one novel, *The Clone* (1965) in collaboration with Kate Wilhelm.

Born in 1920, Thomas studied chemical engineering at M.I.T., then took a second degree in law, with time out for the artillery, and for court-martial work in Japan, during World War II. He now lives, with his wife and three children, in Lancaster, Pa., except when they are scuba-diving off their cabin cruiser in Atlantic coastal waters.

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THE THREE MEN bent over the chart and once again computed the orbit. It was quiet in the satellite, a busy quiet broken by the click of seeking microswitches and the gentle purr of smooth-running motors. The deep pulsing throb of the air conditioner had stopped; the satellite was in the Earth's shadow and there was no need for cooling the interior.

"Well," said Morgan, "it checks. We'll pass within fifty feet of the other satellite. Too close. Think we ought to move?"

Kaufman looked at him and did not speak. McNary glanced up and snorted. Morgan nodded. He said, "That's

right. If there's any moving to be done, let them do it." He felt a curious nascent emotion, a blend of anger and exhilaration—very faint now, just strong enough to be recognizable. The pencil snapped in his fingers, and he stared at it, and smiled.

Kaufman said, "Any way we can reline this a little? Fifty feet cuts it kind of close."

They were silent, and the murmuring of machinery filled the cramped room. "How's this?" said McNary. "Wait till we see the other satellite, take a couple of readings on it, and compute the orbit again. We'd have about five minutes to make the calculations. Morgan here can do it in less than that. Then we'd know if we're on a collision course."

Morgan nodded. "We could do it that way." He studied the chart in front of him. "The only thing, those boys on the other satellite will see what we're doing. They'll know we're afraid of a collision. They'll radio it down to Earth, and—you know the Russian mind—we'll lose face."

"That so bad?" asked Kaufman.

Morgan stared at the chart. He answered softly. "Yes, I think it is. The Russians will milk it dry if we make any move to get our satellite out of the way of theirs. We can't do that to our people."

McNary nodded. Kaufman said, "Agree. Just wanted to throw it out. We stay put. We hit, we hit."

The other two looked at Kaufman. The abrupt dismissal of a serious problem was characteristic of the little astronomer; Kaufman wasted no time with second guesses. A decision made was a fact accomplished; it was over.

Morgan glanced at McNary to see how he was taking it. McNary, now, big as he was, was a worrier. He stood ready to change his mind at any time, whenever some new alternative looked better. Only the soundness of his judgment prevented his being putty in any strong hands. He was a meteorologist, and a good one.

"You know," McNary said, "I still can't quite believe it. Two satellites, one pole-to-pole, the other equatorial, both having apogees and perigees of different elevations—yet they wind up on what amounts to a collision course."

Morgan said, "That's what regression will do for you. But we haven't got any time for that; we've got to think this

out. Let's see, they'll be coming up from below us at passage. Can we make anything of that?"

There was silence while the three men considered it. Morgan's mind was focused on the thing that was about to happen; but wisps of memory intruded. Faintly he could hear the waves, smell the bite in the salt sea air. A man who had sailed a thirty-two-foot ketch alone into every corner of the globe never thereafter quite lost the sound of the sea in his ear. And the struggle, the duel, the strain of outguessing the implacable elements, there was a test of a man. . . .

"Better be outside in any case," said Kaufman. "Suited up and outside. They'll see us, and know we intend to do nothing to avoid collision. Also, we'll be in a better position to cope with anything that comes along, if we're in the suits."

Morgan and McNary nodded, and again there was talk. They discussed the desirability of radio communication with the other satellite, and decided against it. To keep their own conversations private, they agreed to use telephone communication instead of radio. When the discussion trailed off, Kaufman said, "Be some picture, if we have the course computed right. We stand there and wave at 'em as they go by."

Morgan tried to see it in his mind: three men standing on a long, slim tube, and waving at three men on another. The first rocket passage, and me waving. And then Morgan remembered something, and the image changed.

He saw the flimsy, awkward planes sputtering past each other on the morning's mission. The pilots, detached observers, noncombatants really, waved at each other as the rickety planes passed. Kindred souls they were, high above the walks of normal men. So they waved . . . for a while.

Morgan said, "Do you suppose they'll try anything?"

"Like what?" said Kaufman.

"Like knocking us out of orbit if they can. Like shooting at us if they have a gun. Like throwing something at us, if they've got nothing better to do."

"My God," said McNary, "you think they might have brought a gun up here?"

Morgan began examining the interor of the tiny cabin. Slowly he turned his head, looking at one piece of equip-

ment after another, visualizing what was packed away under it and behind it. To the right of the radio was the spacesuit locker, and his glance lingered there. He reached over, opened the door and slipped a hand under the suits packed in the locker. For a moment he fumbled and then he sat back holding an oxygen flask in his hand. He hefted the small steel flask and looked at Kaufman. "Can you think of anything better than this for throwing?"

Kaufman took it and hefted it in his turn, and passed it to McNary. McNary did the same and then carefully held it in front of him and took his hand away. The flask remained poised in mid-air, motionless. Kaufman shook his head and said, "I can't think of anything better. It's got good mass, fits the hand well. It'll do."

Morgan said, "Another thing. We clip extra flasks to our belts and they look like part of the standard equipment. It won't be obvious that we're carrying something we can throw."

McNary gently pushed the flask toward Morgan, who caught it and replaced it. McNary said, "I used to throw a hot pass at Berkeley. I wonder how the old arm is."

The discussion went on. At one point the radio came to life and Kaufman had a lengthy conversation with one of the control points on the surface of the planet below. They talked in code. It was agreed that the American satellite should not move to make room for the other, and this information was carefully leaked so the Russians would be aware of the decision.

The only difficulty was that the Russians also leaked the information that their satellite would not move, either.

A final check of the two orbits revealed no change. Kaufman switched off the set.

"That," he said, "is the whole of it."

"They're leaving us pretty much on our own," said McNary.

"Couldn't be any other way," Morgan answered. "We're the ones at the scene. Besides"—he smiled his tight smile—"they trust us."

Kaufman snorted. "Ought to. They went to enough trouble to pick us."

McNary looked at the chronometer and said, "Three quarters of an hour to passage. We'd better suit up."

Morgan nodded and reached again into the suit locker. The top suit was McNary's, and as he worked his way into it, Morgan and Kaufman pressed against the walls to give him room. Kaufman was next, and then Morgan. They set out the helmets, and while Kaufman and McNary made a final check of the equipment, Morgan took several sights to verify their position.

"Luck," said Kaufman, and dropped his helmet over his head. The others followed and they all went through the air-sealing check-off. They passed the telephone wire around, and tested the circuit. Morgan handed out extra oxygen flasks, three for each. Kaufman waved, squeezed into the air lock and pulled the hatch closed behind him. McNary went next, then Morgan.

Morgan carefully pulled himself erect alongside the outer hatch and plugged the telephone jack into his helmet. As he straightened, he saw the Earth directly in front of him. It loomed large, visible as a great mass of blackness cutting off the harsh white starshine. The blackness was smudged with irregular patches of orangish light that marked the cities of Earth.

Morgan became aware that McNary, beside him, was pointing toward the center of the Earth. Following the line of his finger Morgan could see a slight flicker of light against the blackness; it was so faint that he had to look above it to see it.

"Storm," said McNary. "Just below the equator. It must be a pip if we can see the lightning through the clouds from here. I've been watching it develop for the last two days."

Morgan stared, and nodded to himself. He knew what it was like down there. The familiar feeling was building up, stronger now as the time to passage drew closer. First the waiting. The sea, restless in expectancy as the waves tossed their hoary manes. The gathering majesty of the elements, reaching, searching, striving. . . . And if at the height of the contest the screaming wind snatched up and smothered a defiant roar from a mortal throat, there was none to tell of it.

Then the time came when the forces waned. A slight let-up at first, then another. Soon the toothed and jagged edge

of the waves subsided, the hard side-driven spray and rain assumed a more normal direction.

The man looked after the departing storm, and there was pain in his eyes, longing. Almost, the words rose to his lips, "Come back, I am still here, do not leave me, come back." But the silent supplication went unanswered, and the man was left with a taste of glory gone, with an emptiness that drained the soul. The encounter had ended, the man had won. But the winning was bitter. The hard fight was not hard enough. Somewhere there must be a test sufficient to try the mettle of this man. Somewhere there was a crucible hot enough to float any dross. But where? The man searched and searched, but could not find it.

Morgan turned his head away from the storm and saw that Kaufman and McNary had walked to the top of the satellite. Carefully he turned his body and began placing one foot in front of the other to join them. Yes, he thought, men must always be on top, even if the top is only a state of mind. Here on the outer surface of the satellite, clinging to the metallic skin with shoes of magnetized alloy, there was no top. One direction was the same as another, as with a fly walking on a chandelier. Yet some primordial impulse drove a man to that position which he considered the top, drove him to stand with his feet pointed toward the Earth and his head toward the outer reaches where the stars moved.

Walking under these conditions was difficult, so Morgan moved with care. The feet could easily tread ahead of the man without his knowing it, or they could lag behind. A slight unthinking motion could detach the shoes from the satellite, leaving the man floating free, unable to return. So Morgan moved with care, keeping the telephone line clear with one hand.

When he reached the others, Morgan stopped and looked around. The sight always gave him pause. It was not pretty; rather, it was harsh and garish like the raucous illumination of a honkytonk saloon. The black was too black, and the stars burned too white. Everything appeared sharp and hard, with none of the softness seen from the Earth.

Morgan stared, and his lips curled back over his teeth. The anticipation inside him grew greater. No sound and

fury here; the menace was of a different sort. Looming, quietly foreboding, it was everywhere.

Morgan leaned back to look overhead, and his lips curled further. This was where it might come, this was the place. Raw space, where a man moved and breathed in momentary peril, where cosmic debris formed arrow-swift reefs on which to founder, where star-born particles traveled at unthinkable speeds out of the macrocosm seeking some fragile microcosm to shatter.

"Sun." Kaufman's voice echoed tinnily inside the helmet. Morgan brought his head down. There, ahead, a tinge of deep red edged a narrow segment of the black Earth. The red brightened rapidly, and broadened. Morgan reached to one side of his helmet and dropped a filter into place; he continued to stare at the sun.

McNary said, "Ten minutes to passage."

Morgan unhooked one of the oxygen cylinders at his belt and said, "We need some practice. We'd better try throwing one of these now; not much time left." He turned sideways and made several throwing motions with his right hand without releasing the cylinder. "Better lean into it more than you would down below. Well, here goes." He pushed the telephone line clear of his right side and leaned back, raising his right arm. He began to lean forward. When it seemed that he must topple, he snapped his arm down and threw the cylinder. The recoil straightened him neatly, and he stood securely upright. The cylinder shot out and down in a straight line and was quickly lost to sight.

"Very nice," said McNary. "Good timing. I'll keep mine low too. No sense cluttering the orbits up here with any more junk." Carefully McNary leaned back, leaned forward, and threw. The second cylinder followed the first, and McNary kept his footing.

Without speaking Kaufman went through the preliminaries and launched his cylinder. Morgan and McNary watched it speed into the distance. "Shooting stars on Earth tonight," said McNary.

"Quick! I'm off." It was Kaufman.

Morgan and McNary turned to see Kaufman floating several feet above the satellite, and slowly receding. Morgan stepped toward him and scooped up the telephone wire

that ran to Kaufman's helmet. Kaufman swung an arm in a circle so that it became entangled in the wire. Morgan carefully drew the wire taut and checked Kaufman's outward motion. Gently, so as not to snap the wire, he slowly reeled him in. McNary grasped Kaufman's shoulders and turned him so that his feet touched the metal shell of the satellite.

McNary chuckled and said, "Why didn't you ride an oxygen cylinder down?"

Kaufman grunted and said, "Oh, sure. I'll leave that to the idiots in the movies; that's the only place a man can ride a cylinder in space." He turned to Morgan. "Thanks. Do as much for you some day."

"Hope you don't have to," Morgan answered. "Look, any throwing to be done, you better leave it to Mac and me. We can't be fishing anyone back if things get hot."

"Right," said Kaufman, "I'll do what I can to fend off anything they throw at us." He sniffed. "Be simpler if we have a collision."

Morgan was staring to the left. He lifted a hand and pointed. "That it?"

The others squinted in that direction. After a moment they saw the spot of light moving swiftly up and across the black backdrop of the naked sky. "Must be," said Kaufman. "Right time, right place. Must be."

Morgan proudly turned his back on the sun and closed his eyes; he would need his best vision shortly now, and he wanted his pupils dilated as much as possible. "Make anything out yet?" he said.

"No. Little brighter."

Morgan stood without moving. He could feel the heat on his back as his suit seized the radiant energy from the sun and converted it to heat. He grew warm at the back, yet his front remained cold. The sensation was familiar, and Morgan sought to place it. Yes, that was it—a fireplace. He felt as does a man who stands in a cold room with his back toward a roaring fire. One side toasted, the other side frigid. Funny, the homey sensations, even here.

"Damn face plate." It was Kaufman. He had scraped the front of his helmet against the outside hatch a week ago. Since then the scratches distracted him every time he wore the helmet.

Morgan waited, and the exultation seethed and bubbled and fumed. "Anything?" he said.

"It's brighter," said McNary. "But—wait a minute, I can make it out. They're outside, the three of them. I can just see them."

It was time. Morgan turned to face the approaching satellite. He raised a hand to shield his face plate from the sun and carefully opened his eyes. He shifted his hand into the proper position and studied the other satellite.

It was like their own, even to the three men standing on it, except that the three were spaced farther apart.

"Any sign of a rifle or gun?" asked McNary.

"Not that I see," said Morgan. "They're not close enough to tell."

He watched the other satellite grow larger and he tried to judge its course, but it was too far away. Although his eyes were on the satellite, his side vision noted the bright-lit Earth below and the stars beyond. A small part of his mind was amused by his own stubborn egocentricity. Knowing well that he was moving and moving fast, he still felt that he stood motionless while the rest of the universe revolved around him. The great globe seemed to be majestically turning under his rooted feet. The harsh brilliances that were the stars seemed to sweep by overhead. And that oncoming satellite, it seemed not to move so much as merely swell in size as he watched.

One of the tiny figures on the other satellite shifted its position toward the others. Sensitive to the smallest detail, Morgan said, "He didn't clear a line when he walked. No telephone. They're on radio. See if we can find the frequency. Mac, take the low. Shorty, the medium. I'll take the high."

Morgan reached to his helmet and began turning the channel selector, hunting for the frequency the Russians were using. Kaufman found it. He said, "Got it, I think. One twenty-eight point nine."

Morgan set his selector, heard nothing at first. Then hard in his ear burst an unintelligible sentence with the characteristic fruity diphthongs of Russian. "I think that's it," he said.

He watched, and the satellite increased in size. "No rifle

or any other weapon that I see," said Morgan. "But they *are* carrying a lot of extra oxygen bottles."

Kaufman grunted. McNary asked, "Can you tell if it's a collision course yet? I can't."

Morgan stared at the satellite through narrowed eyes, frowning in concentration. "I think not. I think it'll cross our bow twenty or thirty feet out; close but no collision."

McNary's breath sounded loud in the helmet. "Good. Then we've nothing but the men to worry about. I wonder how those boys pitch."

Another burst of Russian came over the radio, and with it Morgan felt himself slip into the relaxed state he knew so well. No longer was the anticipation rising. He was ready now, in a state of calm, a deadly and efficient calm—ready for the test. This was how it always was with him when the time came, and the time was now.

Morgan watched as the other satellite approached. His feet were apart and his head turned sideways over his left shoulder. At a thousand yards, he heard a mutter in Russian and saw the man at the stern start moving rapidly toward the bow. His steps were long. Too long.

Morgan saw the gap appear between the man and the surface of the other ship, saw the legs kicking in a futile attempt to establish contact again. The radio was alive with quick, short sentences, and the two men turned and began to work their way swiftly toward the bit of human jetsam that floated near them.

"I'll be damned," said Kaufman. "They'll never make it."

Morgan had seen that this was true. The gap between floating man and ship widened faster than the gap between men and floating man diminished. Without conscious thought or plan, Morgan leaned forward and pulled the jack on the telephone line from McNary's helmet. He leaned back and did the same to Kaufman, straightened and removed his own. He threw a quick knot and gathered the line, forming a coil in his left hand and one in his right, and leaving a large loop floating near the ship in front of him. He stepped forward to clear Kaufman, and twisted his body far around to the right. There he waited, eyes fixed on the other satellite. He crouched slightly and began to lean forward, far forward. At the proper moment he snapped both his arms around to throw the line, the left hand throwing

high, the right low. All his sailor's skill went into that heave. As the other satellite swept past, the line flew true to meet it. The floating man saw it coming and grabbed it and wrapped it around his hand and shouted into the radio. The call was not needed; the lower portion of the line struck one of the walking men. He turned and pulled the line into his arms and hauled it tight. The satellite was barely past when the bit of human jetsam was returning to its metallic haven. The two men became three again, and they turned to face the American satellite. As one man the three raised both arms and waved. Still without thinking, Morgan found himself raising an arm with Kaufman and McNary and waving back.

He dropped his arm and watched the satellite shrink in size. The calmness left him, replaced by a small spot of emptiness that grew inside him, and grew and swelled and threatened to engulf him.

Passage was ended, but the taste in his mouth was of ashes and not of glory.

NO, NO, NOT ROGOV!

Cordwainer Smith

Paul M. A. Linebarger ("Cordwainer Smith") (1913–1966) was Professor of Asiatic Politics at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. At the time of his death, he and his wife, Dr. Genevieve Linebarger (a political scientist specializing in Southeast Asia), had recently completed a book, *Confrontation and World Peace*, based on a tour of Asia and the Pacific in 1964–65.

Dr. Linebarger was born in Milwaukee, but just barely: "Father wanted a boy who could be President, so I had to be born in America." He grew up in China: "father," a former U.S. Judge in the Philippines, was legal adviser to Sun Yat-sen. (Years later, Dr. Linebarger's business cards bore his name in Chinese characters, and at least two pen names, "Felix C. Forrest" and "Cordwainer Smith," were derived from the literal translation of the name, Lin Po-lo: Forest of Incandescent Bliss.)

The first "Smith" story, "Scanners Live in Vain", appeared in a semiprofessional magazine, *Fantasy Book*, in 1950, and was immediately reprinted in Heinlein's classic anthology, *Tomorrow the Stars*. His first book, *You Will Never Be the Same*, was published in 1962. The last was *Quest of Three Worlds* (Ace, 1966).

"No, No, Not Rogov!" was first published in *If*, February, 1959, and reprinted in the 5th Annual. "A Planet Named Shayol" also appeared in the 7th Annual, and "Drunkboat" in the 9th.

That gold shape on the golden steps shook and fluttered like a bird gone mad—like a bird imbued with an intellect and a soul, and, nevertheless, driven mad by ecstasies and terrors beyond human understanding. A thousand worlds watched.

Had the ancient calendar continued, this would have been A.D. 13,582. After defeat, after disappointment, after

ruin and reconstruction, mankind had leaped among the stars.

Out of the shock of meeting inhuman art, of confronting nonhuman dances, mankind had made a superb esthetic effort and had leaped upon the stage of all the worlds.

The golden steps reeled. Some eyes that watched had retinas. Some had crystalline cones. Yet all eyes were fixed upon the golden shape which interpreted "The Glory and Affirmation of Man" *in the Inter-World Dance Festival of what might have been A.D. 13,582.*

Once again mankind was winning the contest. Music and dance were hypnotic beyond the limits of systems, compelling, shocking to human and inhuman eyes. The dance was a triumph of shock—the shock of dynamic beauty.

The golden shape on the golden steps executed shimmering intricacies of meaning. The body was gold and still human. The body was a woman, but more than a woman. On the golden steps, in golden light, she trembled and fluttered like a bird gone mad.

The ministry of State Security had been positively shocked when they found that a Nazi agent, more heroic than prudent, had almost reached N. Rogov.

Rogov was worth more to the Soviet armed forces than any two air armies, more than three motorized divisions. His brain was a weapon, a weapon for the Soviet power.

Since the brain was a weapon, Rogov was a prisoner.

He didn't mind.

Rogov was a pure Russian type, broad-faced, sandy-haired, blue-eyed, with whimsy in his smile and amusement in the wrinkles at the tops of his cheeks.

"Of course I'm a prisoner," Rogov used to say. "I am a prisoner of State service to the Soviet peoples. But the workers and peasants are good to me. I am an academician of the All Union Academy of Sciences, a major general in the Red Air Force, a professor in the University of Kharkov, a deputy works manager of the Red Flag Combat Aircraft Production Trust. From each of these I draw a salary."

Sometimes he would narrow his eyes at his Russian scientific colleagues and ask them in dead earnest, "Would I serve capitalists?"

The affrighted colleagues would try to stammer their way out of the embarrassment, protesting their common loyalty to Stalin or Beria, or Zhukov, or Molotov, or Bulganin, as the case may have been.

Rogov would look very Russian: calm, mocking, amused. He would let them stammer.

Then he'd laugh.

Solemnity transformed into hilarity, he would explode into bubbling, effervescent, good-humored laughter: "Of course I could not serve the capitalists. My little Anastasia would not let me."

The colleagues would smile uncomfortably and would wish that Rogov did not talk so wildly, or so comically, or so freely.

Rogov was afraid of nothing. Most of his colleagues were afraid of each other, of the Soviet system, of the world, of life, and of death.

Perhaps Rogov had once been ordinary and mortal like other people, and full of fears.

But he had become the lover, the colleague, the husband of Anastasia Fyodorovna Cherpas.

Comrade Cherpas had been his rival, his antagonist, his competitor, in the struggle for scientific eminence in the frontiers of Russian science. Russian science could never overtake the inhuman perfection of German method, the rigid intellectual and moral discipline of German teamwork, but the Russians could and did get ahead of the Germans by giving vent to their bold, fantastic imaginations. Rogov had pioneered the first rocket launchers of 1939. Cherpas had finished the job by making the best of the rockets radio-directed.

Rogov in 1942 had developed a whole new system of photo-mapping. Comrade Cherpas had applied it to color film. Rogov, sandy-haired, blue-eyed, and smiling, had recorded his criticisms of Comrade Cherpas's naïveté and theoretical unsoundness at the top-secret meetings of Russian scientists during the black winter nights of 1943. Comrade Cherpas, her butter-yellow hair flowing down like living water to her shoulders, her unpainted face gleaming with fanaticism, intelligence, and dedication, would snarl her own defiance at him, deriding his Communist theory,

pinching at his pride, hitting his hypotheses where they were weakest.

By 1944 a Rogov-Cherpas quarrel had become something worth traveling to see.

In 1945 they were married.

Their courtship was secret, their wedding a surprise, their partnership a miracle in the upper ranks of Russian science.

The *émigré* press had reported that the great scientist, Peter Kapitza, once remarked, "Rogov and Cherpas, there is a team. They're Communists, good Communists; but they're better than that! They're *Russian,* Russian enough to beat the world. Look at them. That's the future, our Russian future!" Perhaps the quotation was an exaggeration, but it did show the enormous respect in which both Rogov and Cherpas were held by their colleagues in Soviet science.

Shortly after their marriage strange things happened to them.

Rogov remained happy. Cherpas was radiant.

Nevertheless, the two of them began to have haunted expressions, as though they had seen things which words could not express, as though they had stumbled upon secrets too important to be whispered even to the most secure agents of the Soviet State Police.

In 1947 Rogov had an interview with Stalin. As he left Stalin's office in the Kremlin, the great leader himself came to the door, his forehead wrinkled in thought, nodding, *"Da, da, da."*

Even his own personal staff did not know why Stalin was saying "Yes, yes, yes," but they did see the orders that went forth marked ONLY BY SAFE HAND, and TO BE READ AND RETURNED, NOT RETAINED, and furthermore stamped FOR AUTHORIZED EYES ONLY AND UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES TO BE COPIED.

Into the true and secret Soviet budget that year by the direct personal orders of a noncommittal Stalin, an item was added for "Project Telescope." Stalin tolerated no inquiry, brooked no comment.

A village which had had a name became nameless.

A forest which had been opened to the workers and peasants became military territory.

Into the central post office in Kharkov there went a new box number for the *village of Ya. Ch.*

Rogov and Cherpas, comrades and lovers, scientists both and Russians both, disappeared from the everyday lives of their colleagues. Their faces were no longer seen at scientific meetings. Only rarely did they emerge.

On the few occasions they were seen, usually going to and from Moscow at the time the All Union budget was made up each year, they seemed smiling and happy. But they did not make jokes.

What the outside world did not know was that Stalin in giving them their own project, granting them a paradise restricted to themselves, had seen to it that a snake went with them in the paradise. The snake this time was not one, but two personalities—Gausgofer and Gauck.

Stalin died.

Beria died too—less willingly.

The world went on.

Everything went into the forgotten village of Ya. Ch. and nothing came out.

It was rumored that Khrushchev himself visited Rogov and Cherpas. It was even whispered that Khrushchev said as he went to the Kharkov airport to fly back to Moscow, "It's big, big, big. There'll be no cold war if they do it. There won't be any war of any kind. We'll finish capitalism before the capitalists can ever begin to fight. If they do it. If they do it." Khrushchev was reported to have shaken his head slowly in perplexity and to have said nothing more but to have put his initials on the unmodified budget of Project Telescope when a trusted messenger next brought him an envelope from Rogov.

Anastasia Cherpas became a mother. Their first boy looked like the father. He was followed by a little girl. Then another little boy. The children didn't stop Cherpas's work. The family had a large *dacha* and trained nursemaids took over the household.

Every night the four of them dined together.

Rogov, Russian, humorous, courageous, amused.

Cherpas, older, more mature, more beautiful than ever, but just as biting, just as cheerful, just as sharp as she had ever been.

But then the other two, two who sat with them across the years of all their days, the two colleagues who had been visited upon them by the all-powerful word of Stalin himself.

Gausgofer was a female: bloodless, narrow-faced, with a voice like a horse's whinny. She was a scientist and a policewoman, and competent at both jobs. In 1920 she had reported her own mother's whereabouts to the Bolshevik Terror Committee. In 1924 she had commanded her father's execution. He was a Russian German of the old Baltic nobility and he had tried to adjust his mind to the new system, but he had failed. In 1930 she had let her lover trust her a little too much. He was a Rumanian Communist, very high in the Party, but he had a sneaking sympathy for Trotsky. When he whispered into her ear in the privacy of their bedroom, whispered with the tears pouring down his face, she had listened affectionately and quietly and had delivered his words to the police the next morning.

With that she came to Stalin's attention.

Stalin had been tough. He addressed her brutally, "Comrade, you have some brains. I can see you know what Communism is all about. You understand loyalty. You're going to get ahead and serve the Party and the working class, but is that all you want?" He had spat the question at her.

She was so astonished that she gaped.

The old man had changed his expression, favoring her with leering benevolence. He had put his forefinger on her chest, "Study science, Comrade. Study science. Communism plus science equals victory. You're too clever to stay in police work."

Gausgofer fell in love with Rogov the moment she saw him.

Gausgofer fell in hate—and hate can be as spontaneous and miraculous as love—with Cherpas the moment she saw *her*.

But Stalin had guessed that too.

With the bloodless, fanatic Gausgofer he had sent a man named B. Gauck.

Gauck was solid, impassive, blank-faced. In body he was about the same height as Rogov. Where Rogov was muscular, Gauck was flabby. Where Rogov's skin was fair and shot through with the pink and health of exercise, Gauck's

skin was like stale lard, greasy, gray-green, sickly even on the best of days.

Gauck's eyes were black and small. His glance was as cold and sharp as death. Gauck had no friends, no enemies, no beliefs, no enthusiasms.

Gauck never drank, never went out, never received mail, never sent mail, never spoke a spontaneous word. He was rude, never kind, never friendly, never really withdrawn: He couldn't withdraw any more than the constant withdrawal of all his life.

Rogov had turned to his wife in the secrecy of their bedroom soon after Gausgofer and Gauck came and had said, "Anastasia, is that man sane?"

Cherpas intertwined the fingers of her beautiful, expressive hands. She who had been the wit of a thousand scientific meetings was now at a loss for words. She looked up at her husband with a troubled expression. "I don't know, comrade . . . I just don't know."

Rogov smiled his amused Slavic smile. "At the least then I don't think Gausgofer knows either."

Cherpas snorted with laughter and picked up her hairbrush. "That she doesn't. She really doesn't know, does she? I'll wager she doesn't even know to whom he reports."

That conversation had reached into the past. Gauck, Gausgofer, bloodless eyes and the black eyes—they remained.

Every dinner the four sat down together.

Every morning the four met in the laboratory.

Rogov's great courage, high sanity, and keen humor kept the work going.

Cherpas's flashing genius fueled him whenever the routine overloaded his magnificent intellect.

Gausgofer spied and watched and smiled her bloodless smiles; sometimes, curiously enough, Gausgofer made genuinely constructive suggestions. She never understood the whole frame of reference of their work, but she knew enough of the mechanical and engineering details to be very useful on occasion.

Gauck came in, sat down quietly, said nothing, did nothing. He did not even smoke. He never fidgeted. He never went to sleep. He just watched.

The laboratory grew and with it there grew the immense configuration of the espionage machine.

In theory what Rogov had proposed and Cherpas seconded was imaginable. It consisted of an attempt to work out an integrated theory for all the electrical and radiation phenomena accompanying consciousness, and to duplicate the electrical functions of mind without the use of animal material.

The range of potential products was immense.

The first product Stalin had asked for was a receiver, if possible, one capable of tuning in the thoughts of a human mind and of translating those thoughts either into a punch tape machine, an adapted German Hellschreiber machine, or phonetic speech. If the grids could be turned around, the brain-equivalent machine as a transmitter might be able to send out stunning forces which would paralyze or kill the process of thought.

At its best, Rogov's machine was designed to confuse human thought over great distances, to select human targets to be confused, and to maintain an electronic jamming system which would jam straight into the human mind without the requirements of tubes or receivers.

He had succeeded—in part. He had given himself a violent headache in the first year of work.

In the third year he had killed mice at a distance of ten kilometers. In the seventh year he had brought on mass hallucinations and a wave of suicides in a neighboring village. It was this which impressed Khrushchev.

Rogov was now working on the receiver end. No one had ever explored the infinitely narrow, infinitely subtle bands of radiation which distinguished one human mind from another, but Rogov was trying, as it were, to tune in on minds far away.

He had tried to develop a telepathic helmet of some kind, but it did not work. He had then turned away from the reception of pure thought to the reception of visual and auditory images. Where the nerve-ends reached the brain itself, he had managed over the years to distinguish whole packets of microphenomena, and on some of these he had managed to get a fix.

With infinitely delicate tuning he had succeeded one day in picking up the eyesight of their second chauffeur, and

had managed, thanks to a needle thrust in just below his own right eyelid, to "see" through the other man's eyes as the other man, all unaware, washed their Zis limousine sixteen hundred meters away.

Cherpas had surpassed his feat later that winter, and had managed to bring in an entire family having dinner over in a near-by city. She had invited B. Gauck to have a needle inserted into his cheekbone so that he could see with the eyes of an unsuspecting spied-on stranger. Gauck had refused any kind of needles, but Gausgofer had joined in the experiment and had expressed her satisfaction with the work.

The espionage machine was beginning to take form.

Two more steps remained. The first step consisted of tuning in on some remote target, such as the White House in Washington or the NATO Headquarters outside Paris.

The second problem consisted of finding a method of jamming those minds at a distance, stunning them so that the subject personnel fell into tears, confusion, or insanity.

Rogov had tried, but he had never gotten more than thirty kilometers from the nameless village of Ya. Ch.

One November there had been seventy cases of hysteria, most of them ending in suicide, down in the city of Kharkov several hundred kilometers away, but Rogov was not sure that his own machine was doing it.

Comrade Gausgofer dared to stroke his sleeve. Her white lips smiled and her watery eyes grew happy as she said in her high, cruel voice, "*You* can do it, comrade. You can do it."

Cherpas looked on with contempt. Gauck said nothing.

The female agent Gausgofer saw Cherpas's eyes upon her, and for a moment an arc of living hatred leaped between the two women.

The three of them went back to work on the machine.

Gauck sat on his stool and watched them.

It was the year in which Eristratov died that the machine made a breakthrough. Eristratov died after the Soviet and People's democracies had tried to end the cold war with the Americans.

It was May. Outside the laboratory the squirrels ran among the trees. The leftovers from the night's rain dripped

on the ground and kept the earth moist. It was comfortable to leave a few windows open and to let the smell of the forest into the workshop.

The smell of their oil-burning heaters, the stale smell of insulation, of ozone, and of the heated electronic gear was something with which all of them were much too familiar.

Rogov had found that his eyesight was beginning to suffer because he had to get the receiver needle somewhere near his optic nerve in order to obtain visual impressions from the machine. After months of experimentation with both animal and human subjects he had decided to copy one of their last experiments, successfully performed on a prisoner boy fifteen years of age, by having the needle slipped directly through the skull, up and behind the eye. Rogov had disliked using prisoners, because Gauck, speaking on behalf of security, always insisted that a prisoner used in experiments be destroyed in not less than five days from the beginning of the experiment. Rogov had satisfied himself that the skull-and-needle technique was safe, but he was very tired of trying to get frightened, unscientific people to carry the load of intense, scientific attentiveness required by the machine.

Somewhat ill-humored, he shouted at Gauck, "Have you ever known what this is all about? You've been here years. Do you know what we're trying to do? Don't you ever want to take part in the experiments yourself? Do you realize how many years of mathematics have gone into the making of these grids and the calculation of these wave patterns? Are you good for anything?"

Gauck had said, tonelessly and without anger, "Comrade professor, I am obeying orders. You are obeying orders too. I've never impeded you."

Rogov raved, "I know you never got in my way. We're all good servants of the Soviet State. It's not a question of loyalty. It's a question of enthusiasm. Don't you ever want to glimpse the science we're making? We are a hundred years or a thousand years ahead of the capitalist Americans. Doesn't that excite you? Aren't you a human being? Why don't you take part? How will you understand me when I explain it?"

Gauck said nothing; he looked at Rogov with his beady eyes. His dirty-gray face did not change expression. Cher-

pas said, "Go ahead, Nikolai. The comrade can follow if he wants to."

Gausgofer looked enviously at Cherpas. She seemed inclined to keep quiet, but then had to speak. She said, "Do go ahead, comrade professor."

Said Rogov, "*Kharosho,* I'll do what I can. The machine is now ready to receive minds over immense distances." He wrinkled his lip in amused scorn. "We may even spy into the brain of the chief rascal himself and find out what Eisenhower is planning to do today against the Soviet people. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our machine could stun him and leave him sitting addled at his desk?"

Gauck commented, "Don't try it. Not without orders."

Rogov ignored the interruption and went on. "First I receive. I don't know what I will get, who I will get, or where they will be. All I know is that this machine will reach out across all the minds of men and beasts now living and it will bring the eyes and ears of a single mind directly into mine. With the new needle going directly into the brain it will be possible for me to get a very sharp fixation of position. The trouble with that boy last week was that even though we knew he was seeing something outside this room, he appeared to be getting sounds in a foreign language and did not know enough English or German to realize where or what the machine had taken him to see."

Cherpas laughed. "I'm not worried. I saw then it was safe. You go first, my husband. If our comrades don't mind—?"

Gauck nodded.

Gausgofer lifted her bony hand breathlessly to her skinny throat and said, "Of course, Comrade Rogov, of course. You did *all* the work. You *must* be the first."

Rogov sat down.

A white-smocked technician brought the machine over to him. It was mounted on three rubber-tired wheels and it resembled the small X-ray units used by dentists. In place of the cone at the head of the X-ray machine there was a long, incredibly tough needle. It had been made for them by the best surgical steel craftsmen in Prague.

Another technician came up with a shaving bowl, a brush, and a straight razor. Under the gaze of Gauck's

deadly eyes he shaved an area of four square centimeters on the top of Rogov's head.

Cherpas herself then took over. She set her husband's head in the clamp and used a micrometer to get the skull-fittings so tight and so accurate that the needle would push through the dura mater at exactly the right point.

All this work she did deftly with kind, very strong fingers. She was gentle, but she was firm. She was his wife, but she was also his fellow scientist and his colleague in the Soviet State.

She stepped back and looked at her work. She gave him one of their own very special smiles, the secret gay smiles which they usually exchanged with each other only when they were alone. "You won't want to do this every day. We're going to have to find some way of getting into the brain without using this needle. But it won't hurt you."

"Does it matter if it does hurt?" said Rogov. "This is the triumph of all our work. *Bring it down.*"

Cherpas, her eyes gleaming with attention, reached over and pulled down the handle which brought the tough needle to within a tenth of a millimeter of the right place.

Rogov spoke very carefully: "All I felt was a little sting. You can turn the power on now."

Gausgofer could not contain herself. Timidly she addressed Cherpas, "*May* I turn on the power?"

Cherpas nodded. Gauck watched. Rogov waited. Gausgofer pulled down the bayonet switch.

The power went on.

With an impatient twist of her hand, Anastasia Cherpas ordered the laboratory attendants to the other end of the room. Two or three of them had stopped working and were staring at Rogov, staring like dull sheep. They looked embarrassed and then they huddled in a white-smocked herd at the other end of the laboratory.

The wet May wind blew in on all of them. The scent of forest and leaves was about them.

The three watched Rogov.

Rogov's complexion began to change. His face became flushed. His breathing was so loud and heavy they could hear it several meters away. Cherpas fell on her knees in front of him, eyebrows lifted in mute inquiry.

Rogov did not dare nod, not with the needle on his brain.

He spoke through flushed lips, speaking thickly and heavily, "Do—not—stop—now."

Rogov himself did not know what was happening. He had thought he might see an American room, or a Russian room, or a tropical colony. He might see palm trees, or forests, or desks. He might see guns or buildings, washrooms or beds, hospitals, homes, churches. He might see with the eyes of a child, a woman, a man, a soldier, a philosopher, a slave, a worker, a savage, a religious, a Communist, a reactionary, a governor, a policeman. He might hear voices; he might hear English, or French, or Russian, Swahili, Hindi, Malay, Chinese, Ukrainian, Armenian, Turkish, Greek. He did not know.

None of these things had happened.

It seemed to him that he had left the world, that he had left time. The hours and the centuries shrank up like the meters, and the machine, unchecked, reached out for the most powerful signal which any human mind had transmitted. Rogov did not know it, but the machine had conquered time.

The machine had reached the dance, the human challenger and the dance festival of the year that might have been A.D. 13,582.

Before Rogov's eyes the golden shape and the golden steps shook and fluttered in a ritual a thousand times more compelling than hypnotism. The rhythms meant nothing and everything to him. This was Russia, this was Communism. This was his life—indeed it was his soul acted out before his very eyes.

For a second, the last second of his ordinary life, he looked through flesh and blood eyes and saw the shabby woman whom he had once thought beautiful. He saw Anastasia Cherpas, and he did not care.

His vision concentrated once again on the dancing image, this woman, those postures, that dance!

Then the sound came in—music that would have made a Tschaikovsky weep, orchestras which would have silenced Shostakovich or Khachaturian forever.

The people-who-were-not-people between the stars had taught mankind many arts. Rogov's mind was the best of its time, but his time was far, far behind the time of the

great dance. With that one vision Rogov went firmly and completely mad.

He became blind to the sight of Cherpas, Gausgofer, and Gauck. He forgot the village of Ya. Ch. He forgot himself. He was like a fish, bred in stale fresh water, which is thrown for the first time into a living stream. He was like an insect emerging from the chrysalis. His twentieth-century mind could not hold the imagery and the impact of the music and the dance.

But the needle was there and the needle transmitted into his mind more than his mind could stand.

The synapses of his brain flicked like switches. The future flooded into him.

He fainted.

Cherpas leaped forward and lifted the needle. Rogov fell out of the chair.

It was Gauck who got the doctors. By nightfall they had Rogov resting comfortably and under heavy sedation. There were two doctors, both from the military headquarters. Gauck had obtained authorization for their services by a direct telephone call to Moscow.

Both the doctors were annoyed. The senior one never stopped grumbling at Cherpas.

"You should not have done it, Comrade Cherpas. Comrade Rogov should not have done it either. You can't go around sticking things into brains. That's a medical problem. None of you people are doctors of medicine. It's all right for you to contrive devices with the prisoners, but you can't inflict things like this on Soviet scientific personnel. I'm going to get blamed because I can't bring Rogov back. You heard what he was saying. All he did was mutter, 'That golden shape on the golden steps, that music, that me is a true me, that golden shape, that golden shape, I want to be with that golden shape,' and rubbish like that. Maybe you've ruined a first-class brain forever—" He stopped short as though he had said too much. After all, the problem was a security problem and apparently both Gauck and Gausgofer represented the security agencies.

Gausgofer turned her watery eyes on the doctor and said in a low, even, unbelievably poisonous voice, "Could *she* have done it, comrade doctor?"

The doctor looked at Cherpas, answering Gausgofer, "How? You were there. I wasn't. *How* could she have done it? *Why* should she do it? You were there."

Cherpas said nothing. Her lips were compressed tight with grief. Her yellow hair gleamed, but her hair was all that remained, at that moment, of her beauty. She was frightened and she was getting ready to be sad. She had no time to hate foolish women or to worry about security; she was concerned with her colleague, her lover, her husband Rogov.

There was nothing much for them to do except to wait. They went into a large room and waited.

The servants had laid out immense dishes of cold sliced meat, pots of caviar, and an assortment of sliced breads, pure butter, genuine coffee, and liquors.

None of them ate much. At 9:15 the sound of rotors beat against the house. The big helicopter had arrived from Moscow.

Higher authorities took over.

The higher authority was a deputy minister, a man named V. Karper.

Karper was accompanied by two or three uniformed colonels, by an engineer civilian, by a man from the headquarters of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and by two doctors.

They dispensed with the courtesies. Karper merely said, "You are Cherpas. I have met you. You are Gausgofer. I have seen your reports. You are Gauck."

The delegation went into Rogov's bedroom. Karper snapped, "Wake him."

The military doctor who had given the sedatives said, "Comrade, you mustn't—"

Karper cut him off. "Shut up." He turned to his own physician, pointed at Rogov. "Wake him up."

The doctor from Moscow talked briefly with the senior military doctor. He too began shaking his head. He gave Karper a disturbed look. Karper guessed what he might hear. He said, "Go ahead. I know there is some danger to the patient, but I've got to get back to Moscow with a report."

The two doctors worked over Rogov. One of them gave

Rogov an injection. Then all of them stood back from the bed.

Rogov writhed in his bed. He squirmed. His eyes opened, but he did not see the people. With childishly clear and simple words Rogov began to talk, ". . . that golden shape, the golden stairs, the music, take me back to the music, I want to be with the music, I really am the music . . ." and so on in an endless monotone.

Cherpas leaned over him so that her face was directly in his line of vision. "My darling! My darling, wake up. This is serious."

It was evident to all of them that Rogov did not hear her.

For the first time in many years Gauck took the initiative. He spoke directly to the man from Moscow. "Comrade, may I make a suggestion?"

Karper looked at him. Gauck nodded at Gausgofer. "We were both sent here by orders of Comrade Stalin. She is senior. She bears the responsibility. All I do is double check."

The deputy minister turned to Gausgofer. Gausgofer had been staring at Rogov on the bed; her blue, watery eyes were tearless and her face was drawn into an expression of extreme tension.

Karper ignored that and said to her firmly, clearly, commandingly, "What do you recommend?"

Gausgofer looked at him very directly and said in a measured voice, "I do not think that the case is one of brain damage. I believe that he has obtained a communication which he must share with another human being and that unless one of us follows him there may be no answer."

Karper barked, "Very well. But what do we do?"

"Let *me* follow—into the machine."

Anastasia Cherpas began to laugh slyly and frantically. She seized Karper's arm and pointed her finger at Gausgofer. Karper stared at her.

Cherpas restrained her laughter and shouted at Karper, "The woman's mad. She has loved my husband for many years. She has hated my presence, and now she thinks that she can save him. She thinks that she can follow. She thinks that he wants to communicate with her. That's ridiculous. I will go myself!"

Karper looked about. He selected two of his staff and

stepped over into a corner of the room. They could hear him talking, but they could not distinguish the words. After a conference of six or seven minutes he returned.

"You people have been making serious security charges against each other. I find that one of our finest weapons, the mind of Rogov, is damaged. Rogov's not just a man. He is a Soviet project." Scorn entered his voice. "I find that the senior security officer, a policewoman with a notable record, is charged by another Soviet scientist with a silly infatuation. I disregard such charges. The development of the Soviet State and the work of Soviet science cannot be impeded by personalities. Comrade Gausgofer will follow. I am acting tonight because my own staff physician says that Rogov may not live and it is very important for us to find out just what has happened to him and why."

He turned his baleful gaze on Cherpas. "You will not protest, comrade. Your mind is the property of the Russian State. Your life and your education have been paid for by the workers. You cannot throw these things away because of personal sentiment. If there is anything to be found, Comrade Gausgofer will find it for both of us."

The whole group of them went back into the laboratory. The frightened technicians were brought over from the barracks. The lights were turned on and the windows were closed. The May wind had become chilly.

The needle was sterilized. The electronic grids were warmed up.

Gausgofer's face was an impassive mask of triumph as she sat in the receiving chair. She smiled at Gauck as an attendant brought the soap and the razor to shave clean a patch on her scalp.

Gauck did not smile back. His black eyes stared at her. He said nothing. He did nothing. He watched.

Karper walked to and fro, glancing from time to time at the hasty but orderly preparation of the experiment.

Anastasia Cherpas sat down at a laboratory table about five meters away from the group. She watched the back of Gausgofer's head as the needle was lowered. She buried her face in her hands. Some of the others thought they heard her weeping, but no one heeded Cherpas very much. They were too intent on watching Gausgofer.

Gausgofer's face became red. Perspiration poured down

the flabby cheeks. Her fingers tightened on the arm of her chair. Suddenly she shouted at them, *"That golden shape on the golden steps."*

She leaped to her feet, dragging the apparatus with her.

No one had expected this. The chair fell to the floor. The needle holder, lifted from the floor, swung its weight sidewise. The needle twisted like a scythe in Gausgofer's brain.

The body of Gausgofer lay on the floor, surrounded by excited officials.

Karper was acute enough to look around at Cherpas.

She stood up from the laboratory table and walked toward him. A thin line of blood flowed down from her cheekbone. Another line of blood dripped down from a position on her cheek, one and a half centimeters forward of the opening of her left ear.

With tremendous composure, her face as white as fresh snow, she smiled at him. "I eavesdropped."

Karper said, "What?"

"I eavesdropped, eavesdropped," repeated Anastasia Cherpas. "I found out where my husband has gone. It is not somewhere in this world. It is something hypnotic beyond all the limitations of our science. We have made a great gun, but the gun has fired upon us before we could fire it.

"Project Telescope is finished. You may try to get someone else to finish it, but you will not."

Karper stared at her and then turned aside.

Gauck stood in his way.

"What do you want?"

"To tell you," said Gauck very softly, "to tell you, comrade deputy minister, that Rogov is gone as she says he is gone, that she is finished if she says she is finished, that all this is true. I know."

Karper glared at him. "How do you know?"

Gauck remained utterly impassive. With superhuman assurance and calm he said to Karper, "Comrade, I do not dispute the matter. I know these people, though I do not know their science. Rogov is done for."

At last Karper believed him.

They all looked at Anastasia Cherpas, at her beautiful

hair, her determined blue eyes, and the two thin lines of blood.

Karper turned to her. "What do we do now?"

For an answer she dropped to her knees and began sobbing. "No, no, not Rogov! No, no, not Rogov!"

And that was all that they could get out of her. Gauck looked on.

On the golden steps in the golden light, a golden shape danced a dream beyond the limits of all imagination, danced and drew the music to herself until a sigh of yearning, yearning which became a hope and a torment, went through the hearts of living things on a thousand worlds.

Edges of the golden scene faded raggedly and unevenly into black. The golden dimmed down to a pale gold-silver sheen and then to silver, last of all to white. The dancer who had been golden was now a forlorn white-pink figure standing, quiet and fatigued, on the immense white steps. The applause of a thousand worlds roared in upon her.

She looked blindly at them. The dance had overwhelmed her, too. Their applause could mean nothing. The dance was an end in itself. She would have to live, somehow, until she danced again.

COMPOUNDED INTEREST

Mack Reynolds

Mack Reynolds burst, rather than broke, into print in 1950, with almost 20 stories in the SF magazines alone. Shortly afterwards, he began wandering through Europe, Asia, and Africa (with wife, van and typewriter) as travel editor for *Rogue*, and his SF production fell to only six or seven stories a year, on average, and even less when he began concentrating on longer work. Since 1960, he has written one or two magazine novels a year, and adapted probably (at least) as many again of his shorter pieces for publication by Ace Books. His agent claims he is "the most prolific—by published wordage—contemporary writer of science fiction," and possibly the claim can be upheld, now that he has settled in Mexico, concentrating almost all his time on science fantasy.

His latest book (as I write) is *The Rival Rigelians* (Ace, 1967), and he is reported to be at work on "a major book" to be published "in connection with the 1968 Mexican Olympics."

Four Reynolds stories have been reprinted in the SF Annuals: "Freedom" in the 7th; "Earthlings, Go Home" in the 8th; "Pacifist" in the 10th; and "Compounded Interest", which was published in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, August, 1956, and in the 2nd Annual.

THE STRANGER SAID in miserable Italian, "I wish to see Sior Marin Goldini on business."

The concierge's manner was suspicious. Through the wicket he ran his eyes over the newcomer's clothing. "On business, Sior?" He hesitated. "Possibly, Sior, you could inform me as to the nature of your business, so that I might inform his *Zelenza's* secretary, Vico Letta . . ." He let his sentence dribble away.

The stranger thought about that. "It pertains," he said finally, "to gold." He brought a hand from his pocket and

opened it to disclose a half dozen yellow coins.

"A moment, *Lustrissimo,*" the servant blurted quickly. "Forgive me. Your costume, *Lustrissimo* . . ." He let his sentence dribble away again and was gone.

A few moments later he returned to swing the door open wide. "If you please, *Lustrissimo,* his *Zelenza* awaits you."

He led the way down a vaulted hall to the central court, to the left past a fountain well to a heavy outer staircase supported by Gothic arches and sided by a carved parapet. They mounted, turned through a dark doorway and into a poorly lit corridor. The servant stopped and drummed carefully on a thick wooden door. A voice murmured from within and the servant held the door open and then retreated.

Two men were at a rough-hewn oak table. The older was heavy-set, tight of face and cold, and the other tall and thin and ever at ease. The latter bowed gently. He gestured and said, "His *Zelenza,* the Sior Marin Goldini."

The stranger attempted a clumsy bow in return, said awkwardly, "My name is . . . Mister Smith."

There was a moment of silence which Goldini broke finally by saying, "And this is my secretary, Vico Letta. The servant mentioned gold, Sior, and business."

The stranger dug into a pocket, came forth with ten coins which he placed on the table before him. Vico Letta picked one up in mild interest and examined it. "I am not familiar with the coinage," he said.

His master twisted his cold face without humor. "Which amazes me, my good Vico." He turned to the newcomer. "And what is your wish with these coins, Sior Mister Smith? I confess, this is confusing."

"I want," Mister Smith said, "to have you invest the sum for me."

Vico Letta had idly weighed one of the coins in question on a small scale. He cast his eyes up briefly as he estimated. "The ten would come to approximately forty-nine zecchini, *Zelenza,*" he murmured.

Marin Goldini said impatiently, "Sior, the amount is hardly sufficient for my house to bother with. The bookkeeping alone—"

The stranger broke in. "Don't misunderstand. I realize the sum is small. However, I would ask but ten per cent,

and would not call for an accounting for . . . for one hundred years."

The two Venetians raised puzzled eyebrows. "A hundred years, Sior? Perhaps your command of our language . . ." Goldini said politely.

"One hundred years," the stranger said.

"But surely," the head of the house of Goldini protested, "it is unlikely that any of we three will be alive. As God desires, possibly even the house of Goldini will be a memory only."

Vico Letta, intrigued, had been calculating rapidly. Now he said, "In one hundred years, at ten per cent compounded annually, your gold would be worth better than 700,000 zecchini."

"Quite a bit more," the stranger said firmly.

"A comfortable sum," Goldini nodded, beginning to feel some of the interest of his secretary. "And during this period, all decisions pertaining to the investment of the amount would be in the hands of my house?"

"Exactly." The stranger took a sheet of paper from his pocket, tore it in two, and handed one half to the Venetians. "When my half of this is presented to your descendants, one hundred years from today, the bearer will be due the full amount."

"Done, Sior Mister Smith!" Goldini said. "An amazing transaction, but done. Ten per cent in this day is small indeed to ask."

"It is enough. And now may I make some suggestions? You are perhaps familiar with the Polo family?"

Goldini scowled. "I know Sior Maffeo Polo."

"And his nephew, Marco?"

Goldini said cautiously, "I understand young Marco was captured by the Genoese. Why do you ask?"

"He is writing a book on his adventures in the Orient. It would be a well of information for a merchant house interested in the East. Another thing. In a few years there will be an attempt on the Venetian government and shortly thereafter a Council of Ten will be formed which will eventually become the supreme power of the republic. Support it from the first and make every effort to have your house represented."

They stared at him and Marin Goldini crossed himself unobtrusively.

The stranger said, "If you find need for profitable investments beyond Venice I suggest you consider the merchants of the Hanse cities and their soon to be organized League."

They continued to stare and he said, uncomfortably, "I'll go now. Your time is valuable." He went to the door, opened it himself and left.

Marin Goldini snorted. "That liar, Marco Polo."

Vico said sourly, "How could he have known we were considering expanding our activities into the East? We have discussed it only between ourselves."

"The attempt on the government," Marin Goldini said, crossing himself again. "Was he hinting that our intriguing is known? Vico, perhaps we should disassociate ourselves from the conspirators."

"Perhaps you are right, *Zelenza,*" Vico muttered. He picked up one of the coins again and examined it, back and front. "There is no such nation," he grumbled, "but the coin is perfectly minted." He picked up the torn sheet of paper, held it to the light. "Nor have I ever seen such paper, *Zelenza,* nor such a strange language, although, on closer examination, it appears to have some similarities to the English tongue."

The House of Letta-Goldini was located now in the San Toma district, an imposing structure through which passed the proceeds of a thousand ventures in a hundred lands.

Riccardo Letta looked up from his desk at his assistant. "Then he really has appeared? *Per favore,* Lio, bring me the papers pertaining to the, ah, account. Allow me a matter of ten minutes to refresh my memory and then bring the Sior to me." . . .

The great grandson of Vico Letta, head of the House of Letta-Goldini, came to his feet elegantly, bowed in the sweeping style of his day, said, "Your servant, Sior . . ."

The newcomer bobbed his head in a jerky, embarrassed return of the courtesy, said, "Mister Smith."

"A chair, *Lustrissimo?* And now, pray pardon my abruptness. One's duties when responsible for a house of the magnitude of Letta-Goldini . . ."

Mister Smith held out a torn sheet of paper. His Italian

was abominable. "The agreement made with Marin Goldini, exactly one century ago."

Riccardo Letta took the paper. It was new, clean and fresh, which brought a frown to his high forehead. He took up an aged, yellowed fragment from before him and placed one against the other. They matched to perfection. "Amazing, Sior, but how can it be that my piece is yellow with age and your own so fresh?"

Mister Smith cleared his throat. "Undoubtedly, different methods have been used to preserve them."

"Undoubtedly." Letta relaxed in his chair, placed fingertips together. "And undoubtedly you wish your capital and the interest it has accrued. The amount is a sizable one, Sior; we shall find it necessary to call in various accounts."

Mister Smith shook his head. "I want to continue on the original basis."

Letta sat upright. "You mean for another hundred years?"

"Precisely. I have faith in your management, Sior Letta."

"I see." Riccardo Letta had not maintained his position in the cutthroat world of Venetian banking and commerce by other than his own ability. It took him only a moment to gather himself. "The appearance of your ancestor, Sior, has given rise to a veritable legend in this house. You are familiar with the details?"

The other nodded, warily.

"He made several suggestions, among them that we support the Council of Ten. We are now represented on the Council, Sior. I need not point out the advantage. He also suggested we investigate the travels of Marco Polo, which we failed to do—but should have. Above all in strangeness was his recommendation that investments be made in the Hanse towns."

"Well, and wasn't that a reasonable suggestion?"

"Profitable, Sior, but hardly reasonable. Your ancestor appeared in the year 1300 but the Hanseatic League wasn't formed until 1358."

The small man, strangely garbed in much the same manner tradition had it the first Mister Smith had appeared, twisted his face wryly. "I am afraid I am in no position to explain, Sior. And now, my own time is limited, and, in view of the present size of my investment, I am going to request you have drawn up a contract more binding than

the largely verbal one made with the founders of your house."

Riccardo Letta rang a small bell on his desk and the next hour was spent with assistants and secretaries. At the end of that period, Mister Smith, a sheaf of documents in his hands, said, "And now may I make a few suggestions?"

Riccardo Letta leaned forward, his eyes narrow. "By all means."

"Your house will continue to grow and you will have to think in terms of spreading to other nations. Continue to back the Hanse cities. In the not too far future a remarkable man named Jacques Coeur will become prominent in France. Bring him into the firm as French representative. However, all support should be withdrawn from him in the year 1450."

Mister Smith stood up, preparatory to leaving. "One warning, Sior Letta. As a fortune grows large, the jackals gather. I suggest the magnitude of this one be hidden and diffused. In this manner temporary setbacks may be suffered through the actions of this prince, or that revolution, but the fortune will continue."

Riccardo Letta was not an overly religious man, but after the other had left he crossed himself as had his predecessor.

There were twenty of them waiting in the year 1500. They sat about a handsome conference table, representatives of half a dozen nations, arrogant of mien, sometimes cruel of face. Waldemar Gotland acted as chairman.

"Your Excellency," he said in passable English, "may we assume this is your native language?"

Mister Smith was taken aback by the number of them, but, "You may," he said.

"And that you wish to be addressed as Mister Smith in the English fashion?"

Smith nodded. "That will be acceptable."

"Then, sir, if you will, your papers. We have named a committee, headed by Emil de Hanse, to examine them as to authenticity."

Smith handed over his sheaf of papers. "I desired," he complained, "that this investment be kept secret."

"And it has been to the extent possible, Excellency. Its size is now fantastic. Although the name Letta-Goldini is

still kept, no members of either family still survive. During the past century, Excellency, numerous attempts have been made to seize your fortune."

"To be expected," Mister Smith said interestedly. "And what foiled them?"

"Principally the number involved in its management, Excellency. As a representative from Scandinavia, it is hardly to my interest to see a Venetian or German corrupt The Contract."

Antonio Ruzzini bit out, "Nor to our interest to see Waldemar Gotland attempt it. There has been blood shed more than once in the past century, *Zelenza.*"

The papers were accepted as authentic.

Gotland cleared his throat. "We have reached the point, Excellency, where the entire fortune is yours, and we merely employees. As we have said, attempts have been made on the fortune. We suggest, if it is your desire to continue its growth . . ."

Mister Smith nodded here.

". . . that a stronger contract, which we have taken the liberty to draw up, be adopted."

"Very well, I'll look into it. But first, let me give you my instructions."

There was an intake of breath and they sat back in their chairs.

Mister Smith said, "With the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, Venetian power will drop. The house must make its center elsewhere."

There was a muffled exclamation.

Mister Smith went on: "The fortune is now considerable enough that we can afford to take a long view. We must turn our eyes westward. Send a representative of the fortune to Spain. Shortly, the discoveries in the west will open up investment opportunities there. Support men named Hernando Cortez and Francisco Pizarro. In the middle of the century withdraw our investments from Spain and enter them in England, particularly in commerce and manufacture. There will be large land grants in the new world; attempt to have representatives of the fortune gain some of them. There will be confusion at the death of Henry VIII; support his daughter Elizabeth.

"You will find, as industry expands in the northern coun-

tries, that it is impractical for a manufacturer to operate where there are literally scores of saints' days and fiestas. Support such religious leaders as demand a more, ah, puritanical way of life."

He wound it up. "One other thing. This group is too large. I suggest that only one person from each nation involved be admitted to the secret of the contract."

"Gentlemen," Mister Smith said in 1600, "turn more to manufacture and commerce in Europe, to agriculture, mining and accumulation of large areas of real estate in the New World. Great fortunes will be made this century in the East; be sure that our various houses are first to profit."

They waited about the conference table in London. The clock, periodically and nervously checked, told them they had a full fifteen minutes before Mister Smith was expected.

Sir Robert took a pinch of snuff, presented an air of nonchalance he did not feel. "Gentlemen," he said, "frankly I find it difficult to believe the story legend. Come now, after everything has been said, what does it boil down to?"

Pierre Deflage said softly, "It is a beautiful story, *messieurs.* In the year 1300 a somewhat bedraggled stranger appeared before a Venetian banking house and invested ten pieces of gold, the amount to continue for a century. He made certain suggestions that would have tried the abilities of Nostradamus. Since then his descendants have appeared each century at this day and hour and reinvested the amount, never collecting a *sou* for their own use, but always making further suggestions. Until now, *messieurs,* we have reached the point where it is by far the largest fortune in the world. I, for instance, am considered the wealthiest man in France." He shrugged eloquently. "While we all know I am but an employee of The Contract."

"I submit," Sir Robert said, "that the story is impossible. It has been one hundred years since our *Mr. Smith* has supposedly appeared. During that period there have been ambitious men and unscrupulous men in charge of The Contract. They concocted this fantastic tale for their own ends. Gentlemen, there is no Mr. Smith and never was a Mr. Smith. The question becomes, shall we continue the

farce, or shall we take measures to divide the fortune and each go our own way?"

A small voice from the doorway said, "If you think that possible, sir, we shall have to work still more to make the contract iron bound. May I introduce myself? You may call me Mr. Smith."

In 1800 he said, "You are to back, for twelve years, the adventurer Bonaparte. In 1812 drop him. You are to invest largely in the new nation, the United States. Send a representative to New York immediately. This is to be a century of revolution and change. Withdraw support from monarchy . . ." There was a gasp from around the table. ". . . and support the commercial classes. Back a certain Robert Clive in India. Withdraw all support of Spain in Latin America. In the American civil war to come, back the North.

"Largely, gentlemen, this is to be the century of England. Remember that." He looked away for a moment, off into an unknown distance. "Next century will be different, but not even I know what lies beyond its middle."

After he was gone, Amschel Mayer, representative from Vienna, murmured, "Colleagues, have you realized that at last one of The Contract relicts makes sense?"

Lord Windermere scowled at him, making small attempt to disguise his anti-semitism. "What'd'ya mean by that, sir?"

The international banker opened the heavy box which contained the documents handed down since the day of Goldini. He emerged with a medium-sized gold coin. "One of the original invested coins has been retained all these centuries, my lord."

Windermere took it and read. "The United States of America. Why, confound it, man, this is ridiculous. Someone has been a-pranking. The coin couldn't have existed in Goldini's day; the colonies proclaimed their independence less than twenty-five years ago."

Amschel Mayer murmured, "And the number at the bottom of the coin. I wonder if anyone has ever considered that it might be a date."

Windermere stared at the coin again. "A date? Don't be an ass! One does not date a coin more than a century ahead of time."

Mayer rubbed his beardless face with a thoughtful hand. "More than six centuries ahead of time, my lord."

Over cigars and brandy they went into the question in detail. Young Warren Piedmont said, "You gentlemen have the advantage of me. Until two years ago I knew only vaguely of The Contract in spite of my prominence in the American branch of the hierarchy. And, unfortunately, I was not present when Mr. Smith appeared in 1900 as were the rest of you."

"You didn't miss a great deal," Von Borman growled. "Our Mr. Smith, who has all of us tied so tightly with The Contract that everything we own, even to this cigar I hold in my hand, is his—our Mr. Smith is insignificant, all but threadbare."

"Then there actually is such a person," Piedmont said.

Albert Marat, the French representative, snorted expressively. "Amazingly enough, *messieurs,* his description, even to his clothes, is exactly that handed down from Goldini's day." He chuckled. "We have one advantage this time."

Piedmont frowned. "Advantage?"

"Unbeknown to Mr. Smith, we took a photo of him when he appeared in 1900. It will be interesting to compare it with his next appearance."

Warren Piedmont continued to frown his lack of understanding and Hideka Mitsuki explained. "You have not read the novels of the so clever Mr. H. G. Wells?"

"Never heard of him."

Smith-Winston, of the British branch, said, "To sum it up, Piedmont, we have discussed the possibility that our Mr. Smith is a time traveler."

"Time traveler! What in the world do you mean?"

"This is the year 1910. In the past century science has made strides beyond the conception of the most advanced scholars of 1810. What strides will be made in the next fifty years, we can only conjecture. That they will even embrace travel in time is mind-twisting for us, but not impossible."

"Why fifty years? It will be a full century before—"

"No. This time Mr. Smith informed us that he is not to wait until the year 2000 for his visit. He is scheduled for July 16, 1960. At that time, friends, I am of the opinion

that we shall find what our Mr. Smith has in mind to do with the greatest fortune the world has ever seen."

Von Borman looked about him and growled, "Has it occurred to you that we eight men are the only persons in the world who even know The Contract exists?" He touched his chest. "In Germany, not even the Kaiser knows that I directly own—in the name of The Contract, of course—or control possibly two thirds of the corporate wealth of the Reich."

Marat said, "And has it occurred to you that all our Monsieur Smith need do is demand his wealth and we are penniless?"

Smith-Winston chuckled bitterly. "If you are thinking in terms of attempting to do something about it, forget it. For half a millennium the best legal brains of the world have been strengthening The Contract. Wars have been fought over attempts to change it. Never openly, of course. Those who died did so of religion, national destiny, or national honor. . . . But never has the attempt succeeded. The Contract goes on."

Piedmont said, "To get back to this 1960 appearance. Why do you think Smith will reveal his purpose, if this fantastic belief of yours is correct, that he is a time traveler?"

"It all fits in, old man," Smith-Winston told him. "Since Goldini's time he has been turning up in clothing not too dissimilar to what we wear today. He speaks English—with an American accent. The coins he first gave Goldini were American double-eagles minted in this century. Sum it up. Our Mr. Smith desired to create an enormous fortune. He has done so and I believe that in 1960 we shall learn his purpose."

He sighed and went back to his cigar. "I am afraid I shall not see it. Fifty years is a long time."

They left the subject finally and went to another almost as close to their hearts. Von Borman growled, "I contend that if The Contract is to be served, Germany needs a greater place in the sun. I intend to construct a Berlin to Baghdad railroad and to milk the East of its treasures."

Marat and Smith-Winston received his words coldly. "I assure you, monsieur," Marat said, "we shall have to resist any such plans on your part. The Contract can best be served by maintaining the status quo; there is no room for

German expansion. If you persist in this, it will mean war and you recall what Mr. Smith prophesied. In case of war, we are to withdraw support from Germany and, for some reason, Russia, and support the allies. We warn you, Borman."

"This time Mr. Smith was wrong," Borman growled. "As he said, oil is to be invested in above all, and how can Germany secure oil without access to the East? My plans will succeed and the cause of The Contract will thus be forwarded."

The quiet Hideka Mitsuki murmured, "When Mr. Smith first invested his pieces of gold I wonder if he realized the day would come when the different branches of his fortune would plan and carry out international conflicts in the name of The Contract?"

There were only six of them gathered around the circular table in the Empire State suite when he entered. None had been present at his last appearance and of them all only Warren Piedmont had ever met and conversed with anyone who had actually seen Mr. Smith. Now the octogenarian held up an aged photograph and compared it to the newcomer. "Yes," he muttered, "they were right."

Mr. Smith handed over an envelope heavy with paper. "Don't you wish to check these?"

Piedmont looked about the table. Besides himself, there was John Smith-Winston, the second, from England; Rami Mardu, from India; Warner Voss-Richer, of West Germany; Mito Fisuki, of Japan; Juan Santos, representing Italy, France and Spain. Piedmont said, "We have here a photo taken of you in 1900, sir; it is hardly necessary to identify you further. I might add, however, that during the past ten years we have had various celebrated scientists at work on the question of whether or not time travel was possible."

Mr. Smith said, "So I have realized. In short, you have spent my money in investigating me."

There was little of apology in Piedmont's voice. "We have faithfully, some of us for all our adult lives, protected The Contract. I will not deny that the pay is the highest in the world; however it is only a *job*. Part of the job consists of protecting The Contract and your interests

from those who would fraudulently appropriate the fortune. We spend millions every year in conducting investigations."

"You're right, of course. But your investigations into the possibilities of time travel . . . ?"

"Invariably the answer was that it was impossible. Only one physicist offered a glimmer of possibility."

"Ah, and who was that?"

"A Professor Alan Shirey who does his research at one of the California universities. We were careful, of course, not to hire his services directly. When first approached he admitted he had never considered the problem but he became quite intrigued. However, he finally stated his opinion that the only solution would involve the expenditure of an amount of power so great that there was no such quantity available."

"I see," Mr. Smith said wryly. "And following this period for which you hired the professor, did he discontinue his investigations into time travel?"

Piedmont made a vague gesture. "How would I know?"

John Smith-Winston interrupted stiffly. "Sir, we have all drawn up complete accountings of your property. To say it is vast is an understatement beyond even an Englishman. We should like instructions on how you wish us to continue."

Mr. Smith looked at him. "I wish to begin immediate steps to liquidate."

"Liquidate!" six voices ejaculated.

"I want cash, gentlemen," Smith said definitely. "As fast as it can be accomplished, I want my property converted into cash."

Warner Voss-Richer said harshly, "Mr. Smith, there isn't enough coinage in the world to buy your properties."

"There is no need for there to be. I will be spending it as rapidly as you can convert my holdings into gold or its credit equivalent. The money will be put back into circulation over and over again."

Piedmont was aghast. "But *why?*" He held his hands up in dismay. "Can't you realize the repercussions of such a move? Mr. Smith, you must explain the purpose of all this. . . ."

Mr. Smith said, "The purpose should be obvious. And

the pseudonym of Mr. Smith is no longer necessary. You may call me Shirey—Professor Alan Shirey. You see, gentlemen, the question with which you presented me, whether or not time travel was possible, became consumingly interesting. I have finally solved, I believe, all the problems involved. I need now only a fantastic amount of power to activate my device. Given such an amount of power, somewhat more than is at present produced on the entire globe, I believe I shall be able to travel in time."

"But, but *why?* All this, all this . . . Cartels, governments, wars . . ." Warren Piedmont's aged voice wavered, faltered.

Mr. Smith—Professor Alan Shirey—looked at him strangely. "Why, so that I may travel back to early Venice where I shall be able to make the preliminary steps necessary for me to secure sufficient funds to purchase such an enormous amount of power output."

"And six centuries of human history," said Rami Mardu, Asiatic representative, so softly as hardly to be heard. "Its meaning is no more than this . . . ?"

Professor Shirey looked at him impatiently.

"Do I understand you to contend, sir, that there have been other centuries of human history with more meaning?"

JUNIOR

Robert Abernathy

Robert Abernathy **published some 40 science-fiction stories between 1942 and 1957. (His last story, "Grandma's Lie Soap", was reprinted in the 2nd Annual SF.) When last heard from (1957), he was living in Tucson, Arizona, and doing something Highly Classified for a nearby U.S. Government Establishment—presumably something involving his triplex of specialties, physics, photography, and Slavonic languages. He has since moved to Seattle, where rumor has it he is employed at something unclassifiedly professorial.**

"Junior", which first appeared in *Galaxy*, January, 1956, and then in the 1st Annual, is reprinted here with the author's permission, but without any precise knowledge of his whereabouts. Any information leading to the possibility of paying him for this inclusion will be deeply appreciated by the editor.

■■■■

"JUNIOR!" bellowed Pater.

"Junior!" squeaked Mater, a quavering echo.

"Strayed off again—the young idiot! If he's playing in the shallows, with this tide going out . . ." Pater let the sentence hang blackly. He leaned upslope as far as he could stretch, angrily scanning the shoreward reaches where light filtered more brightly down through the murky water, where the sea-surface glinted like bits of broken mirror.

No sign of Junior.

Mater was peering fearfully in the other direction, toward where, as daylight faded, the slope of the coastal shelf was fast losing itself in green profundity. Out there, beyond sight at this hour, the reef that loomed sheltering above them fell away in an abrupt cliffhead, and the abyss began.

"Oh, oh," sobbed Mater. "He's lost. He's swum into the abyss and been eaten by a sea monster." Her slender stem rippled and swayed on its base, and her delicate crown of pinkish tentacles trailed disheveled in the pull of the ebbtide.

"Pish, my dear!" said Pater. "There are no sea monsters. At worst," he consoled her stoutly, "Junior may have been trapped in a tidepool."

"Oh, oh," gulped Mater. "He'll be eaten by a land monster."

"There ARE no land monsters!" snorted Pater. He straightened his stalk so abruptly that the stone to which he and Mater were conjugally attached creaked under them. "How often must I assure you, my dear, that WE are the highest form of life?" (And, for his world and geologic epoch, he was quite right.)

"Oh, oh," gasped Mater.

Her spouse gave her up. "JUNIOR!" he roared in a voice that loosened the coral along the reef.

Round about, the couple's bereavement had begun attracting attention. In the thickening dusk tentacles paused from winnowing the sea for their owners' suppers, stalked heads turned curiously here and there in the colony. Not far away a threesome of maiden aunts, rooted en brosse to a single substantial boulder, twittered condolences and watched Mater avidly.

"Discipline!" growled Pater. "That's what he needs! Just wait till I—"

"Now, dear—" began Mater shakily.

"Hi, folks!" piped Junior from overhead.

His parents swiveled as if on a single stalk. Their offspring was floating a few fathoms above them, paddling lazily against the ebb; plainly he had just swum from some crevice in the reef nearby. In one pair of dangling tentacles he absently hugged a roundish stone, worn sensuously smooth by pounding surf.

"WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?"

"Nowhere," said Junior innocently. "Just playing hide-and-go-sink with the squids."

"With the other *polyps*," Mater corrected him primly. She detested slang.

Pater was eyeing Junior with ominous calm. "And where," he asked, "did you get that stone?"

Junior contracted guiltily. The surfstone slipped from his tentacles and plumped to the sea-floor in a flurry of sand. He edged away, stammering, "Well, I guess maybe . . . I might have gone a little ways toward the beach . . ."

"You guess! When I was a polyp," said Pater, "the small fry obeyed their elders, and no guess about it!"

"Now, dear—" said Mater.

"And no spawn of mine," Pater warmed to his lecture, "is going to flout my words! Junior . . . COME HERE."

Junior paddled cautiously round the homesite just out of tentacle-reach. He said in a small voice, "I won't."

"DID YOU HEAR ME?"

"Yes," admitted Junior.

The neighbors stared. The three maiden aunts clutched one another with muted shrieks, savoring beforehand the language Pater would now use.

But Pater said "Ulp!"—no more.

"Now, dear," put in Mater quickly. "We must be patient. You know all children go through larval stages."

"When I was a polyp . . ." Pater began rustily. He coughed out an accidentally inhaled crustacean, and started over: "No spawn of mine . . ." Trailing off, he only glared, then roared abruptly, "SPRAT!"

"I won't!" said Junior reflexively, and backpaddled into the coral shadows of the reef.

"That wallop," seethed Pater, "wants a good polyping. I mean—" He glowered suspiciously at Mater and the neighbors.

"Dear," soothed Mater, "didn't you *notice . . . ?"*

"OF COURSE I— Notice what?"

"What Junior was doing. Carrying a stone. I don't suppose he understands why, just yet, but . . ."

"A stone? Ah, uh, to be sure, a stone. Why . . . Why, my dear, do you realize what this MEANS?"

Pater was once more occupied with improving Mater's mind. It was a long job, without foreseeable end—especially since he and his helpmeet were both firmly rooted for life to the same tastefully decorated homesite (garnished by Pater himself with colored pebbles, shells, ur-

chins, and bits of coral in the rather rococo style which had prevailed during Pater's courting days as a free-swimming polyp).

"Intelligence, my dear," pronounced Pater, "is quite incompatible with motility. Just think—how could ideas congeal in a brain shuttled hither and yon, bombarded with ever-changing sense-impressions? Look at the lower species, which swim about all their lives, incapable of taking root or thought! True Intelligence, my dear—as distinguished from Instinct, of course—presupposes the fixed viewpoint!"

He paused. Mater murmured, "Yes, dear," as she always did at this point.

Junior undulated past, swimming toward the abyss. He moved a bit heavily now; it was growing hard for him to keep his maturely thickening afterbody in a horizontal posture.

"Just look at the young of our own kind," said Pater. "Scatterbrained larvae, wandering greedily about in search of new stimuli. But, praise be, they mature at last into sensible, sessile adults. While yet the unformed intellect rebels against the ending of carefree polyphood, instinct, the wisdom of Nature, instructs them to prepare for the great change!"

He nodded wisely as Junior came gliding back out of the gloom of deep water. Junior's tentacles clutched an irregular basalt fragment which he must have picked up down the rubble-strewn slope. As he paddled slowly along the rim of the reef, the adult anthozoans located directly below looked up and hissed irritable warnings. He was swimming a bit more easily now, and, if Pater had not been a firm believer in Instinct, he might have been reminded of the grossly materialistic theory, propounded by some iconoclast, according to which a maturing polyp's tendency to grapple objects was merely a matter of taking on ballast.

"See!" declared Pater triumphantly. "I don't suppose he understands *why*, just yet . . . but Instinct urges him infallibly to assemble the materials for his future homesite."

Junior let the rock fragment fall, and began plucking restlessly at a coral outcropping.

"Dear," said Mater, "don't you think you ought to tell him . . . ?"

"Ahem!" said Pater. "The wisdom of Instinct—"

"As you've always said, a polyp needs a parent's guidance," remarked Mater.

"*Ahem!*" repeated Pater. He straightened his stalk and bellowed authoritatively, "JUNIOR! Come here!"

The prodigal polyp swam warily close. "Yes, Pater?"

"Junior," said his parent solemnly, "now that you are growing up, it behooves you to know certain facts."

Mater blushed a delicate lavender and turned away on her side of the rock.

"Very soon now," said Pater, "you will begin feeling an irresistible urge . . . to sink to the bottom, to take root there in some sheltered location which will be your lifetime site. Perhaps you even have an understanding already with some—ah—charming young polyp of the opposite gender, whom you would invite to share your homesite. Or, if not, you should take all the more pains to make that site as attractive as possible, in order that such a one may decide to grace it with—"

"Uh-huh," said Junior understandingly. "That's what the fellows mean when they say any of 'em'll fall for a few high-class rocks."

Pater marshaled his thoughts again. "Well, quite apart from such material considerations as selecting the right rocks, there are certain—ah—matters we do not ordinarily discuss."

Mater blushed a more pronounced lavender. The three maiden aunts, rooted to their boulder within easy earshot of Pater's carrying voice, put up a respectable pretense of searching one another for water-fleas.

"No doubt," said Pater, "in the course of your harum-scarum adventurings as a normal polyp among polyps, you've noticed the ways in which the lower orders reproduce themselves—the activities of the fishes, the crustacea, the marine worms will not have escaped your attention."

"Uh-huh," said Junior, treading water.

"You will have observed that among these there takes place a good deal of—ah—maneuvering for position. But among intelligent, firmly rooted beings like ourselves, matters are of course on a less crude and direct plane. What

among lesser creatures is a question of tactics belongs, for us, to the realm of strategy." Pater's tone grew confiding. "Now, Junior, once you're settled, you'll realize the importance of being easy in your mind about your offspring's parentage. Remember, a niche in brine saves trying. Nothing like choosing your location well in the first place. Study the currents around your prospective site—particularly their direction and force at such crucial times as flood-tide. Try to make sure you and your future mate won't be too close down-current from anybody else's site, since in a case like that accidents can happen. You understand, Junior?"

"Uh-huh," acknowledged Junior. "That's what the fellows mean when they say don't let anybody get the drop on you."

"Well," said Pater flatly.

"But it all seems sort of silly," said Junior stubbornly. "*I'd* rather just keep moving around and not have to do all that figuring. And the ocean's full of things I haven't seen yet. I don't *want* to grow down!"

Mater paled with shock. Pater gave his spawn a scalding, scandalized look. "You'll learn! You can't beat Biology," he said thickly, creditably keeping his voice down. "Junior, you may go!"

Junior bobbled off, and Pater admonished Mater sternly: "We must have patience, my dear! All children pass through these larval stages . . ."

"Yes, dear," sighed Mater.

At long last, Junior seemed to have resigned himself to making the best of it.

With considerable exertions, hampered by his increasing bottom-heaviness, he was fetching loads of stones, seaweed and other debris to a spot downslope, and there laboring over what promised to be a fairly ambitious cairn. Judging by what they could see of it, his homesite might even prove a credit to the colony (thus Mater mused) and attract a mate who would be a good catch (so went Pater's thoughts).

Junior was still to be seen at times along the reef in company with his free-swimming friends among the other polyps, at some of whom his parents had always looked

askance, fearing they were by no means well-bred. In fact, there was strong suspicion that some of them—waifs from the disreputable shallows district in the hazardous reaches just below the tide-mark—had never been bred at all, but were products of budding, a practice frowned on in polite society.

However, Junior's appearance and rate of locomotion made it clear he would soon be done with juvenile follies. As Pater repeated with satisfaction, you can't beat Biology; as one becomes more and more bottle-shaped the romantic illusions of youth must inevitably perish.

"I always knew there was sound stuff in the youngster," declared Pater expansively.

"At least he won't be able to go around with those ragamuffins much longer," breathed Mater thankfully.

"What does the young fool think he's doing, fiddling round with soapstone?" grumbled Pater, peering critically through the green to try to make out the details of Junior's building. "Doesn't he know it's apt to slip its place in a year or two?"

"Look, dear," hissed Mater acidly, "isn't that the little polyp who was so rude once . . . I wish she wouldn't keep watching Junior like that. Our northwest neighbor heard *positively* that she's the child of an only parent!"

"Never mind," Pater turned to reassure her. "Once Junior is properly rooted, his self-respect will cause him to keep riffraff at a distance. It's a matter of psychology, my dear; the vertical position makes all the difference in one's thinking."

The great day arrived.

Laboriously Junior put a few finishing touches to his construction—which, so far as could be seen from a distance, had turned out decent-looking enough, though it was rather questionably original in design, lower and flatter than was customary.

With one more look at his handiwork, Junior turned bottom-end-down and sank wearily onto the finished site. After a minute, he paddled experimentally, but flailing tentacles failed to lift him—he was already rooted, and growing more solidly so by the moment.

The younger polyps peered from the hollows of the reef

in roundeyed awe touched with fear.

"Congratulations!" cried the neighbors. Pater and Mater bowed this way and that in acknowledgment. Mater waved a condescending tentacle to the three maiden aunts.

"I told you so!" said Pater triumphantly.

"Yes, dear," said Mater meekly.

Suddenly there were outcries of alarm from the dwellers down-reef. A wave of dismay swept audibly through all the nearer part of the colony. Pater and Mater looked round and froze.

Junior had begun paddling again, but this time in a most peculiar manner—with a rotary twist and a sidewise scoop which looked awkward, but which he performed so deftly that he must have practiced it. Fixed upright as he was now on the platform he had built, he looked for all the world as if he were trying to swim sidewise.

"He's gone mad!" squeaked Mater, grasping at the obvious straw.

"I—" gulped Pater, "I'm afraid not."

At least, they saw, there was method in Junior's actions. He went on paddling in the same fashion—and now he, and his platform with him, were farther away than they had been, and growing more remote all the time.

Parts of the homesite that was not a homesite revolved in some way incomprehensible to eyes that had never seen the like. And the whole affair trundled along, rocking at bumps in the sandy bottom, and squeaking painfully; nevertheless, it moved.

The polyps watching from the reef swam out and frolicked after Junior, watching his contrivance go and chattering questions, while their parents bawled at them to keep away from that.

The three maiden aunts shrieked faintly and swooned in one another's tentacles. The colony was shaken as it had not been since the tidal wave.

"COME BACK!" thundered Pater. "You CAN'T do that!"

"Come back!" shrilled Mater. "You can't do *that!"*

"Come back!" gabbled the neighbors. "You can't *do* that!"

But Junior was past listening to reason. Junior was on wheels.

SENSE FROM THOUGHT DIVIDE

Mark Clifton

"Remembrance and reflection, how allied;
What thin partitions sense from thought divide."
Pope

Mark Clifton (1911–1962) had an impact on science fiction entirely out of proportion to the quantity of his published work. His first two stories, "Star, Bright" and "What Have I Done?", appeared almost simultaneously early in 1952 in *Astounding* and *Galaxy*, followed by nine more in rapid succession. Between 1954 and 1962 there were, altogether, another nine, and four novels. Yet at one time he seemed to dominate the pages of *Astounding* (then the leading magazine in the field) so completely that some disgruntled fans began referring to it as the "Clifton House Organ."

Born in Oklahoma, Clifton was teaching rural school when he was thirteen; got fired for teaching evolution; went to the city and worked his way through college-equivalency by ghosting papers and theses for enrolled students. He spent 20 years in personnel work and industrial engineering, retired at forty-one after a serious illness, and turned to science fiction. His last novel was *Eight Keys to Eden* (1960), and he wrote one nonfiction book for college students, *Opportunity Unlimited* (1959).

"Sense from Thought Divide" first appeared in *Astounding*, March, 1955, in a slightly longer version; it is reprinted here from the 1st *SF Annual*. His story, "What Now, Little Man?" was in the 5th Annual, and "Hang Head, Vandall" in the 8th.

WHEN I OPENED THE DOOR to my secretary's office, I could see her looking up from her desk at the Swami's face with an expression of fascinated skepticism. The Swami's back was toward me, and on it hung flowing folds of a black cloak. His turban was white, except where it had rubbed against the back of his neck.

"A tall, dark, and handsome man will soon come into your life," he was intoning in that sepulchral voice men

habitually use in their dealings with the absolute.

Sara's green eyes focused beyond him, on me, and began to twinkle.

"And there he is right now," she commented dryly. "Mr. Kennedy, Personnel Director for Computer Research."

The Swami whirled around, his heavy robe following the movement in a practiced swirl. His liquid black eyes looked me over shrewdly, and he bowed toward me as he vaguely touched his chest, lips and forehead. I expected him to murmur, "Effendi," or "Bwana Sahib," or something, but he must have felt silence was more impressive.

I acknowledged his greeting by pulling down one corner of my mouth. Then I looked at his companion.

The young lieutenant was standing very straight, very stiff, and a flush of pink was starting up from his collar and spreading around his clenched jaws to leave a semicircle of white in front of his red ears.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Lieutenant Murphy." He managed to open his teeth a bare quarter of an inch for the words to come out. "Pentagon!" His light gray eyes pierced me to see if I were impressed.

I wasn't.

"Division of Matériel and Supply," he continued in staccato, imitating a machine gun.

I waited. It was obvious he wasn't through yet. He hesitated, and I could see his Adam's apple travel up above the knot of his tie and back down again as he swallowed. The pink flush deepened into brilliant red.

"Poltergeist Section," he said defiantly.

"What?" The exclamation was out before I could catch it.

He tried to glare at me, but his eyes were pleading instead.

"General Sanfordwaithe said you'd understand." He intended to make it matter of fact in a sturdy, confident voice, but there was the undertone of a wail. It was time I lent a hand.

"You're West Point, aren't you?" I asked kindly.

He straightened still more. I hadn't believed it possible.

"Yes, sir!" He wanted to keep the gratitude out of his

voice, but it was there. And for the first time, he had spoken the habitual term of respect to me.

"Well, what do you have here, Lieutenant Murphy?" I nodded toward the Swami who had been wavering between a proud, free stance and that of a drooping supplicant.

"According to my orders, sir," he said formally, "you have requested the Pentagon furnish you with one half dozen, six, male-type poltergeists. I am delivering the first of them to you, sir."

Sara's mouth, hanging wide open, reminded me to close my own.

So the Pentagon was calling my bluff. Well, maybe they did have something at that. I'd see.

"Float me over that ash tray there on the desk," I said casually to the Swami.

He looked at me as if I'd insulted him, and I could anticipate some reply to the effect that he was not applying for domestic service. But the humble supplicant rather than the proud and fierce hill man won. He started to pick up the ash tray from Sara's desk.

"No, no!" I exclaimed. "I didn't ask you to hand it to me. I want you to TK it over to me. What's the matter? Can't you even TK a simple ash tray?"

The lieutenant's eyes were getting bigger and bigger.

"Didn't your Poltergeist Section test this guy's aptitudes for telekinesis before you brought him from Washington all the way out here to Los Angeles?" I snapped at him.

The lieutenant's lips thinned to a bloodless line.

"I am certain he must have qualified adequately," he said stiffly, and this time left off the "sir."

"Well, I don't know," I answered doubtfully. "If he hasn't even enough telekinetic ability to float me an ash tray across the room—"

The Swami recovered himself first. He put the tips of his long fingers together in the shape of a swaybacked steeple, and rolled his eyes upward.

"I am an instrument of infinite wisdom," he intoned. "Not a parlor magician."

"You mean that with all your infinite wisdom you can't do it," I accused flatly.

"The vibrations are not favorable—" he rolled the words sonorously.

"All right," I agreed. "We'll go somewhere else, where they're better!"

"The vibrations throughout all this crass, materialistic Western world—" he intoned.

"All right," I interrupted, "we'll go to India, then. Sara, call up and book tickets to Calcutta on the first possible plane!" Sara's mouth had been gradually closing, but it unhinged again.

"Perhaps not even India," the Swami murmured, hastily. "Perhaps Tibet."

"Now you know we can't get admission into Tibet while the Communists control it," I argued seriously. "But how about Nepal? That's a fair compromise. The Maharajadhiraja's friendly now. I'll settle for Nepal."

The Swami couldn't keep the triumphant glitter out of his eyes. He had me.

"I'm afraid it would have to be Tibet," he said positively. "Nowhere else in all this troubled world are the vibrations—"

"Oh go on back to Flatbush!" I interrupted disgustedly. "You know as well as I that you've never been outside New York before in your life. Your accent's as phony as the pear-shaped tones of a midwestern garden club president. Can't even TK a simple ash tray!"

I turned to the amazed lieutenant.

"Will you come into my office?" I asked him.

He looked over at the Swami, in doubt.

"He can wait out here," I said. "He won't run away. There isn't any subway, and he wouldn't know what to do. Anyway, if he did get lost, your Army Intelligence could find him. Give G-2 something to work on. Right through this door, lieutenant."

"Yes, sir," he said meekly, and preceded me into my office.

I closed the door behind us and waved him over to the crying chair. He folded at the knees and hips only, as if there were no hinges at all in the ramrod of his back. He sat up straight, on the edge of his chair, ready to spring into instant charge of battle. I went around back to my desk and sat down.

"Now, lieutenant," I said soothingly, "tell me all about it."

I could have sworn his square chin quivered at the note of sympathy in my voice. I wondered, irrelevantly, if the lads at West Point all slept with their faces confined in wooden frames to get that characteristically rectangular look.

"You knew I was from West Point," he said, and his voice held a note of awe. "And you knew, right away, that Swami was a phony from Flatbush."

"Come now," I said with a shrug. "Nothing to get mystical about. Patterns. Just patterns. Every environment leaves the stamp of its matrix on the individual shaped in it. It's a personnel man's trade to recognize the make of a person, just as you would recognize the make of a rifle."

"Yes, sir. I see, sir," he answered. But of course he didn't. And there wasn't much use to make him try. Most people cling too desperately to the ego-saving formula: Man cannot know man.

"Look, lieutenant," I said, getting down to business, "Have you been checked out on what this is all about?"

"Well, sir," he answered, as if he were answering a question in class, "I was cleared for top security, and told that a few months ago you and your Dr. Auerbach, here at Computer Research, discovered a way to create antigravity. I was told you claimed you had to have a poltergeist in the process. You told General Sanfordwaithe that you needed six of them, males. That's about all, sir. So the Poltergeist Division discovered the Swami, and I was assigned to bring him out here to you."

"Well then, Lieutenant Murphy, you go back to the Pentagon and tell General Sanfordwaithe that—" I could see by the look on his face that my message would probably not get through verbatim. "Never mind, I'll write it," I amended disgustedly. "And you can carry the message."

I punched Sara's button on my intercom.

"After all the exposure out there to the Swami," I said, "if you're still with us on this crass, materialistic plane, will you bring your book?"

"My astral self has been hovering over you, guarding you, every minute," Sara answered dreamily.

"Can it take shorthand?" I asked dryly.

"Maybe I'd better come in," she replied.

When she came through the door the lieutenant gave her one appreciative glance, then returned to his aloof pedestal of indifference. Obviously his pattern was to stand in majestic splendor and allow the girls to fawn somewhere down near his shoes. These lads with a glamour-boy complex almost always gravitate toward some occupation which will require them to wear a uniform. Sara catalogued him as quickly as I did, and seemed unimpressed. But you never can tell about a woman; the smartest of them will fall for the most transparent poses.

"General Sanfordwaithe, dear sir," I began, as she sat down at one corner of my desk and flipped open her book. "It takes more than a towel wrapped around the head and some mutterings about infinity to get poltergeist effects. So I am returning your phony Swami to you with my compliments—"

"Beg your pardon, sir," the lieutenant interrupted, and there was a certain note of suppressed triumph in his voice. "In case you rejected our applicant for the poltergeist job you have in mind, I was to hand you this." He undid a lovingly polished button of his tunic, slipped his hand beneath the cloth and pulled forth a long, sealed envelope.

I took it from him and noted the three sealing-wax imprints on the flap. From being carried so close to his heart for so long, the envelope was slightly less crisp than when he had received it. I slipped my letter opener in under the side flap, and gently extracted the letter without, in any way, disturbing the wax seals which were to have guaranteed its privacy. There wasn't any point in my doing it, of course, except to demonstrate to the lieutenant that I considered the whole deal as a silly piece of cloak and dagger stuff.

After the general formalities, the letter was brief: "Dear Mr. Kennedy: We already know the Swami is a phony, but our people have been convinced that in spite of this there are some unaccountable effects. We have advised your general manager, Mr. Henry Grenoble, that we are in the act of carrying out our part of the agreement, namely, to provide you with six male-type poltergeists, and to both you and him we are respectfully suggesting that you get on

with the business of putting the antigravity units into immediate production."

I folded the letter and tucked it into one side of my desk pad. I looked at Sara.

"Never mind the letter to General Sanfordwaithe," I said. "He has successfully cut off my retreat in that direction." I looked over at the lieutenant. "All right," I said resignedly, "I'll apologize to the Swami, and make a try at using him."

I picked up the letter again and pretended to be reading it. But this was just a stall, because I had suddenly been struck by the thought that my extreme haste in scoring off the Swami and trying to get rid of him was because I didn't want to get involved again with poltergeists. Not any, of any nature.

Old Stone Face, our general manager, claimed to follow the philosophy of building men, not machines. To an extent he did. His favorite phrase was, "Don't ask me how. I hired you to tell me." He hired a man to do a job, and I will say for him, he left that man alone as long as the job got done. But when a man flubbed a job, and kept on flubbing it, then Mr. Henry Grenoble stepped in and carried out his own job—general managing.

He had given me the assignment of putting antigrav units into production. He had given me access to all the money I would need for the purpose. He had given me sufficient time, months of it. And, in spite of all this coöperation, he still saw no production lines which spewed out antigrav units at some such rate as seventeen and five twelfths per second.

Apparently he got his communication from the Pentagon about the time I got mine. Apparently it contained some implication that Computer Research, under his management, was not pursuing the cause of manufacturing antigrav units with diligence and dispatch. Apparently he did not like this.

I had no more than apologized to the Swami, and received his martyred forgiveness, and arranged for a hotel suite for him and the lieutenant, when Old Stone Face sent for me. He began to manage with diligence and dispatch.

"Now you look here, Kennedy," he said forcefully, and

his use of my last name, rather than my first, was a warning. "I've given you every chance. When you and Auerbach came up with that antigrav unit last fall, I didn't ask a lot of fool questions. I figured you knew what you were doing. But the whole winter has passed, and here it is spring, and you haven't done anything that I can see. I didn't say anything when you told General Sanfordwaithe that you'd have to have poltergeists to carry on the work, but I looked it up. First I thought you'd flipped your lid, then I thought you were sending us all on a wild goose chase so we'd leave you alone, then I didn't know what to think."

I nodded. He wasn't through.

"Now I think you're just pretending the whole thing doesn't exist because you don't want to fool with it."

I couldn't argue with that.

"For the first time, Kennedy, I'm asking you what happened?" he said firmly, but his tone was more telling than asking. So I was going to have to discuss frameworks with Old Stone Face, after all.

"Henry," I asked slowly, "have you kept up your reading in theoretical physics?"

He blinked at me. I couldn't tell whether it meant yes or no.

"When we went to school, you and I—" I hoped my putting us both in the same age group would tend to mollify him a little, "physics was all snug, secure, safe, definite. A fact was a fact, and that's all there was to it. But there's been some changes made. There's the coördinate systems of Einstein, where the relationships of facts can change from framework to framework. There's the application of multivalued logic to physics where a fact becomes not a fact any longer. The astronomers talk about the expanding universe—it's a piker compared to man's expanding concepts about that universe."

He waited for more. His face seemed to indicate that I was beating around the bush.

"That all has a bearing on what happened," I assured him. "You have to understand what was behind the facts before you can understand the facts themselves. First, we weren't trying to make an antigrav unit at all. Dr. Auer-

bach was playing around with a chemical approach to cybernetics. He made up some goop which he thought would store memory impulses, the way the brain stores them. He brought a plastic cylinder of it over to me, so I could discuss it with you. I laid it on my desk while I went on with my personnel management business at hand."

Old Stone Face opened a humidor and took out a cigar. He lit it slowly and deliberately and looked at me sharply as he blew out the first puff of smoke.

"The nursery over in the plant had been having trouble with a little girl, daughter of one of our production women. She'd been throwing things, setting things on fire. The teachers didn't know how she did it, she just did it. They sent her to me. I asked her about it. She threw a tantrum, and when it was all over, Auerbach's plastic cylinder of goop was trying to fall upward, through the ceiling. That's what happened," I said.

He looked at his cigar, and looked at me. He waited for me to tie the facts to the theory. I hesitated, and then tried to reassure myself. After all, we were in the business of manufacturing computers. The general manager ought to be able to understand something beyond primary arithmetic.

"Jennie Malasek was a peculiar child with a peculiar background," I went on. "Her mother was from the old country, a Slav. There's the inheritance of a lot of peculiar notions. Maybe she had passed them on to her daughter. She kept Jennie locked up in their room. The kid never got out with other children. Children, kept alone, never seeing anybody, get peculiar notions all by themselves. Who knows what kind of a coördinate system she built up, or how it worked? Her mother could come home at night and go about her tasks talking aloud, half to the daughter, half to herself. 'I really burned that foreman up, today,' she'd say. Or, 'Oh, boy, was he fired in a hurry!' Or, 'She got herself thrown out of the place,' things like that."

"So what does that mean, Ralph?" he asked. His switch to my first name was encouraging.

"To a child who never knew anything else," I answered, "one who had never learned to distinguish reality from

unreality—as we would define it from our agreed framework—a special coördinate system might be built up where 'Everybody was up in the air at work, today,' might be taken literally. Under the old systems of physics that couldn't happen, of course—it says in the textbooks—but since it has been happening all through history, in thousands of instances, in the new systems of multivalued physics we recognize it. Under the old system, we already had all the major answers, we thought. Now that we've got our smug certainties knocked out of us, we're just fumbling along, trying to get some of the answers we thought we had.

"We couldn't make that cylinder activate others. We tried. We're still trying. In ordinary cybernetics you can have one machine punch a tape and it can be fed into another machine, but that means you first have to know how to code and decode a tape mechanically. We don't know how to code or decode a psi effect. We know the Auerbach cylinder will store a psi impulse, but we don't know how. So we have to keep working with psi gifted people, at least until we've established some of the basic laws governing psi."

I couldn't tell by Henry's face whether I was with him or far far away. He told me he wanted to think about it, and made a little motion with his hand that I should leave the room.

I walked through the suite of executive offices and down a sound-rebuffing hallway. The throbbing clatter of manufacture of metallic parts made a welcome sound as I went through the far doorway into the factory. I saw a blueprint spread on a foreman's desk as I walked past. Good old blueprint. So many millimeters from here to there, made of such and such an alloy, a hole punched here with an allowance of five ten-thousandths plus or minus tolerance. Snug, secure, safe. I wondered if psi could ever be blueprinted. Or suppose you put a hole here, but when you looked away and then looked back it had moved, or wasn't there at all?

Quickly, I got myself into a conversation with a supervisor about the rising rate of employee turnover in his department. That was something also snug, secure, safe. All you had to do was figure out human beings.

I spent the rest of the morning on such pursuits, working with things I understood.

On his first rounds of the afternoon, the interoffice messenger brought me a memorandum from the general manager's office. I opened it with some misgivings.

Mr. Grenoble felt he should work with me more closely on the antigrav project. He understood, from his researches, that the most positive psi effects were experienced during a seance with a medium. Would I kindly arrange for the Swami to hold a seance that evening, after office hours, so that he might analyze the man's methods and procedures to see how they could fit smoothly into Company Operation. This was not to be construed as interference in the workings of my department but in the interest of pursuing the entire matter with diligence and dispatch—

The seance was to be held in my office.

I had had many peculiar conferences in this room—from union leaders stripping off their coats, throwing them on the floor and stomping on them; to uplifters who wanted to ban cosmetics on our women employees so the male employees would not be tempted to think Questionable Thoughts. I could not recall ever having held a seance before.

My desk had been moved out of the way, over into one corner of the large room. A round table was brought over from the salesmen's report writing room (used there more for surreptitious poker playing than for writing reports) and placed in the middle of my office—on the grounds that it had no sharp corners to gouge people in their middles if it got to cavorting about recklessly. In an industrial plant one always has to consider the matter of safety rules and accident insurance rates.

In the middle of the table there rested, with dark fluid gleaming through clear plastic cases, six fresh cylinders which Auerbach had prepared in his laboratory over in the plant.

Auerbach had shown considerable unwillingness to attend the seance; he pleaded being extra busy with experiments just now, but I gave him that look which told him I knew he had just been stalling around the last few months, the same as I had.

If the psi effect had never come out in the first place, there wouldn't have been any mental conflict. He could have gone on with his processes of refining, simplifying and increasing the efficiency ratings of his goop. He would have settled gladly for a chemical compound which could have added two and two upon request; but when that compound can learn and demonstrate that there's no such thing as gravity, teaching it simple arithmetic is like ashes in the mouth.

I said as much to him. I stood there in his laboratory, leaned up against a work bench, and risked burning an acid hole in the sleeve of my jacket just to put over an air of unconcern. He was perched on the edge of an opposite work bench, swinging his feet, and hiding the expression in his eyes behind the window's reflection upon his polished glasses. I said even more.

"You know," I said reflectively, "I'm completely unable to understand the attitude of supposedly unbiased men of science. Now you take all that mass of data about psi effects, the odd and unexplainable happenings, the premonitions, the specific predictions, the accurate descriptions of far away simultaneously happening events. You take that whole mountainous mass of data, evidence, phenomena—"

A slight turn of his head gave me a glimpse of his eyes behind the glasses. He looked as if he wished I'd change the subject. In his dry, undemonstrative way, I think he liked me. Or at least he liked me when I wasn't trying to make him think about things outside his safe and secure little framework. But I wasn't going to stop.

"Before Rhine came along, and brought all this down to the level of laboratory experimentation," I pursued, "how were those things to be explained? Say a fellow had some unusual powers, things that happened around him, things he knew without any explanation for knowing them. I'll tell you. There were two courses open to him. He could express it in the semantics of spiritualism, or he could admit to witchcraft and sorcery. Take your pick; those were the only two systems of semantics available to him.

"We've got a third one now—parapsychology. If I had asked you to attend an experiment in parapsychology, you'd have agreed at once. But when I ask you to attend a

seance, you balk! Man, what difference does it make what we call it? Isn't it up to us to investigate the evidence wherever we find it? No matter what kind of semantic debris it's hiding in?"

Auerbach shoved himself down off the bench, and pulled out a beat-up package of cigarettes.

"All right, Kennedy," he said resignedly, "I'll attend your seance."

The other invited guests were Sara, Lieutenant Murphy, Old Stone Face, myself, and, of course, the Swami. This was probably not typical of the Swami's usual audience composition.

Six chairs were placed at even intervals around the table. I had found soft white lights overhead to be most suitable for my occasional night work, but the Swami insisted that a blue light, a dim one, was most suitable for his night work.

I made no objection to that condition. One of the elementary basics of science is that laboratory conditions may be varied to meet the necessities of the experiment. If a red-lighted darkness is necessary to an operator's successful development of photographic film, then I could hardly object to a blue-lighted darkness for the development of the Swami's effects.

Neither could I object to the Swami's insistence that he sit with his back to the true North. When he came into the room, accompanied by Lieutenant Murphy, his thoughts seemed turned in upon himself, or wafted somewhere out of this world. He stopped in midstride, struck an attitude of listening, or feeling, perhaps, and slowly shifted his body back and forth.

"Ah," he said at last, in a tone of satisfaction, "there is the North!"

It was, but this was not particularly remarkable. There is no confusing maze of hallways leading to the Personnel Department from the outside. Applicants would be unable to find us if there were. If he had got his bearings out on the street, he could have managed to keep them.

He picked up the nearest chair with his own hands and shifted it so that it would be in tune with the magnetic lines of Earth. I couldn't object. The Chinese had insisted upon such placement of household articles, particularly

their beds, long before the Earth's magnetism had been discovered by science. The birds had had their direction-finders attuned to it, long before there was man.

Instead of objecting, the lieutenant and I meekly picked up the table and shifted it to the new position. Sara and Auerbach came in as we were setting the table down. Auerbach gave one quick look at the Swami in his black cloak and nearly white turban, and then looked away.

"Remember semantics," I murmured to him, as I pulled out Sara's chair for her. I seated her to the left of the Swami. I seated Auerbach to the right of him. If the lieutenant was, by chance, in cahoots with the Swami, I would foil them to the extent of not letting them sit side by side at least. I sat down at the opposite side of the table from the Swami. The lieutenant sat down between me and Sara.

The general manager came through the door at that instant, and took charge immediately.

"All right now," Old Stone Face said crisply, in his low, rumbling voice, "no fiddle faddling around. Let's get down to business."

The Swami closed his eyes.

"Please be seated," he intoned to Old Stone Face. "And now, let us all join hands in an unbroken circle."

Henry shot him a beetlebrowed look as he sat down between Auerbach and me, but at least he was coöperative to the extent that he placed both his hands on top of the table. If Auerbach and I reached for them, we would be permitted to grasp them.

I leaned back and snapped off the overhead light to darken the room in an eerie, blue glow.

We sat there, holding hands, for a full ten minutes. Nothing happened.

It was not difficult to estimate the pattern of Henry's mind. Six persons, ten minutes, equals one man-hour. One man-hour of idle time to be charged into the cost figure of the antigrav unit. He was staring fixedly at the cylinders which lay in random positions in the center of the table, as if to assess their progress at this processing point. He stirred restlessly in his chair, obviously dissatisfied with the efficiency rating of the manufacturing process.

The Swami seemed to sense the impatience, or it might have been coincidence.

"There is some difficulty," he gasped in a strangulated, high voice. "My guides refuse to come through."

"Harrumph!" exclaimed Old Stone Face. It left no doubt about what *he* would do if *his* guides did not obey orders on the double.

"Someone in the circle is not a True Believer!" the Swami accused in an incredulous voice.

In the dim blue light I was able to catch a glimpse of Sara's face. She was on the verge of breaking apart. I managed to catch her eye and flash her a stern warning. Later she told me she had interpreted my expression as stark fear, but it served the same purpose. She smothered her laughter in a most unladylike sound somewhere between a snort and a squawk.

The Swami seemed to become aware that somehow he was not holding his audience spellbound.

"Wait!" he commanded urgently; then he announced in awe-stricken tones, "I feel a presence!"

There was a tentative, half-hearted rattle of some castanets—which could have been managed by the Swami wiggling one knee, if he happened to have them concealed there. This was followed by the thin squawk of a bugle —which could have been accomplished by sitting over toward one side and squashing the air out of a rubber bulb attached to a ten-cent party horn taped to his thigh.

Then there was nothing. Apparently his guides had made a tentative appearance and were, understandably, completely intimidated by Old Stone Face. We sat for another five minutes.

"Harrumph!" Henry cleared his throat again, this time louder and more commanding.

"That is all," the Swami said in a faint, exhausted voice. "I have returned to you on your material plane."

The handholding broke up in the way bits of metal, suddenly charged positive and negative, would fly apart. I leaned back again and snapped on the white lights. We all sat there a few seconds, blinking in what seemed a sudden glare.

The Swami sat with his chin dropped down to his chest. Then he raised stricken, liquid eyes.

"Oh, now I remember where I am," he said. "What happened? I never know."

Old Stone Face threw him a look of withering scorn. He picked up one of the cylinders and hefted it in the palm of his hand. It did not fly upward to bang against the ceiling. It weighed about what it ought to weigh. He tossed the cylinder, contemptuously, back into the pile, scattering them over the table. He pushed back his chair, got to his feet, and stalked out of the room without looking at any of us.

The Swami made a determined effort to recapture the spotlight.

"I'm afraid I must have help to walk to the car," he whispered. "I am completely exhausted. Ah, this work takes so much out of me. Why do I go on with it? Why? Why? Why?"

He drooped in his chair, then made a valiantly brave effort to rise under his own power when he felt the lieutenant's hands lifting him up. He was leaning heavily on the lieutenant as they went out the door.

Sara looked at me dubiously.

"Will there be anything else?" she asked. Her tone suggested that since nothing had been accomplished, perhaps we should get some work out before she left.

"No, Sara," I answered. "Good night. See you in the morning."

She nodded and went out the door.

Apparently none of them had seen what I saw. I wondered if Auerbach had. He was a trained observer. He was standing beside the table looking down at the cylinders. He reached over and poked at one of them with his forefinger. He was pushing it back and forth. It gave him no resistance beyond normal inertia. He pushed it a little farther out of parallel with true North. It did not try to swing back.

So he had seen it. When I'd laid the cylinders down on the table they were in random positions. During the seance there had been no jarring of the table, not even so much as a rap or quiver which could have been caused by the Swami's lifted knee. When we'd shifted the table, after the

Swami had changed his chair, the cylinders hadn't been disturbed. When Old Stone Face had been staring at them during the seance—seance?, hah!—they were lying in inert, random positions.

But when the light came back on, and just before Henry had picked one up and tossed it back to scatter them, every cylinder had been laid in orderly parallel—and with one end pointing to true North!

I stood there beside Auerbach, and we both poked at the cylinders some more. They gave us no resistance, nor showed that they had any ideas about it one way or the other.

"It's like so many things," I said morosely. "If you do just happen to notice anything out of the ordinary at all, it doesn't seem to mean anything."

"Maybe that's because you're judging it outside of its own framework," Auerbach answered. I couldn't tell whether he was being sarcastic or speculative. "What I don't understand," he went on, "is that once the cylinders having been activated by whatever force there was in action —all right, call it psi—well, why didn't they retain it, the way the other cylinders retained the antigrav force?"

I thought for a moment. Something about the conditional setup seemed to give me an idea.

"You take a photographic plate," I reasoned. "Give it a weak exposure to light, then give it a strong blast of overexposure. The first exposure is going to be blanked out by the second. Old Stone Face was feeling pretty strongly toward the whole matter."

Auerbach looked at me, unbelieving.

"There isn't any rule about who can have psi talent," I argued. "I'm just wondering if I shouldn't wire General Sanfordwaithe and tell him to cut our order for poltergeists down to five."

I spent a glum, restless night. I knew, with certainty, that Old Stone Face was going to give me trouble. I didn't need any psi talent for that; it was an inevitable part of his pattern. He had made up his mind to take charge of this antigrav operation, and he wouldn't let one bogus seance stop him more than momentarily.

If it weren't so close to direct interference with my de-

partment, I'd have been delighted to sit on the side lines and watch him try to command psi effects to happen. That would be like commanding some random copper wire and metallic cores to start generating electricity.

For once I could have overlooked the interference with my department if I didn't know, from past experience, that I'd be blamed for the consequent failure. And there was something else, too; I had the feeling that if I were allowed to go along, carefully and experimentally, I just might discover a few of the laws about psi. There was the tantalizing feeling that I was on the verge of knowing at least something.

The Pentagon people had been right. The Swami was an obvious phony of the baldest fakery, yet he had something. He had something, but how was I to get hold of it? Just what kind of turns with what around what did you make to generate a psi force? It took two thousand years for man to move from the concept that amber was a stone with a soul to the concept of static electricity. Was there any chance I could find some shortcuts in reducing the laws governing psi? The one bright spot of my morning was that Auerbach hadn't denied seeing the evidence of the cylinders pointing North.

It turned out to be the only bright spot. I had no more than got to my office and sorted out the routine urgencies from those which had to be handled immediately, when Sara announced the lieutenant and the Swami. I put everything else off, and told her to send them right in.

The Swami was in an incoherent rage. The lieutenant was contracting his eyebrows in a scowl and clenching his fists in frustration. In a voice, soaring into the falsetto, the Swami demanded that he be sent back to Brooklyn where he was appreciated. The lieutenant had orders to stay with the Swami, but he didn't have any orders about returning either to Brooklyn or the Pentagon. I managed, at last, to get the lieutenant seated in a straight chair, but the Swami couldn't stay still long enough. He stalked up and down the room, swirling his slightly odorous black cloak on the turns. Gradually the story came out.

Old Stone Face, a strong advocate of Do It Now, hadn't wasted any time. From his home he had called the Swami

at his hotel and commanded him to report to the general manager's office at once. They all got there about the same time, and Henry had waded right in.

Apparently Henry, too, had spent a restless night. He accused the Swami of inefficiency, bungling, fraud, deliberate insubordination, and a few other assorted faults for having made a fool out of us all at the seance. He'd as much as commanded the Swami to cut out all the shilly-shallying and get down to the business of activating anti-grav cylinders, or else. He hadn't been specific about what the "or else" would entail.

"Now I'm sure he really didn't mean—" I began to pour oil on the troubled waters. "With your deep insight, Swami— The fate of great martyrs throughout the ages—" Gradually the ego-building phrases calmed him down. He grew willing to listen, if for no more than the anticipation of hearing more of them.

He settled down into the crying chair at last, his valence shifting from outraged anger to a vast and noble forgiveness. This much was not difficult. To get him to coöperate, consciously and enthusiastically, might not be so easy.

Each trade has its own special techniques. The analytical chemist has a series of routines he tries when he wishes to reduce an unknown compound to its constituents. To the chemically uneducated, this may appear to be a fumbling, hit or miss, kind of procedure. The personnel man, too, has his series of techniques, which may appear to be no more than random, pointless conversation.

I first tried the routine process of reasoning. I didn't expect it to work; it seldom does, but it can't be eliminated until it has been tested.

"You must understand," I said slowly, soothingly, "that our intentions are constructive. We are simply trying to apply the scientific method to something which has, heretofore, been wrapped in mysticism."

The shocked freezing of his facial muscles gave me the answer to that.

"Science understands nothing, nothing at all!" he snapped. "Science tries to reduce everything to test tubes and formulae; but I am the instrument of a mystery which man can never know."

"Well, now," I said reasonably. "Let us not be incon-

sistent. You say this is something man was not meant to know; yet you, yourself, have devoted your life to gaining a greater comprehension of it."

"I seek only to rise above my material self so that I might place myself in harmony with the flowing symphony of Absolute Truth," he lectured me sonorously. The terminology didn't bother me; the jargon of the sciences sometimes grows just as esoteric. Maybe it even meant something.

One thing I was sure it meant. There are two basic approaches to the meaning of life and the universe about us. Man can know: That is the approach of science, its whole meaning. There are mysteries which man was not meant to know: That is the other approach. There is no reconciling of the two on a reasoning basis. I represented the former. I wasn't sure the Swami was a true representative of the latter, but at least he had picked up the valence and the phrases.

I made a mental note that reasoning was an unworkable technique with this compound. Henry, a past master at it, had already tried threats and abuse. That hadn't worked. I next tried one of the oldest forms in the teaching of man, a parable.

I told him of my old Aunt Dimity, who was passionately fond of Rummy, but considered all other card games sinful.

"Ah, how well she proves my point," the Swami countered. "There is an inner voice, a wisdom greater than the mortal mind to guide us—"

"Well now," I asked reasonably, "why would the inner voice say that Rummy was O.K., but Casino wasn't?" But it was obvious he liked the point he had made better than he had liked the one I failed to make.

So I tried the next technique. Often an opponent will come over to your side if you just confess, honestly, that he is a better man than you are, and you need his help. What was the road I must take to achieve the same understanding he had? His eyes glittered at that.

"First there is fasting, and breathing, and contemplating self," he murmured mendaciously. "I would be unable to aid you until you gave me full ascendancy over you, so that I might guide your every thought—"

I decided to try inspiration.

"Do you realize, Swami," I asked, "that the one great drawback throughout the ages to a full acceptance of psi is the lack of permanent evidence? It has always been evanescent, perishable. It always rests solely upon the word of witnesses. But if I could show you a film print, then you could not doubt the existence of photography, could you?"

I opened my lower desk drawer and pulled out a couple of the Auerbach cylinders which we had used the night before. I laid them on top of the desk.

"These cylinders," I said, "act like the photographic film. They will record, in permanent form, the psi effects you command. At last, for all mankind the doubt will be stilled; man will at once know the truth; and you will take your place among the immortals."

I thought it was pretty good. It should have done the trick. But the Swami was staring at the cylinders first in fascination, then fear, then in horror. He jumped to his feet, without bothering to swirl his robe majestically, rushed over to the door, fumbled with the knob as if he were in a burning room, managed to get the door open, and rushed outside. The lieutenant gave me a puzzled look, and went after him.

I drew a deep breath, and exhaled it audibly. My testing procedures hadn't produced the results I'd expected, but the last one had revealed something else—or rather, had confirmed two things we knew already.

One: The Swami believed himself to be a fraud.

Two: He wasn't.

Both cylinders were pointing toward the door. I watched them, at first not quite sure; like the Swami, I'd have preferred not to believe the evidence. But the change in their perspective with the angles of the desk made the motion unmistakable.

Almost as slowly as the minute hand of a watch, they were creeping across the desk toward the door. They, too, were trying to escape from the room.

I nudged them with my fingers. They hustled along a little faster, as if appreciative of the help, even coming from me. I saw they were moving faster, as if they were learning as they tried it. I turned one of them around.

Slowly it turned back and headed for the door again. I lifted one of them down to the floor. It had no tendency to float, but it kept heading for the door. The other one fell off the desk while I was fooling with the first one. The jar didn't seem to bother it any. It, too, began to creep across the rug toward the door.

I opened the door for them. Sara looked up. She saw the two cylinders come into view, moving under their own power.

"Here we go again," she said, resignedly.

The two cylinders pushed themselves over the door sill, got clear outside my office. Then they went inert. Both Sara and I tried nudging them, poking them. They just lay there; mission accomplished. I carried them back inside my office and lay them on the floor. Immediately both of them began to head for the door again.

"Simple," Sara said dryly, "they just can't stand to be in the same room with you, that's all."

"You're not just whistling, gal," I answered. "That's the whole point."

"Have I said something clever?" she asked seriously.

I took the cylinders back into my office and put them in a desk drawer. I watched the desk for a while, but it didn't change position. Apparently it was too heavy for the weak force activating the cylinders.

I picked up the phone and called Old Stone Face. I told him about the cylinders.

"There!" he exclaimed with satisfaction. "I knew all that fellow needed was a good old-fashioned talking to. Some day, my boy, you'll realize that you still have a lot to learn about handling men."

"Yes, sir," I answered.

At that, Old Stone Face had a point. If he hadn't got in and riled things up, maybe the Swami would not have been emotionally upset enough to generate the psi force which had activated these new cylinders.

Did that mean that psi was linked with emotional upheaval? Well, maybe. Not necessarily, but Rhine had proved that strength of desire had an effect upon the frequency index of telekinesis.

Was there anything at all we knew about psi, so that we

could start cataloguing, sketching in the beginnings of a pattern? Yes, of course there was.

First, it existed. No one could dismiss the mountainous mass of evidence unless he just refused to think about the subject.

Second, we could, in time, know what it was and how it worked. You'd have to give up the entire basis of scientific attitude if you didn't admit that.

Third, it acted like a sense, rather than as something dependent upon the intellectual process of thought. You could, for example—I argued to my imaginary listener—command your nose to smell a rose, and by autosuggestion you might think you were succeeding; that is, until you really did smell a real rose, then you'd know that you'd failed to create it through a thought pattern. The sense would have to be separated from the process of thinking about the sense.

So what was psi? But, at this point, did it matter much? Wasn't the main issue one of learning how to produce it, use it? How long did we work with electricity and get a lot of benefits from it before we formed some theories about what it was? And, for that matter, did we know what it was, even yet? "A flow of electrons" was a pretty meaningless phrase, when you stopped to think about it. I could say psi was a flow of psitrons, and it would mean as much.

I reached over and picked up a cigarette. I started fumbling around in the center drawer of my desk for a matchbook. I didn't find any. Without thinking, I opened the drawer containing the two cylinders. They were pressing up against the side of the desk drawer, still trying to get out of the room. Single purposed little beasts, weren't they?

I closed the drawer, and noticed that I was crushing out my cigarette in the ash tray, just as if I'd smoked it. My nerves weren't all they should be this morning.

Which brought up the fourth point, and also took me right back to where I started.

Nerves . . .

Emotional upheavals.

Rhine's correlations between interest, belief, and ability to perform . . .

It seemed very likely that a medium such as the Swami, whose basic belief was There Are Mysteries, would be unable to function in a framework where the obvious intent was to unveil those mysteries!

That brought up a couple more points. I felt pretty sure of them. I felt as if I were really getting somewhere. And I had a situation which was ideal for proving my points.

I flipped the intercom key, and spoke to Sara.

"Will you arrange with her foreman for Annie Malasek to come to my office right now?" I asked. Sara is flippant when things are going along all right, but she knows when to buckle down and do what she's asked. She gave me no personal reactions to this request.

Yes, Annie Malesek would be a good one. If anybody in the plant believed There Are Mysteries, it would be Annie. Further, she was exaggeratedly loyal to me. She believed I was responsible for turning her little Jennie, the little girl who'd started all this poltergeist trouble, into a Good Little Girl. In this instance, I had no qualms about taking advantage of that loyalty.

While I waited for her I called the lieutenant at his hotel. He was in. Yes, the Swami was also in. They'd just returned. Yes, the Swami was ranting and raving about leaving Los Angeles at once. He had said he absolutely would have nothing more to do with us here at Computer Research. I told Lieutenant Murphy to scare him with tales of the secret, underground working of Army Intelligence, to quiet him down. And I scared the lieutenant a little by pointing out that holding a civilian against his will without the proper writ was tantamount to kidnaping. So if the Army didn't want trouble with the Civil Courts, all brought about because the lieutenant didn't know how to handle his man—

The lieutenant became immediately anxious to coöperate with me. So then I soothed him. I told him that, naturally, the Swami was unhappy. He was used to Swaming, and out here he had been stifled, frustrated. What he needed was some credulous women to catch their breath at his awe-inspiring insight and gaze with fearful rapture into his eyes. The lieutenant didn't know where he could

find any women like that. I told him, dryly, that I would furnish some.

Annie was more than coöperative. Sure, the whole plant was buzzing about that foreign-looking Swami who had been seen coming in and out of my office. Sure, a lot of the Girls believed in seances.

"Why? Don't you, Mr. Kennedy?" she asked curiously.

I said I wasn't sure, and she clucked her tongue in sympathy. It must be terrible not to be sure, so . . . well, it must be just terrible. And I was such a kind man, too . . .

But when I asked her to go to the hotel and persuade the Swami to give her a reading, she was reluctant. I thought my plan was going to be frustrated, but it turned out that her reluctance was only because she did not have a thing to wear, going into a high-toned place like that.

Sara wasn't the right size, but one of the older girls in the outer office would lend Annie some clothes if I would let her go see the Swami, too. It developed that her own teacher was a guest of Los Angeles County for a while, purely on a trumped-up charge, you understand, Mr. Kennedy. Not that she was a cop hater or anything like that. She was perfectly aware of what a fine and splendid job those noble boys in blue did for us all, but—

In my own office! Well, you never knew.

Yet, what was the difference between her and me? We were both trying to get hold of and benefit by psi effects, weren't we?

And the important thing was that we could combine our efforts to our mutual advantage. My interviewer's teacher had quite a large following, and now they were all at loose ends. If the Swami were willing, she could provide a large and ready-made audience for him. She would be glad to talk to him about it.

Annie hurriedly said that she would be glad to talk to him about it, too; that she could get up a large audience, too. So, even before it got started, I had my rival factions at work. I egged them both on, and promised that I'd get Army Intelligence to work with the local boys in blue to hold off making any raids.

Annie told me again what a kind man I was. My interviewer spoke up quickly and said how glad she was to

find an opportunity for expressing how grateful she was for the privilege of working right in the same department with such an understanding, really intellectually developed adult. She eyed Annie sidelong, as if to gauge the effects of her attempts to set me up on a pedestal, out of Annie's reach.

I hoped I wouldn't start believing either one of them. I hoped I wasn't as inaccurate in my estimates of people as was my interviewer. I wondered if she were really qualified for the job she held. Then I realized this was a contest between two women and I, a mere male, was simply being used as the pawn. Well, that worked both ways. In a fair bargain both sides receive satisfaction. I felt a little easier about my tactical maneuvers.

But the development of rivalry between factions of the audience gave me an additional idea. Perhaps that's what the Swami really needed, a little rivalry. Perhaps he was being a little too hard to crack because he knew he was the only egg in the basket.

I called Old Stone Face and told him what I planned. He responded that it was up to me. He'd stepped in and got things under way for me, got things going, now it was my job to keep them going. It looked as if he were edging out from under—or maybe he really believed that.

Before I settled into the day's regular routine, I wired General Sanfordwaithe, and told him that if he had any more prospects ready would he please ship me one at once, via air mail, special delivery.

The recital hall, hired for the Swami's Los Angeles debut, was large enough to accommodate all the family friends and relatives of any little Maribel who, having mastered "Daffodils In May," for four fingers, was being given to the World. It had the usual small stage equipped with pull-back curtains to give a dramatic flourish, or to shut off from view the effects of any sudden nervous catastrophe brought about by stage fright.

I got there, purposely a little late, in hopes the house lights would already be dimmed and everything in progress; but about a hundred and fifty people were milling around outside on the walk and in the corridors. Both factions had really been busy.

Most of them were women, but, to my intense relief, there were a few men. Some of these were only husbands, but a few of the men wore a look which said they'd been far away for a long time. Somehow I got the impression that instead of looking into a crystal ball, they would be more inclined to look out of one.

It was a little disconcerting to realize that no one noticed me, or seemed to think I was any different from anybody else. I supposed I should be thankful that I wasn't attracting any attention. I saw my interviewer amid a group of Older Girls. She winked at me roguishly, and patted her heavy handbag significantly. As per instructions, she was carrying a couple of the Auerbach cylinders.

I found myself staring in perplexity for a full minute at another woman, before I realized it was Annie. I had never seen her before, except dressed in factory blue jeans, man's blue shirt, and a bandanna wrapped around her head. Her companion, probably another of the factory assemblers, nudged her and pointed, not too subtly, in my direction. Annie saw me then, and lit up with a big smile. She started toward me, hesitated when I frowned and shook my head, flushed with the thought that I didn't want to speak to her in public; then got a flash of better sense than that. She, too, gave me a conspiratorial wink and patted her handbag.

My confederates were doing nicely.

Almost immediately thereafter a horsefaced, mustached old gal started rounding people up in a honey sweet, pear shaped voice, and herded them into the auditorium. I chose one of the wooden folding chairs in the back row.

A heavy jowled old gal came out in front of the closed curtains and gave a little introductory talk about how lucky we all were that the Swami had consented to visit with us. There was the usual warning to anyone who was not of the esoteric that we must not expect too much, that sometimes nothing at all happened, that true believers did not attend just to see effects. She reminded us kittenishly that the guides were capricious, and that we must all help by merging ourselves in the great flowing currents of absolute infinity.

She finally faltered, realized she was probably saying all the things the Swami would want to say—in the manner of

people who introduce speakers everywhere—and with a girlish little flourish she waved at someone off stage.

The house lights dimmed. The curtains swirled up and back.

The Swami was doing all right for himself. He was seated behind a small table in the center of the stage. A pale violet light diffused through a huge crystal ball on the table, and threw his dark features into sharp relief. It gave an astonishingly remote and inscrutable wisdom to his features. In the pale light, and at this distance, his turban looked quite clean.

He began to speak slowly and sonorously. A hush settled over the audience, and gradually I felt myself merging with the mass reaction of the rest. As I listened, I got the feeling that what he was saying was of tremendous importance, that somehow his words contained great and revealing wonders—or would contain them if I were only sufficiently advanced to comprehend their true meanings. The man was good, he knew his trade. All men search for truth at one level or another. I began to realize why such a proportionate few choose the cold and impersonal laboratory. Perhaps if there were a way to put science to music—

The Swami talked on for about twenty minutes, and then I noticed his voice had grown deeper and deeper in tone, and suddenly, without any apparent transition, we all knew it was not really the Swami's voice we were hearing. And then he began to tell members of the audience little intimate things about themselves, things which only they should know.

He was good at this, too. He had mastered the trick of making universals sound like specifics. I could do the same thing. The patterns of people's lives have multiple similarities. To a far greater extent than generally realized the same things happen to everyone. The idea was to take some of the lesser known ones and word them so they seemed to apply to one isolated individual.

For instance, I could tell a fellow about when he was a little boy there was a little girl in a red dress with blond pigtails who used to scrap with him and tattle things about him to her mother. If he were inclined to be credulous, this was second sight I had. But it is a universal. What aver-

age boy didn't, at one time or another, know a little girl with blond pigtails? What blond little girl didn't occasionally wear a red dress? What little girl didn't tattle to her mother about the naughty things the boys were doing?

The Swami did that for a while. The audience was leaning forward in a rapture of ecstasy. First the organ tones of his voice soothed and softened. The phrases which should mean something if only you had the comprehension. The universals applied as specifics. He had his audience in the palm of his hand. He didn't need his crystal ball to tell him that.

But he wanted it to be complete. Most of the responses had been from women. He gave them the generalities which didn't sound like generalities. They confirmed with specifics. But most were women. He wanted the men, too. He began to concentrate on the men. He made it easy.

"I have a message," he said. "From . . . now let me get it right . . . from R. S. It is for a man in this audience. Will the man who knew R. S. acknowledge?"

There was a silence. And that was such an easy one, too. I hadn't planned to participate, but, on impulse, since none of the other men were coöperating, I spoke up.

"Robert Smith!" I exclaimed. "Good old Bob!"

Several of the women sitting near me looked at me and beamed their approval. One of the husbands scowled at me.

"I can tell by your tone," the Swami said, and apparently he hadn't recognized my tone, "that you have forgiven him. That is the message. He wants you to know that he is happy. He is much wiser now. He knows now that he was wrong."

One of the women reached over and patted me on the shoulder.

But the Swami had no more messages for men. He was smart enough to know where to stop. He'd tried one of the simplest come-ons, and there had been too much of a pause. It had almost not come off.

I wondered who good old Bob Smith was? Surely, among the thousands of applicants I'd interviewed, there must have been a number of them. And, being applicants, of course some of them had been wrong.

The Swami's tones, giving one message after another—

faster and faster now, not waiting for acknowledgment or confirmation—began to sink into a whisper. His speech became ragged, heavy. The words became indistinguishable. About his head there began to float a pale, luminescent sphere. There was a subdued gasp from the audience and then complete stillness. As though, unbreathing, in the depths of a tomb, they watched the sphere. It bobbed about, over the Swami's head and around him. At times it seemed as if about to float off stage, but it came back. It swirled out over the audience, but not too far, and never at such an angle that the long, flexible dull black wire supporting it would be silhouetted against the glowing crystal ball.

Then it happened. There was a gasp, a smothered scream. And over at one side of the auditorium a dark object began bobbing about in the air up near the ceiling. It swerved and swooped. The Swami's luminescent sphere jerked to a sudden stop. The Swami sat with open mouth and stared at the dark object which he was not controlling.

The dark object was not confined to any dull black wire. It went where it willed. It went too high and brushed against the ceiling.

There was a sudden shower of coins to the floor. A compact hit the floor with a flat spat. A handkerchief floated down more slowly.

"My purse!" a woman gasped. I recognized my interviewer's voice. Her purse contained two Auerbach cylinders, and they were having themselves a ball.

In alarm, I looked quickly at the stage, hoping the Swami wasn't astute enough to catch on. But he was gone. The audience, watching the bobbing purse, hadn't realized it as yet. And they were delayed in realizing it by a diversion from the other side of the auditorium.

"I can't hold it down any longer, Mr. Kennedy!" a woman gasped out. "It's taking me up into the air!"

"Hold on, Annie!" I shouted back. "I'm coming!"

A chastened and subdued Swami sat in my office the following morning, and this time he was inclined to be coöperative. More, he was looking to me for guidance, understanding, and didn't mind acknowledging my ascendancy.

And, with the lieutenant left in the outer office, he didn't have any face to preserve.

Later, last night, he'd learned the truth of what happened after he had run away in a panic. I'd left a call at the hotel for the lieutenant. When the lieutenant had got him calmed down and returned my call, I'd instructed him to tell the Swami about the Auerbach cylinders; to tell the Swami he was not a fake after all.

The Swami had obviously spent a sleepless night. It is a terrible thing to have spent years perfecting the art of fakery, and then to realize you needn't have faked at all. More terrible, he had swallowed some of his own medicine, and all through the night he had shivered in fear of some instant and horrible retaliation. For him it was still a case of There Are Mysteries.

And it was of no comfort to his state of mind right now that the four cylinders we had finally captured last night were, at this moment, bobbing about in my office, swooping and swerving around in the upper part of the room, like bats trying to find some opening. I was giving him the full treatment. The first two cylinders, down on the floor, were pressing up against my closed door, like frightened little things trying to escape a room of horror.

The Swami's face was twitching, and his long fingers kept twining themselves into King's X symbols. But he was sitting it out. He was swallowing some of the hair of the dog that bit him. I had to give him A for that.

"I've been trying to build up a concept of the framework wherein psi seems to function," I told him casually, just as if it were all a formularized laboratory procedure. "I had to pull last night's stunt to prove something."

He tore his eyes away from the cylinders which were over exploring one corner of the ceiling, and looked at me.

"Let's go to electricity," I said speculatively. "Not that we know psi and electricity have anything in common, other than some similar analogies, but we don't know they don't. Both of them may be just different manifestations of the same thing. We don't really know why a magnetized core, turning inside a coil of copper wire, generates electricity.

"Oh we've got some phrases," I acknowledged. "We've

got a whole structure of phrases, and when you listen to them they sound as if they ought to mean something—like the phrases you were using last night. Everybody assumes they do mean something to the pundits. So, since it is human to want to be a pundit, we repeat these phrases over and over, and call them explanations. Yet we do know what happens, even if we do just theorize about why. We know how to wrap something around something and get electricity.

"Take the induction coil," I said. "We feed a low-voltage current into one end, and we draw off a high-voltage current from the other. But anyone who wants, any time, can disprove the whole principle of the induction coil. All you have to do is wrap your core with a nonconductor, say nylon thread, and presto, nothing comes out. You see, it doesn't work; and anybody who claims it does is a faker and a liar. That's what happens when science tries to investigate psi by the standard methods.

"You surround a psi-gifted individual with nonbelievers, and probably nothing will come out of it. Surround him with true believers; and it all seems to act like an induction coil. Things happen. Yet even when things do happen, it is usually impossible to prove it.

"Take yourself, Swami. And this is significant. First we have the north point effect. Then those two little beggars trying to get out the door. Then the ones which are bobbing around up there. Without the cylinders there would have been no way to know that anything had happened at all.

"Now, about this psi framework. It isn't something you can turn on and off, at will. We don't know enough yet for that. Aside from some believers and those individuals who do seem to attract psi forces, we don't know, yet, what to wrap around what. So, here's what you're to do: You're to keep a supply of these cylinders near you at all times. If any psi effects happen, they'll record it. Fair enough?

"Now," I said with finality. "I have anticipated that you might refuse. But you're not the only person who has psi ability. I've wired General Sanfordwaithe to send me another fellow; one who will coöperate."

The Swami thought it over. Here he was with a suite in a good hotel; with an army lieutenant to look after his

earthly needs; on the payroll of a respectable company; with a ready-made flock of believers; and no fear of the bunco squad. He had never had it so good. The side money, for private readings alone, should be substantial.

Further, and he watched me narrowly, I didn't seem to be afraid of the cylinders.

"I'll coöperate," he said.

For three days there was nothing. The Swami called me a couple times a day and reported that the cylinders just lay around his room. I didn't know what to tell him. I recommended he read biographies of famous mediums. I recommended fasting, and breathing, and contemplating self. He seemed dubious, but said he'd try it.

On the morning of the third day, Sara called me on the intercom and told me there was another Army lieutenant in her office, and another . . . gentleman. I opened my door and went out to Sara's office to greet them.

The new lieutenant was no more than the standard output from the same production line as Lieutenant Murphy, but the wizened little old man he had in tow was from a different and much rarer matrix. As fast as I had moved, I was none too soon. The character reached over and tilted up Sara's chin as I was coming through the door.

"Now you're a healthy young wench," he said with a leer. "What are you doing tonight, baby?" The guy was at least eighty years old.

"Hey, you, pop!" I exclaimed in anger. "Be your age!"

He turned around and looked me up and down.

"I'm younger, that way, than you are, right now!" he snapped.

A disturbance in the outer office kept me from thinking up a retort. There were some subdued screams, some scuffling of heavy shoes, the sounds of some running feet as applicants got away. The outer door to Sara's office was flung open.

Framed in the doorway, breast high, floated the Swami!

He was sitting, cross-legged, on a hotel bathmat. From both front corners, where they had been attached by loops of twine, there peeked Auerbach cylinders. Two more rear

cylinders were grasped in Lieutenant Murphy's strong hands. He was propelling the Swami along, mid air, in Atlantic City Boardwalk style.

The Swami looked down at us with aloof disdain, then his eyes focused on the old man. His glance wavered; he threw a startled and fearful look at the cylinders holding up his bathmat. They did not fall. A vast relief overspread his face, and he drew himself erect with more disdain than ever. The old man was not so aloof.

"Harry Glotz!" he exclaimed. "Why you . . . you faker! What are you doing in that getup?"

The Swami took a casual turn about the room, leaning to one side on his magic carpet as if banking an airplane.

"Peasant!" He spat the word out and motioned grandly toward the door. Lieutenant Murphy pushed him through.

"Why, that no good bum!" the old man shouted at me. "That no-good from nowhere! I'll fix him! Thinks he's something, does he? I'll show him! Anything he can do I can do better!"

His rage got the better of him. He rushed through the door, shaking both fists above his white head, shouting imprecations, threats, and pleading to be shown how the trick was done, all in the same breath. The new lieutenant cast a stricken look at us and then sped after his charge.

"Looks as if we're finally in production," I said to Sara.

"That's only the second one," she said mournfully. "When you get all six of them, this joint's sure going to be jumping!"

I looked out of her window at the steel and concrete walls of the factory. They were solid, real, secure; they were a symbol of reality, the old reality a man could understand.

"I hope you don't mean that literally, Sara," I answered dubiously.

MARIANA

Fritz Leiber

"Mariana" was selected for the 5th SF Annual from *Fantastic*, Feb., 1960.

MARIANA HAD BEEN LIVING in the big villa and hating the tall pine trees around it for what seemed like an eternity when she found the secret panel in the master control panel of the house.

The secret panel was simply a narrow blank of aluminum—she'd thought of it as room for more switches if they ever needed any, perish the thought!—between the air-conditioning controls and the gravity controls. Above the switches for the three-dimensional TV but below those for the robot butler and maids.

Jonathan had told her not to fool with the master control panel while he was in the city, because she would wreck anything electrical, so when the secret panel came loose under her aimlessly questing fingers and fell to the solid rock floor of the patio with a musical *twing* her first reaction was fear.

Then she saw it was only a small blank oblong of sheet aluminum that had fallen and that in the space it had covered was a column of six little switches. Only the top one was identified. Tiny glowing letters beside it spelled TREES and it was on.

When Jonathan got home from the city that evening she gathered her courage and told him about it. He was neither particularly angry nor impressed.

"Of course there's a switch for the trees," he informed her deflatingly, motioning the robot butler to cut his steak.

"Didn't you know they were radio trees? I didn't want to wait twenty-five years for them and they couldn't grow in this rock anyway. A station in the city broadcasts a master pine tree and sets like ours pick it up and project it around homes. It's vulgar but convenient."

After a bit she asked timidly, "Jonathan, are the radio pine trees ghostly as you drive through them?"

"Of course not! They're solid as this house and the rock under it—to the eye and to the touch too. A person could even climb them. If you ever stirred outside you'd know these things. The city station transmits pulses of alternating matter at sixty cycles a second. The science of it is over your head."

She ventured one more question: "Why did they have the tree switch covered up?"

"So you wouldn't monkey with it—same as the fine controls on the TV. And so you wouldn't get ideas and start changing the trees. It would unsettle *me*, let me tell you, to come home to oaks one day and birches the next. I like consistency and I like pines." He looked at them out of the dining-room picture window and grunted with satisfaction.

She had been meaning to tell him about hating the pines, but that discouraged her and she dropped the topic.

About noon the next day, however, she went to the secret panel and switched off the pine trees and quickly turned around to watch them.

At first nothing happened and she was beginning to think that Jonathan was wrong again, as he so often was though would never admit, but then they began to waver and specks of pale green light churned across them and then they faded and were gone, leaving behind only an intolerably bright single point of light—just as when the TV is switched off. The star hovered motionless for what seemed a long time, then backed away and raced off toward the horizon.

Now that the pine trees were out of the way Mariana could see the real landscape. It was flat gray rock, endless miles of it, exactly the same as the rock on which the house was set and which formed the floor of the patio. It was the same in every direction. One black two-lane road drove straight across it—nothing more.

She disliked the view almost at once—it was dreadfully lonely and depressing. She switched the gravity to moon-normal and danced about dreamily, floating over the middle-of-the-room bookshelves and the grand piano and even having the robot maids dance with her, but it did not cheer her. About two o'clock she went to switch on the pine trees again, as she had intended to do in any case before Jonathan came home and was furious.

However, she found there had been changes in the column of six little switches. The TREES switch no longer had its glowing name. She remembered that it had been the top one, but the top one would not turn on again. She tried to force it from "off" to "on" but it would not move.

All of the rest of the afternoon she sat on the steps outside the front door watching the black two-lane road. Never a car or a person came into view until Jonathan's tan roadster appeared, seeming at first to hang motionless in the distance and then to move only like a microscopic snail although she knew he always drove at top speed—it was one of the reasons she would never get in the car with him.

Jonathan was not as furious as she had feared. "Your own damn fault for meddling with it," he said curtly. "Now we'll have to get a man out here. Dammit, I hate to eat supper looking at nothing but those rocks! Bad enough driving through them twice a day."

She asked him haltingly about the barrenness of the landscape and the absence of neighbors.

"Well, you wanted to live *way out,*" he told her. "You wouldn't ever have known about it if you hadn't turned off the trees."

"There's one other thing I've got to bother you with, Jonathan," she said. "Now the second switch—the one next below—has got a name that glows. It just says HOUSE. It's turned on—I haven't touched it! Do you suppose . . ."

"I want to look at this," he said, bounding up from the couch and slamming his martini-on-the-rocks tumbler down on the tray of the robot maid so that she rattled. "I bought this house as solid, but there are swindles. Ordinarily I'd spot a broadcast style in a flash, but they just might have slipped me a job relayed from some other planet or

solar system. Fine thing if me and fifty other multi-megabuck men were spotted around in identical houses, each thinking his was unique."

"But if the house is based on rock like it is . . ."

"That would just make it easier for them to pull the trick, you dumb bunny!"

They reached the master control panel. "There it is," she said helpfully, jabbing out a finger . . . and hit the HOUSE switch.

For a moment nothing happened, then a white churning ran across the ceiling, the walls and furniture started to swell and bubble like cold lava, and then they were alone on a rock table big as three tennis courts. Even the master control panel was gone. The only thing that was left was a slender rod coming out of the gray stone at their feet and bearing at the top, like some mechanistic fruit, a small block with the six switches—that and an intolerably bright star hanging in the air where the master bedroom had been.

Mariana pushed frantically at the HOUSE switch, but it was unlabeled now and locked in the "off" position, although she threw her weight at it stiff-armed.

The upstairs star sped off like an incendiary bullet, but its last flashbulb glare showed her Jonathan's face set in lines of fury. He lifted his hands like talons.

"You little idiot!" he screamed, coming at her.

"No, Jonathan, no!" she wailed, backing off, but he kept coming.

She realized that the block of switches had broken off in her hands. The third switch had a glowing name now: JONATHAN. She flipped it.

As his fingers dug into her bare shoulders they seemed to turn to foam rubber, then to air. His face and gray flannel suit seethed iridescently, like a leprous ghost's, then melted and ran. His star, smaller than that of the house but much closer, seared her eyes. When she opened them again there was nothing at all left of the star or Jonathan but a dancing dark after-image like a black tennis ball.

She was alone on an infinite flat rock plain under the cloudless, star-specked sky.

The fourth switch had its glowing name now: STARS.

It was almost dawn by her radium-dialed wristwatch and she was thoroughly chilled, when she finally decided to switch off the stars. She did not want to do it—in their slow wheeling across the sky they were the last sign of orderly reality—but it seemed the only move she could make.

She wondered what the fifth switch would say. ROCKS? AIR? Or even . . . ?

She switched off the stars.

The Milky Way, arching in all its unalterable glory, began to churn, its component stars darting about like midges. Soon only one remained, brighter even than Sirius or Venus —until it jerked back, fading, and darted to infinity.

The fifth switch said DOCTOR and it was not on but off.

An inexplicable terror welled up in Mariana. She did not even want to touch the fifth switch. She set the block of switches down on the rock and backed away from it.

But she dared not go far in the starless dark. She huddled down and waited for dawn. From time to time she looked at her watch dial and at the night-light glow of the switch-label a dozen yards away.

It seemed to be growing much colder.

She read her watch dial. It was two hours past sunrise. She remembered they had taught her in third grade that the sun was just one more star.

She went back and sat down beside the block of switches and picked it up with a shudder and flipped the fifth switch.

The rock grew soft and crisply fragrant under her and lapped up over her legs and then slowly turned white.

She was sitting in a hospital bed in a small blue room with a white pin-stripe.

A sweet, mechanical voice came out of the wall, saying, "You have interrupted the wish-fulfillment therapy by your own decision. If you now recognize your sick depression and are willing to accept help, the doctor will come to you. If not, you are at liberty to return to the wish-fulfillment therapy and pursue it to its ultimate conclusion."

Mariana looked down. She still had the block of switches in her hands and the fifth switch still read DOCTOR.

The wall said, "I assume from your silence that you will accept treatment. The doctor will be with you immediately."

The inexplicable terror returned to Mariana with compulsive intensity.

She switched off the doctor.

She was back in the starless dark. The rocks had grown very much colder. She could feel icy feathers falling on her face—snow.

She lifted the block of switches and saw, to her unutterable relief, that the sixth and last switch now read, in tiny glowing letters: MARIANA.

PLENITUDE

Will Worthington

"Will Worthington" is the pseudonym of an author who published ten stories altogether between 1958–1961. "Plenitude" was selected for the 5th *SF Annual* from *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, October, 1959.

"WHY CAN'T WE GO HOME NOW, DADDY?" asked Mike, the youngest, and the small tanned face I saw there in the skimpy shade of the olive tree was mostly a matter of eyes—all else, hair, cheeks, thumb-sized mouth, jelly-bean body and usually flailing arms and legs, were mere accessories to the round, blue, endlessly wondering *eyes*. (*"The Wells of 'Why'"* . . . It would make a poem, I thought, if a poem were needed, and if I wasn't so damned tired. And I also thought, "Oh, God! It begins. Five years old. No, not quite. Four.")

"Because Daddy has to finish weeding this row of beans," I said. "We'll go back to the house in a little while."

I would go back to the house and then I would follow the path around the rocks to the hot springs, and there I would peel off what was left of my clothes and I would soak myself in the clear but pungent water that came bubbling—perfect—from a cleft in the rocks to form a pool in the hollow of a pothole—also perfect. And while I steeped in the mineral water I could think about the fish which was soon to be broiling on the fire, and I could think of Sue turning it, poking at it and sprinkling herbs over it as though it was the first or perhaps the last fish that would ever be broiled and eaten by human creatures. She would perform that office with the same total and unreserved dedication with which, since sun-up, she had scraped deerskin, picked worms from new cabbage-leaves, gathered

firewood, caulked the walls of the cabin where the old chinking had fallen away or been chewed or knocked away by other hungry or merely curious creatures, and otherwise filled in the numberless gaps in the world—trivial things mostly which would not be noticed and could not become great things in a man's eyes unless she were to go away or cease to be. I don't think of this because, for all immediate purposes—there are no others—she is the first Woman in the world and quite possibly—the last.

"Why don't we live in the Old House in the valley, Daddy?"

It is All-Eyes again. Make no mistake about it; there is a kind of connectedness between the seemingly random questions of very small kids. These are the problems posed by an *Ur*-logic which is much closer to the pulse of reality than are any of the pretentious, involuted systems and the mincing nihilations and category-juggling of adults. It is we who are confused and half-blinded with the varieties of special knowledge. But how explain? What good is my experience to him?

"There are too many old things in the Old House which don't work," I say, even as I know that I merely open the floodgates of further questions.

"Don't the funny men work, Daddy? I want to see the funny men! Daddy, I want . . ."

The boy means the robots. I took him down to see the Old House in the valley once before. He rode on top of my haversack and hung on to my hair with his small fingers. It was all a lark for him. I had gone to fetch some books—gambling that there might be a bagful of worthwhile ones that had not been completely eaten by bugs and mice; and if the jaunt turned out depressing for me, it was my fault, which is to say the fault of memory and the habit of comparing what has been with what is—natural, inevitable, unavoidable, but oh, God, just the same . . . The robots which still stood on their size-thirty metal feet looked like grinning Mexican mummies. They gave me a bad turn even though I knew what they were, and should have known what changes to expect after a long, long absence from that house, but to the kid they were a delight. Never mind transphenomenality of rusted surfaces and uselessly dangling wires; never mind the history of a senile generation.

They were the funny men. I wish I could leave it at that, but of course I can't. I hide my hoe in the twigs of the olive tree and pick up Mike. This stops the questions for a while.

"Let's go home to Mummy," I say; and also, hoping to hold back the questions about the Old House long enough to think of some real answers, "Now aren't you glad we live up here where we can see the ocean and eagles and hot springs?"

"Yeth," says Mike firmly by way of making a querulous and ineffectual old man feel better about his decision. What a comfort to me the little one is!

I see smoke coming from the chimney, and when we round the last turn in the path we see the cabin. Sue waves from the door. She has worked like a squaw since dawn, and she smiles and waves. I can remember when women would exhaust themselves talking over the phone and eating bonbons all day and then fear to smile when their beat husbands came home from their respective nothing-foundries lest they crack the layers of phony "youthful glow" on their faces. Not like Sue. Here is Sue with smudges of charcoal on her face and fish-scales on her leather pants. Her scent is of woodsmoke and of sweat. There is no artificial scent like this—none more endearing nor more completely "correct." There was a time when the odor of perspiration would have been more of a social disaster for a woman than the gummata of tertiary pox. Even men were touched by this strange phobia.

Sue sees the question on my face and she knows why my smile is a little perfunctory and strained.

"Chris . . . ?" I start to ask finally.

"No. He took his bow and his sleeping-bag. Muttered something about an eight-point buck."

We do not *need* the venison. If anything has been made exhaustively and exhaustingly clear to the boy it is that our blessings consist in large part of what we do not need. But this is not the point, and I know it is not the point.

"Do you think he'll ever talk to me again, Sue?"

"Of course he will." She pulls off my sweaty shirt and hands me a towel. "You know how twelve is. Everything in technicolor and with the throbbiest possible background music. Everything drags or jumps or swings or everything

is Endsville or something else which it actually isn't. If it can't be turned into a drama it doesn't exist. He'll get over it."

I can think of no apt comment. Sue starts to busy herself with the fire, then turns back to me.

"You did the best thing. You did what you had to do, that's all. Go take your bath. I'm getting hungry."

I make my way up the path to the hot springs and I am wearing only the towel and the soles of an ancient pair of sneakers held on with thongs. I am thinking that the hot water will somehow dissolve the layers of sickly thought that obscure all the colors of the world from my mind, just as it will rid me of the day's accretion of grime, but at once I know that I am yielding to a vain and superstitious hope. I can take no real pleasure in the anticipation of my bath.

When I emerge from the underbrush and come in sight of the outcroppings of rock where the springs are, I can see Sato, our nearest neighbor and my oldest friend, making his way along the path from his valley on the other side of the mountain. I wave at him, but he does not wave back. I tell myself that he is concentrating on his feet and simply does not see me, but myself answers back in much harsher terms. Sato knows what happened when I took my older son to the City, and he knows why my son has not spoken more than a dozen coherent words since returning. He knows what I have done, and while it is not in the man's nature to rebuke another or set himself above another or mouth moral platitudes, there are limits.

Sato is some kind of a Buddhist. Only vaguely and imperfectly do I understand what this implies; not being unnecessarily explicit about itself is certainly a part of that doctrine. But there is also the injunction against killing. And I am —notwithstanding every meretricious attempt of my own mind to convert that fact into something more comfortable —a killer. And so . . . I may now contemplate what it will mean not merely to have lost my older son, but also the priceless, undemanding and yet immeasurably rewarding friendship of the family in the next valley.

"It was not intentional," I tell myself as I lower my griminess and weariness into the hot water. "It was necessary. How else explain why we chose . . . ?" But it isn't

worth a damn. I might as well mumble Tantric formulae. The water feels lukewarm—*used.*

I go on flaying myself in this manner. I return to the house and sit down to supper. The food I had looked forward to so eagerly tastes like raw fungus or my old sneakers. Nothing Sue says helps, and I even find myself wishing she would go to hell with her vitamin-enriched cheerfulness.

On our slope of the mountain the darkness comes as it must come to a lizard which is suddenly immured in a cigar box. Still no sign of Chris and so, of course, the pumas are more vocal than they have been all year. I itemize and savor every disaster that roars, rumbles, creeps, slithers, stings, crushes or bites: everything from rattlers to avalanches, and I am sure that one or all of these dire things will befall Chris before the night is over. I go outside every time I hear a sound—which is often—and I squint at the top of the ridge and into the valley below. No Chris.

Sue, from her bunk, says, "If you don't stop torturing yourself, you'll be in no condition to *do* anything if it *does* become necessary." She is right, of course, which makes me mad as hell on top of everything else. I lie on my bunk and for the ten-millionth time reconstruct the whole experience:

We had been hacking at elder bushes, Chris and I. It had been a wet winter and clearing even enough land for garden truck out of the encroaching vegetation began to seem like trying to hold back the sea with trowels. This problem and the gloomy knowledge that we had about one hatful of beans left in the cabin had conspired to produce a mood in which nothing but hemlock could grow. And I'd about had it with the questions. Chris had started the "Why" routine at about the same age as little Mike, but the questions, instead of leveling off as the boy began to exercise his own powers of observation and deduction, merely became more involved and challenging.

The worst thing about this was that I could not abdicate: other parents in other times could fluff off the questions of their kids with such hopeless and worthless judgments as "Well, that's how things *are,*" thereby implying that both the questioner and the questioned are standing passively at

the dead end of a chain of historical cause, or are existentially trapped in the eye of a storm of supernal origin, or are at the nexus of a flock of processes arising out of the choices of too many other agencies to pinpoint and blame definitively . . . *our* life, on the other hand, was clearly and in every significant particular our own baby. It did not merely proceed out of one particular historical choice, complete with foreseeable contingencies, but was an entire fabric of choices—*ours*. Here was total responsibility, complete with crowding elder bushes, cold rain, chiggers, rattlers, bone-weariness and mud. I had elected to live it—even to impose it upon my progeny—and I was prepared for its hardships, but what galled me was having to justify it.

"The people in the City don't have to do *this*, do they?" ("This" is grubbing out elder bushes, and he is right. The people in the City do not have to do *This*. They do not have to hunt, fish, gather or raise their own food. They do not have to build their own cabins, carry their own water from springs or fashion their own clothes from the skins of beautiful, murdered—by me—animals. They do not have to perspire. One of these days I will have to explain that they do not even have to sleep with their own wives. *That* of itself should be the answer of answers, but twelve is not yet ready; twelve cares about things with wheels, things which spin, roar, roll, fly, explode, exude noise and stench. Would that twelve were fourteen!)

In the meantime it is *dig—hack—heave; dig—hack—heave!* "Come on, Chris! It isn't sundown yet."

"Why couldn't we bring an old tractor up here in pieces and put it together and fix it up and find oil and . . ." (I try to explain for the fifty-millionth time that you do not simply "fix up" something which is the outgrowth of an enormous Organization of interdependent Organizations, the fruit of a dead tree, as it were. The wheel will not be turned back. The kid distrusts abstractions and generalities, and I don't blame him, but God I'm tired!) "Let's just clear off this corner by the olive tree, Chris, and then we'll knock off for the day."

"Are we *better* than the City-People?"

(This one hit a nerve. "Better" is a judgment made by people after the fact of their own decisions. Or there isn't

any "Better." As for the Recalcitrants, of which vague class of living creatures we are members, they were and are certainly both more and less *something* than the others were —the City people—the ones who elected to Go Along with the Organization. Of all the original Recalcitrant families, I would guess that not ten per cent are now alive. I would if I had any use for statistics. If these people had something in common, you would have to go light-years away to find a name for it. I think it was a common lack of something —a disease perhaps. Future generations will take credit for it and refer to their origins as Fine Old Stock. I think most of them were crazy. I am glad they were, but most of them were just weird. Southern California. I have told Chris about the Peters family. They were going to make it on nothing but papaya juice and stewed grass augmented by East Indian breathing exercises. Poor squittered-out souls! Their corpses were like balsa wood. Better? What is Better? Grandfather was going to live on stellar emanations and devote his energies to whittling statues out of fallen redwoods. Thank Nature his stomach had other ideas! And God I'm tired and fed up!)

"Dammit, boy! Tomorrow I'll *take* you to the City and let you answer your own questions!"

And I did. Sue protested and old Sato just gave me that look which said, "I'm not saying anything," but I *did*.

The journey to the City is necessarily one which goes from bad to worse. As a deer and a man in the wilderness look for downward paths and lush places if they would find a river, the signs which lead to the centers of human civilization are equally recognizable.

You look for ugliness and senselessness. It is that simple. Look for places which have been overlaid with mortar so that nothing can grow or change at its will. Look for things which have been fashioned at great expense of time and energy and then discarded. Look for tin and peeling paint, for rusted metal, broken neon tubing, drifts and drifts of discarded containers—cans, bottles, papers. Look for flies and let your nose lead you where it would rather not go.

What is the difference between the burrow of a fox and a huge sheet-metal hand which bears the legend, in peeling, garish paint: THIS WAY TO PERPETUAL PARMENI-

DEAN PALACES . . . ? I do not know why one is better than the other, or *if* it is. I know that present purposes—purposes of intellect—lead one way, and intuition leads the other. So we resist intuition, and the path of greatest resistence leads us from one vast, crumbling, frequently stinking artifact or monument to another.

Chris is alternately nauseated and thrilled. He wants to stay in the palatial abandoned houses in the outskirts, but I say "no." For one thing, the rats look like Doberman Pinschers and for another . . . well, never mind what it is that repels me.

Much of the city looks grand until we come close enough to see where cement and plaster, paint and plastic have sloughed away to reveal ruptured tubes and wires which gleam where their insulation has rotted away, and which are connected to nothing with any life in it. We follow a monorail track which is a silver thread from a distance, but which has a continuous ridge of rust and bird droppings along its upper surface as far as the eye can see. We see more of the signs which point to the PERPETUAL PARMENIDEAN PALACES, and we follow them, giving our tormented intuition a rest even while for our eyes and our spirits there is no relief.

When we first encounter life we are not sure that it *is* life.

"They look like huge grapes!" exclaims Chris when we find them, clustered about a central tower in a huge sunken place like a stadium. The P. P. Palaces are indeed like huge grapes—reddish, semitransparent, about fifteen feet in diameter, or perhaps twenty. I am not used to measuring spaces in such terms any more. The globes are connected to the central tower, or stem, by means of thick cables . . . their umbilicals. A high, wire-mesh fence surrounds the area, but here and there the rust has done its work in spite of zinc coating on the wire. With the corn-knife I have brought to defend us from the rats and God knows what, I open a place in the fence. We are trespassing, and we know this, but we have come this far.

"Where are the people?" asks Chris, and I see that he looks pale. He has asked the question reluctantly, as though preferring no answer. I give none. We come close to one of the spheres, feeling that we do the wrong thing and

doing it anyway. I see our objective and I point. It is a family of them, dimly visible like floating plants in an uncleaned aquarium. It is their frightened eyes we first see.

I do not know very much about the spheres except from hearsay and dim memory. The contents, including the occupants, are seen only dimly, I know, because the outer skins of the thing are filled with a self-replenishing liquid nutrient which requires the action of the sun and is augmented by the waste-products of the occupants. We look closer, moving so that the sun is directly behind the sphere, revealing its contents in sharper outline.

"Those are not real people," says Chris. Now he looks a little sick. "What are all those tubes and wires for if they're real people? Are they robots or dolls or what?"

I do not know the purpose of all the tubes and wires myself. I do know that some are connected with veins in their arms and legs, others are nutrient enemata and for collection of body wastes, still others are only mechanical tentacles which support and endlessly fondle and caress. I know that the wires leading to the metal caps on their heads are part of an invention more voracious and terrible than the ancient television—direct stimulation of certain areas of the brain, a constant running up and down the diapason of pleasurable sensation, controlled by a sort of electronic kaleidoscope.

My imagination stops about here. It would be the ultimate artificiality, with nothing of reality about it save endless variation. Of senselessness I will not think. I do not know if they see constantly shifting masses or motes of color, or smell exotic perfumes, or hear unending and constantly swelling music. I think not. I doubt that they even experience anything so immediate and yet so amorphous as the surge and recession of orgasm or the gratification of thirst being quenched. It would be stimulation without real stimulus; ultimate removal from reality. I decide not to speak of this to Chris. He has had enough. He has seen the wires and the tubes.

I have never sprung such abstractions as "Dignity" upon the boy. What good are such absolutes on a mountainside? If there is Dignity in grubbing out weeds and planting beans, those pursuits must be more dignified *than* something, because, like all words, it is a meaningless wisp of

lint once removed from its relativistic fabric. The word does not exist until he invents it himself. The hoe and the rocky soil or the nutrient enema and the electronic ecstasy: He must judge for himself. That is why I have brought him here.

"Let's get away from here," he says. "Let's go home!"

"Good," I say, but even as I say it I can see that the largest of the pallid creatures inside the "grape" is doing something—I cannot tell what—and to my surprise it seems capable of enough awareness of us to become alarmed. What frightening creatures we must be—dirty, leather clothes with patches of dried animal blood on them, my beard and the small-boy grime of Chris! Removed as I am from these helpless aquarium creatures, I cannot blame them. But my compassion was a short-lived thing. Chris screamed.

I turned in time to see what can only be described as a huge metal scorpion rushing at Chris with its tail lashing, its fore-claws snapping like pruning shears and red lights flashing angrily where its eyes should have been. A guard robot, of course. Why I had not foreseen such a thing I will never know. I supposed at the time that the creature inside the sphere had alerted it.

The tin scorpion may have been a match for the reactions and the muscles of less primitive, more "civilized" men than ourselves, or the creators of the Perpetual Parmenidean Palaces had simply not foreseen barbarians with heavy corn-knives. I knocked Chris out of the way and dispatched the tin bug, snipping off its tail-stinger with a lucky slash of the corn-knife and jumping up and down on its thorax until all its appendages were still.

When the reaction set in, I had to attack something else. I offer no other justification for what I did. We were the intruders—the invading barbarians. All the creatures in the spheres wanted was their security. The man in the sphere set the scorpion on us, but he was protecting his family. I can see it that way now. I wish I couldn't. I wish I was one of those people who can always contrive to have been Right.

I saw the frightened eyes of the things inside the sphere, and I reacted to it as a predatory animal reacts to the scent of urea in the sweat of a lesser animal. And they had men-

aced my son with a hideous machine in order to be absolutely *secure!* If I reasoned at all, it was along this line.

The corn-knife was not very sharp, but the skin of the sphere parted with disgusting ease. I heard Chris scream, "No! Dad! No!" . . . but I kept hacking. We were nearly engulfed in the pinkish, albuminous nutritive which gushed from the ruptured sac. I can still smell it.

The creatures inside were more terrible to see in the open air than they had been behind their protective layers of plastic material. They were dead white and they looked to be soft, although they must have had normal human skeletons. Their struggles were blind, pointless and feeble, like those of some kind of larvae found under dead wood, and the largest made a barely audible mewing sound as it groped about in search of what I cannot imagine.

I heard Chris retching violently, but could not tear my attention away from the spectacle. The sphere now looked like some huge coelenterate which had been halved for study in the laboratory, and the hoselike tentacles still moved like groping cilia.

The agony of the creatures in the "grape" (I cannot think of them as People) when they were first exposed to unfiltered, unprocessed air and sunlight, when the wires and tubes were torn from them, and especially when the metal caps on their heads fell off in their panicky struggles and the whole universe of chilly external reality rushed in upon them at once, is beyond my imagining; and perhaps this is merciful. This and the fact that they lay in the stillness of death after only a very few minutes in the open air.

Memory is merciful too in its imperfection. All I remember of our homeward journey is the silence of it.

"Wake up! We have company, old man!"

It is Sue shaking me. Somehow I did sleep—in spite of Chris and in spite of the persistent memory. It must be midmorning. I swing my feet down and scrub at my gritty eyes. Voices outside. Cheerful. How cheerful?

It is Sato and he has his old horse hitched to a crude travois of willow poles. It is Sato and his wife and three kids and my son Chris. There trussed up on the travois is the biggest buck I have seen in ten years, its neck transfixed with an arrow. A perfect shot and one that could not have

been scored without the most careful and skillful stalking. I remember teaching him that only a bad hunter . . . a heedless and cruel one . . . would risk a distant shot with a bow.

Chris is grinning and looking sheepish. Sato's daughter is there, which accounts for the look of benign idiocy. I was wondering when he would notice. Then he sees me standing in the door of the cabin and his face takes on about ten years of gravity and thought, but this is not for the benefit of the teen-age female. Little Mike is clawing at Chris and asking *why* he went away like that and *why* he went hunting without Daddy, and several other *whys* which Chris ignores. His answer is for his old man:

"I'm sorry, Dad. I wasn't mad at you . . . just sort of crazy. Had to do . . . this. . . ." He points at the deer. "Anyhow, I'm back."

"And I'm glad," I managed.

"Dad, those elder bushes . . ."

"To hell with them," say I. "Wednesday is soon enough."

Sato moves in grinning, and just in time to relieve the awkwardness. "Dressed out this buck and carried it down the mountain by himself." I think of mountain lions. "He was about pooped when I found him in a pasture."

Sue holds open the cabin door and the Satos file in. Himself first, carrying a jug of wine, then Mrs. Sato, grinning greetings. She has never mastered English. It has not been necessary.

I drag up what pass for chairs. Made them myself. We begin talking about weeds and beans, and weather, bugs and the condition of fruit trees. It is Sato who has steered the conversation into these familiar ways, bless his knowing heart. He uncorks the wine. Sue and Mrs. Sato, meanwhile, are carrying on one of their lively conversations. Someday I will listen to them, but I doubt that I will ever learn how they communicate . . . or what. Women.

I can hear Chris outside talking to Yuki, Sato's daughter. He is not boasting about the deer; he is telling her about the fight with the tin scorpion and the grape-people.

"Are they blind . . . the grape-people?" the girl asks.

"Heck no," says Chris. "At least one of them wasn't. One of them sicced the robot bug on us. They were going to kill us. And so, Dad did what he had to do. . . ."

I don't hear the details over the interjections of Yuki and little Mike, but I can imagine they are as pungent as the teen-age powers of physiological description allow. I hear Yuki exclaim, "Oh how utterly *germy!*" and another language problem occurs to me. How can kids who have never hung around a drugstore still manage to evolve languages of their own . . . characteristically adolescent dialects? It is one more mystery which I shall never solve. I hear little Mike asking for reasons and causes with his favorite word. "*Why,* Chris?"

"I'll explain it when you get older," says Chris, and oddly it doesn't sound ridiculous.

Sato pours a giant-size dollop of wine in each tumbler.

"What's the occasion?" I ask.

Sato studies the wine critically, holding the glass so the light from the door shines through.

"It's Tuesday," he says.

DAY AT THE BEACH

Carol Emshwiller

"Day at the Beach", originally published in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, August, 1959, was reprinted in the *5th SF Annual*, and in the British anthology, *The ABC of Science Fiction* (1966).

"IT'S SATURDAY," the absolutely hairless woman said, and she pulled at her frayed, green kerchief to make sure it covered her head. "I sometimes forget to keep track of the days, but I marked three more off on the calendar because I think that's how many I forgot, so this *must* be Saturday."

Her name was Myra and she had neither eyebrows nor lashes nor even a faint, transparent down along her cheeks. Once she had had long, black hair, but now, looking at her pink, bare face, one would guess she had been a redhead.

Her equally hairless husband, Ben, sprawled at the kitchen table waiting for breakfast. He wore red plaid Bermuda shorts, rather faded, and a tee shirt with a large hole under the arm. His skull curved above his staring eyes more naked-seeming than hers because he wore no kerchief or hat.

"We used to always go out on Saturdays," she said, and she put a bowl of oatmeal at the side of the table in front of a youth chair.

Then she put the biggest bowl between her husband's elbows.

"I have to mow the lawn this morning," he said. "All the more so if it's Saturday."

She went on as if she hadn't heard. "A day like today

we'd go to the beach. I forget a lot of things, but I remember that."

"If I were you, I just wouldn't think about it." Ben's empty eyes finally focused on the youth chair and he turned then to the open window behind him and yelled, "Littleboy, Littleboy," making the sound run together all L's and Y. "Hey, it's breakfast, Boy," and under his breath he said, "He won't come."

"But I *do* think about it. I remember hot dogs and clam chowder and how cool it was days like this. I don't suppose I even have a bathing suit around any more."

"It wouldn't be like it used to be."

"Oh, the sea's the same. That's one thing sure. I wonder if the boardwalk's still there."

"Hah," he said. "I don't have to see it to know it's all gone for firewood. It's been four winters now."

She sat down, put her elbows on the table and stared at her bowl. "Oatmeal," she said, putting in that one word everything she felt about the beach and wanting to go there.

"It's not that I don't want to do better for you," Ben said. He touched her arm with the tips of his fingers for just a moment. "I wish I could. And I wish I could have hung on to that corned beef hash last time, but it was heavy and I had to run and there was a fight on the train and I lost the sugar too. I wonder which bastard has it now."

"I know how hard you try, Ben. I do. It's just sometimes everything comes on you at once, especially when it's a Saturday like this. Having to get water way down the block and that only when there's electricity to run the pump, and this oatmeal; sometimes it's just once too often, and then, most of all, you commuting in all that danger to get food."

"I make out. I'm not the smallest one on that train."

"God, I think that every day. Thank God, I say to myself, or where would we be now. Dead of starvation that's where."

She watched him leaning low over his bowl, pushing his lips out and making a sucking sound. Even now she was still surprised to see how long and naked his skull arched,

and she had an impulse, seeing it there so bare and ugly and thinking of the commuting, to cover it gently with her two hands, to cup it and make her hands do for his hair; but she only smoothed at her kerchief again to make sure it covered her own baldness.

"Is it living, though? Is it living, staying home all the time, hiding like, in this house? Maybe it's the rest of them, the dead ones, that are lucky. It's pretty sad when a person can't even go to the beach on a Saturday."

She was thinking the one thing she didn't want to do most of all was to hurt him. No, she told herself inside, sternly. Stop it right now. Be silent for once and eat, and, like Ben says, don't think; but she was caught up in it somehow and she said, "You know, Littleboy never did go to the beach yet, not even once, and it's only nine miles down," and she knew it would hurt him.

"Where is Littleboy?" he said and yelled again out the window. "He just roams."

"It isn't as if there were cars to worry about any more, and have you seen how fast he is and how he climbs so good for three and a half? Besides, what can you do when he gets up so early?"

He was finished eating now and he got up and dipped a cup of water from the large pan on the stove and drank it. "I'll take a look," he said. "He won't come when you call."

She began to eat finally, watching him out the kitchen window and listening to him calling. Seeing him hunched forward and squinting because he had worn glasses before and his last pair had been broken a year ago. Not in a fight, because he was careful not to wear them commuting even then, when it wasn't quite so bad. It was Littleboy who had done it, climbed up and got them himself from the very top drawer, and he was a whole year younger. Next thing she knew they were on the floor, broken.

Ben disappeared out of range of the window and Littleboy came darting in as though he had been huddling by the door behind the arbor vitae all the time.

He was the opposite of his big, pink and hairless parents, with thick and fine black hair growing low over his forehead and extending down the back of his neck so far that she always wondered if it ended where hair used to end be-

fore, or whether it grew too far down. He was thin and small for his age, but strong-looking and wiry with long arms and legs. He had a pale, olive skin, wide, blunt features and a wary stare, and he looked at her now, waiting to see what she would do.

She only sighed, lifted him and put him in his youth chair and kissed his firm, warm cheek, thinking, what beautiful hair, and wishing she knew how to cut it better so he would look neat.

"We don't have any more sugar," she said, "but I saved you some raisins," and she took down a box and sprinkled some on his cereal.

Then she went to the door and called, "He's here, Ben. He's here." And in a softer voice she said, "The pixy." She heard Ben answer with a whistle and she turned back to the kitchen to find Littleboy's oatmeal on the floor in a lopsided oval lump, and him, still looking at her with wise and wary brown eyes.

She knelt down first, and spooned most of it back into the bowl. Then she picked him up rather roughly, but there was gentleness to the roughness, too. She pulled at the elastic topped jeans and gave him two hard, satisfying slaps on bare buttocks. "It isn't as if we had food to waste," she said, noticing the down that grew along his backbone and wondering if that was the way the three year olds had been before.

He made an *Aaa, Aaa,* sound, but didn't cry, and after that she picked him up and held him so that he nuzzled into her neck in the way she liked. "Aaa," he said again, more softly, and bit her just above the collar bone.

She dropped him down, letting him kind of slide with her arms still around him. It hurt and she could see there was a shallow, half-inch piece bitten right out.

"He bit me again," she shouted, hearing Ben at the door. "He bit me. A real piece out even, and look, he has it in his mouth still."

"God, what a . . ."

"Don't hurt him. I already slapped him good for the floor and three is a hard age." She pulled at Ben's arm. "It says so in the books. Three is hard, it says." But she remembered it really said that three was a beginning to be cooperative age.

He let go and Littleboy ran out of the kitchen back toward the bedrooms.

She took a deep breath. "I've just got to get out of this house. I mean really away."

She sat down and let him wash the place and cross two bandaids over it. "Do you think we could go? Do you think we could go just one more time with a blanket and a picnic lunch? I've just got to do *something*."

"All right. All right. You wear the wrench in your belt and I'll wear the hammer, and we'll risk taking the car."

She spent twenty minutes looking for bathing suits and not finding them, and then she stopped because she knew it didn't really matter, there probably wouldn't be anyone there.

The picnic was simple enough. She gathered it together in five minutes, a precious can of tuna fish and hard, homemade biscuits baked the evening before when the electricity had come on for a while, and shriveled, worm-eaten apples, picked from neighboring trees and hoarded all winter in another house that had a cellar.

She heard Ben banging about in the garage, measuring out gas from his cache of cans, ten miles' worth to put in the car and ten miles' worth in a can to carry along and hide someplace for the trip back.

Now that he had decided they would go, her mind began to be full of what-ifs. Still, she thought, she would *not* change her mind. Surely once in four years was not too often to risk going to the beach. She had thought about it all last year too, and now she was going and she would enjoy it.

She gave Littleboy an apple to keep him busy and she packed the lunch in the basket, all the time pressing her lips tight together, and she said to herself that she was *not* going to think of any more what-ifs, and she *was* going to have a good time.

Ben had switched after the war from the big-finned Dodge to a small and rattly European car. They fitted into it cozily, the lunch in back with the army blanket and a pail and shovel for playing in the sand, and Littleboy in front on her lap, his hair brushing her cheek as he turned, looking out.

They started out on the empty road. "Remember how it was before on a weekend?" she said, and laughed. "Bumper to bumper, they called it. We didn't like it then."

A little way down they passed an old person on a bicycle, in jeans and a bright shirt with the tail out. They couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman, but the person smiled and they waved and called, "Aaa."

The sun was hot, but as they neared the beach there began to be a breeze and she could smell the sea. She began to feel as she had the very first time she had seen it. She had been born in Ohio and she was twelve before she had taken a trip and come out on the wide, flat, sunny sands and smelled this smell.

She held Littleboy tight though it made him squirm, and she leaned against Ben's shoulder. "Oh, it's going to be fun!" she said. "Littleboy, you're going to see the sea. Look, darling, keep watching, and smell. It's delicious." And Littleboy squirmed until she let go again.

Then, at last, there was the sea, and it *was* exactly as it had always been, huge and sparkling and making a sound like . . . no, *drowning out* the noises of wars. Like the black sky with stars, or the cold and stolid moon, it dwarfed even what had happened.

They passed the long, brick bathhouses, looking about as they always had, but the boardwalks between were gone, as Ben had said, not a stick left of them.

"Let's stop at the main bathhouse."

"No," Ben said. "We better keep away from those places. You can't tell who's in there. I'm going way down beyond."

She was glad, really, especially because at the last bathhouse she thought she saw a dark figure duck behind the wall.

They went down another mile or so, then drove the car off behind some stunted trees and bushes.

"Nothing's going to spoil this Saturday," she said, pulling out the picnic things, "just nothing. Come, Littleboy." She kicked off her shoes and started running for the beach, the basket bouncing against her knee.

Littleboy slipped out of his roomy sneakers easily and scampered after her. "You can take your clothes off," she told him. "There's nobody here at all."

When Ben came, later, after hiding the gas, she was

settled, flat on the blanket in old red shorts and a halter, and still the same green kerchief, and Littleboy, brown and naked, splashed with his pail in the shallow water, the wetness bringing out the hairs along his back.

"Look," she said, "nobody as far as you can see and you can see so far. It gives you a different feeling from home. You know there are people here and there in the houses, but here, it's like we were the only ones, and here it doesn't even matter. Like Adam and Eve, we are, just you and me and our baby."

He lay on his stomach next to her. "Nice breeze," he said.

Shoulder to shoulder they watched the waves and the gulls and Littleboy, and later they splashed in the surf and then ate the lunch and lay watching again, lazy, on their stomachs. And after a while she turned on her back to see his face. "With the sea it doesn't matter at all," she said and she put her arm across his shoulder. "And we're just part of everything, the wind and the earth and the sea too, my Adam."

"Eve," he said and smiled and kissed her and it was a longer kiss than they had meant. "Myra. Myra."

"There's nobody but us."

She sat up. "I don't even know a doctor since Press Smith was killed by those robbing kids and I'd be scared."

"We'll find one. Besides, you didn't have any trouble. It's been so damn long." She pulled away from his arm. "And I love you. And Littleboy, he'll be way over four by the time we'd have another one."

She stood up and stretched and then looked down the beach and Ben put a hand around her ankle. She looked down the other way. "Somebody's coming," she said, and then he got up too.

Far down, walking in a business-like way on the hard, damp part of the sand, three men were coming toward them.

"You got your wrench?" Ben asked. "Put it just under the blanket and sit down by it, but keep your knees under you."

He put his tee shirt back on, leaving it hanging out, and he hooked the hammer under his belt in back, the top

covered by the shirt. Then he stood and waited for them to come.

They were all three bald and shirtless. Two wore jeans cut off at the knees and thick belts, and the other had checked shorts and a red leather cap and a pistol stuck in his belt in the middle of the front at the buckle. He was older. The others looked like kids and they held back as they neared and let the older one come up alone. He was a small man, but looked tough. "You got gas," he said, a flat-voiced statement of fact.

"Just enough to get home."

"I don't mean right here. You got gas at home is what I mean."

Myra sat stiffly, her hand on the blanket on top of where the wrench was. Ben was a little in front of her and she could see his curving, forward-sloping shoulders and the lump of the hammer-head at the small of his back. If he stood up straight, she thought, and held his shoulders like they ought to be, he would look broad and even taller and he would show that little man, but the other had a pistol. Her eyes kept coming back to its shining black.

Ben took a step forward. "Don't move," the little man said. He shifted his weight to one leg, looking relaxed, and put his hand on his hip near the pistol. "Where you got the gas to get you home? Maybe we'll come with you and you might lend us a little of that gas you got there at your house. Where'd you hide the stuff to get you back, or I'll let my boys play a bit with your little one and you might not like it."

Littleboy, she saw, had edged down, away from them, and he crouched now, watching with his wide-eyed stare. She could see the tense, stringy muscles along his arms and legs and he reminded her of gibbons she had seen at the zoo long ago. His poor little face looks old, she thought, too old for three years. Her fingers closed over the blanket-covered wrench. They'd better not hurt Littleboy.

She heard her husband say, "I don't know." "Oh, Ben," she said, "oh, Ben."

The man made a motion and the two youths started out, but Littleboy had started first, she saw. She pulled at her wrench and then had to stop and fumble with the blanket,

and it took a long time because she kept her eyes on Littleboy and the two others chasing.

She heard a shout and a grunt beside her. "Oh, Ben," she said again, and turned, but it was Ben on top attacking the other, and the small man was trying to use his pistol as a club but he had hold of the wrong end for that, and Ben had the hammer and he was much bigger.

He was finished in a minute. She watched, empty-eyed, the whole of it, holding the wrench in a white-knuckled hand in case he needed her.

Afterward, he moved from the body into a crouching run, hammer in one hand and pistol, by the barrel, in the other. "You stay here," he shouted back.

She looked at the sea a few minutes, and listened to it, but her own feelings seemed more important than the stoic sea now. She turned and followed, walking along the marks where the feet had swept at the soft sand.

Where the bushes began she saw him loping back. "What happened?"

"They ran off when they saw me after them with the other guy's gun. No bullets though. You'll have to help look now."

"He's lost!"

"He won't come when you call. We'll just have to look. He could be way out. I'll try that and you stay close and look here. The gas is buried under that bush there, if you need it."

"We've got to find him, Ben. He doesn't know his way home from here."

He came to her and kissed her and held her firmly across the shoulders with one arm. She could feel his muscles bunch into her neck as hard almost as the head of his hammer that pressed against her arm. She remembered a time four years ago when his embrace had been soft and comfortable. He had had hair then, but he had been quite fat, and now he was hard and bald, having gained something and lost something.

He turned and started off, but looked back and she smiled and nodded to show him she felt better from his arm around her and the kiss.

I would die if anything happened and we would lose

Littleboy, she thought, but mostly I would hate to lose Ben. Then the world would really be lost altogether, and everything would be ended.

She looked, calling in a whisper, knowing she had to peer under each bush and watch behind and ahead for scampering things. He's so small when he huddles into a ball and he can sit so still. Sometimes I wish there was another three-year-old around to judge him by. I forget so much about how it used to be, before. Sometimes I just wonder about him.

"Littleboy, Littleboy. Mommy wants you," she called softly. "Come. There's still time to play in the sand and there are apples left." She leaned forward, and her hand reached to touch the bushes.

Later the breeze began to cool and a few clouds gathered. She shivered in just her shorts and halter, but it was mostly an inner coldness. She felt she had circled, hunting, for well over an hour, but she had no watch, and at a time like this she wasn't sure of her judgment. Still, the sun seemed low. They should go home soon. She kept watching now, too, for silhouettes of people who might *not* be Ben or Littleboy, and she probed the bushes with her wrench with less care. Every now and then she went back to look at the blanket and the basket and the pail and shovel, lying alone and far from the water, and the body there, with the red leather cap beside it.

And then, when she came back another time to see if all the things were still there, undisturbed, she saw a tall, two-headed seeming monster walking briskly down the beach, and one head, bouncing directly over the other one, had hair and was Littleboy's.

The sunset was just beginning. The rosy glow deepened as they neared her and changed the colors of everything. The red plaid of Ben's shorts seemed more emphatic. The sand turned orangeish. She ran to meet them, laughing and splashing her feet in the shallow water, and she came up and held Ben tight around the waist and Littleboy said, "Aaa."

"We'll be home before dark," she said. "There's even time for one last splash."

They packed up finally while Littleboy circled the body

by the blanket, touching it sometimes until Ben slapped him for it and he went off and sat down and made little cat sounds to himself.

He fell asleep in her lap on the way home, lying forward against her with his head at her neck the way she liked. The sunset was deep, with reds and purples.

She leaned against Ben. "The beach always makes you tired," she said. "I remember that from before too. I'll be able to sleep tonight."

They drove silently along the wide empty parkway. The car had no lights, but that didn't matter.

"We did have a good day after all," she said. "I feel renewed."

"Good," he said.

It was just dark as they drove up to the house. Ben stopped the car and they sat a moment and held hands before moving to get the things out.

"We had a good day," she said again. "And Littleboy saw the sea." She put her hand on the sleeping boy's hair, gently so as not to disturb him and then she yawned. "I wonder if it really *was* Saturday."

LET'S BE FRANK
Brian W. Aldiss

Brian W. Aldiss is the author of some 20 or more books in England and America, and editor of half a dozen anthologies, as well as a book reviewer, Literary Editor of the Oxford *Mail,* and co-editor (with Harry Harrison) of the critical journal, *S. F. Horizons.*

Born in England in 1925, Aldiss had a tour of Asia with the Army during World War II, and a tour of Yugoslavia, with his wife, in 1965; they now live just outside Oxford in what is certainly the only thatched cottage in England with central heating.

His first story was published in 1954; in 1955, his first book, *The Brightfount Diaries,* came out, and he was also in his first anthology, as author of the prize-winning story in a London *Observer* contest.

His first U.S. publication was in 1958; in 1959, there were two novels and a collection, and there have been one or two books a year since. His 1965 novella, "The Saliva Tree" (title story of a 1966 Faber collection), won a Science Fiction Writers of America Nebula Award; and he took a "Hugo" in 1961 for "Hothouse" (part of the novel of that title, in England—*The Long Afternoon of the Earth* in the U.S.). His last U.S. book was *Who Can Replace a Man?* (Harcourt, 1966); a new novel, *Cryptozoic,* will be out soon from Doubleday.

"Let's Be Frank", reprinted in the 3rd Annual from *Science Fantasy,* June, 1957, was Aldiss' first hardcover publication in the U.S.; it also appears in *The ABC of Science Fiction.* Three other Annuals contained Aldiss stories: "Ten-Storey Jigsaw" in the 4th, "Old Hundredth" the 6th, and "Scarfe's World" in the 11th.

FOUR YEARS AFTER pretty little Anne Boleyn was executed in the Tower of London, a child was born into the Gladwebb family—an unusual child.

That morning, four people stood waiting in the draughty antechamber to milady's bedroom, where the confinement

was taking place—her mother, an aunt, a sister-in-law and a page. The husband, young Sir Frank Gladwebb, was not present; he was out hunting. At length the midwife bustled out to the four in the antechamber and announced that the Almighty (who had recently become a Protestant) had seen fit to bless milady with a son.

"Why, then, do we not hear the child crying, woman?" milady's mother, Cynthia Chinfont St. Giles, demanded, striding into the room to her daughter. There the reason for the child's silence became obvious: it was asleep.

It remained in the "sleep" for nineteen years.

Young Sir Frank was not a patient man; he suffered, in an ambitious age, from ambition, and anything which stood between him and his advancement got short shrift. Returning from the hunt to find his first-born comatose, he was not pleased. The situation, however, was remedied by the birth of a second son in the next year, and of three more children in the four years thereafter. All of these offspring were excessively normal, the boy taking Holy Orders and becoming eventually the Abbot of St. Duckwirt, where simony supplemented an already generous income.

The sleeping child grew as it slept. It stirred in its sleep, sometimes it yawned, it accepted the bottle. Sir Frank kept it in an obscure room in the manor, appointing an old harridan called Nan to attend it. In moments of rage, or when he was in his cups, Sir Frank would swear to run a sword through the child; yet the words were idle, as those about him soon perceived. There was a strange bond between Sir Frank and the sleeping child. Though he visited it rarely, he never forgot it.

On the child's third birthday, he went up to see it. It lay in the center of a four-poster, its face calm. With an impulse of tenderness, Sir Frank picked it up, cradling it, limp and helpless, in his arms.

"It's a lovely lad, sire," Nan commented. And at that moment the sleeping child opened its eyes and appeared to focus them on its father. With a cry, Sir Frank staggered back dizzily, overwhelmed by an indescribable sensation. He sprawled on the bed, holding the child tightly to keep it from harm. When the giddy feeling had gone, he looked and found the child's eyes shut again, and so they remained for a long while.

The Tudor springs and winters passed, the sleeping child experiencing none of them. He grew to be a handsome young boy, and a manservant was engaged for him; still his eyes never opened, except on the rare occasions when his father—now engrossed in the affairs of court—came to see him. Because of the weakness which took him at these times, Sir Frank saw to it that they were few.

Good King Harry died, the succession passed to women and weaklings, Sir Frank came under the patronage of Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex. And in the year of the coronation of Elizabeth, the sleeping child awoke.

Sir Frank, now a prosperous forty-one, had gone in to see his first-born for the first time in thirty months. On the four-poster lay a handsome, pale youth of nineteen, his straggling growth of beard the very shade of his father's more luxuriant crop. The manservant was out of the room.

Strangely perturbed, as if something inexpressible lay just below the surface of his thoughts, Sir Frank went over to the bed and rested his hands on the boy's shoulders. He seemed to stand on the brink of a precipice.

"Frank," he whispered—for the sleeping child had been given his own name—"Frank, why don't you wake up?"

In answer to the words, the youth's eyes opened. The usual wash of dizziness came and went like a flash; Sir Frank found himself looking up into his own eyes.

He found more than that.

He found he was a youth of nineteen whose soul had been submerged until now. He found he could sit up, stretch, run a hand marveling through his hair and exclaim, "By our Lady!" He found he could get up, look long at the green world beyond his window and finally turn back to stare at himself.

And all the while "himself" had watched the performance with his own eyes. Shaking, father and son sat down together on the bed.

"What sorcery is this?" Sir Frank muttered.

But it was no sorcery, or not in the sense Sir Frank meant. He had merely acquired an additional body for his ego. It was not that he could be in either as he pleased; he was in both at the same time. When the son came finally to consciousness, it was to his father's consciousness.

Warily, experimenting that day and the next few days—

when the whole household rejoiced at this awakening of the first-born—Sir Frank found that his new body could do all he could do: could ride, could fence, could make love to a kitchen wench: could indeed do these things better than the old body, which was beginning, just a little, to become less pliant under approaching middle age. His experience, his knowledge, all were resources equally at the command of either body. He was, in fact, two people.

A later generation could have explained the miracle to Sir Frank—though explaining in terms he would not have understood. Though he knew well enough the theory of family traits and likenesses, it would have been impossible then to make him comprehend the intricacy of a chromosome which carries inside it—not merely the stereotypes of parental hair or temperament—but the secret knowledge of how to breathe, how to work the muscles to move the bones, how to grow, how to remember, how to commence the processes of thought . . . all the infinite number of secret "how to's" that have to be passed on for life to stay above jelly level.

A freak chromosome in Sir Frank ensured he passed on, together with these usual secrets, the secret of his individual consciousness.

It was extraordinary to be in two places at once, doing two different things—extraordinary, but not confusing. He merely had two bodies which were as integrated as his two hands had been.

Frank II had a wonderful time; youth and experience, foresight and a fresh complexion, were united as never before. The combination was irresistible. The Virgin Queen, then in her late twenties, summoned him before her and sighed deeply. Then, catching Essex's eye, she put him out of reach of temptation by sending him off to serve the ambassador at the court of her brother-in-law, Philip.

Frank II liked Spain. Philip's capital was gayer, warmer and more sanitary than London. It was intoxicating to enjoy the best of both courts. It proved also extremely remunerative: the shared consciousness of Frank I and II was by far the quickest communicational link between the two rival countries, and as such was worth money. Not that Frank revealed his secret to a soul, but he let it be known

he had a fleet of capable spies who moved without risk of detection between England and Spain. Burly Lord Burleigh beamed upon him. So did the Duke of Medina Sidonia.

So fascinating was it being two people at once, that Frank I was slow to take any systematic survey of other lurking advantages. An unfortunate tumble from a horse, however, gave him leisure for meditation. Even then, he might have missed the vital point, were it not for something that happened in Madrid.

Frank III was born.

Frank II had passed on the renegade chromosome via a little Spanish courtesan. The child was called Sancha. There was no coma about him! As if to defy the extreme secrecy under which the birth took place, he wailed lustily from the start. And he had the shared consciousness of his father and grandfather.

It was an odd feeling indeed, opening this new annex to life and experiencing the world through all the child's weakness and helplessness. There were many frustrations for Frank I, but compensations too—not the least being closeted so intimately with the babe's delightful mother.

This birth made Frank realize one striking, blinding fact: as long as the chromosome reproduced itself in sufficient dominance, he was immortal! To him, in an unscientific age, the problem did not present itself quite like that; but he realized that here was a trait to be kept in the family.

It happened that Frank had married one of his daughters off to an architect called Tanyk. This union produced a baby daughter some two weeks after the secret birth of Frank III (they hardly thought of him as Sancha). Frank I and II arranged that III should come to England and marry Miss Tanyk just as soon as both were old enough; the vital chromosome ought to be latent in her and appear in her children.

Relations between England and Spain deteriorating, Frank II came home shortly with the boy Frank III acting as his page. The fruits of several other liaisons had to be left behind with their mothers; they had no shared consciousness, only ordinary good red English blood.

Frank II had been back in the aptly named Mother Country for only a few months when a lady of his ac-

quaintance presented him with Frank IV. Frank IV was a girl, christened Berenice. The state of coma which had ensnared Frank II for so long did not afflict Berenice, or any other of his descendants.

Another tremendous adjustment in the shared consciousness had to be made. That also had its compensations; Frank was the first man ever really to appreciate the woman's point of view.

So the eventful years rolled on. Sir Frank's wife died; the Abbey of St. Duckwirt flourished; Frank II sailed over to Hispaniola; the Armada sailed against England and was repulsed. And in the next year, Frank III (Sancha), with his Spanish looks and English money, won the hand of Rosalynd Tanyk, as prearranged. When his father returned from the New World (with his English looks and Spanish money), it was in time to see in person his daughter, Berenice, alias Frank IV, also taken in wedlock.

By this year, Frank I was old and gray and retired in the country. While he was experiencing old age in that body, he was experiencing active middle age in his son's and the delights of matrimony in his grandson's and granddaughter's.

He awaited anxiously the issue of Frank III (Sancha)'s marriage to his cousin Rosalynd. There was offspring enough. One in 1590. Twins in 1591. Three lovely children —but, alas, ordinary mortals, without shared consciousness. Then, while watching an indifferent and bloody play called "Titus Andronicus," two years later, Rosalynd came into labor, and was delivered—at a tavern in Cheapside—of Frank V.

In the succeeding years, she delivered Franks VI and VIII. Frank VII sprang from Berenice (Frank IV)'s union. So did Frank IX. The freak chromosome was getting into its stride.

Full of years, Sir Frank's body died. The diphtheria which carried him off caused him as much suffering as it would have done an ordinary man; dying was not eased by his unique gift. He slid out into the long darkness—but his consciousness continued unabated in eight other bodies.

It would be pleasant to follow the history of these Franks (who, of course, really bore different surnames and Christian names): but space forbids. Suffice it to say that there

were vicissitudes—the old queen shut Frank II in the Tower, Frank VI had a dose of the clap, Frank IX ruined himself trying to grow asparagus, then newly discovered from Asia. Despite this, the shared consciousness spread; the five who shared it in this third generation prospered and produced children with the same ability.

The numbers grew. Twelve in the fourth generation, twenty-two in the fifth, fifty in the sixth, and in the seventh, by the time William and Mary came to the throne, one hundred and twenty-four.

These people, scattered all over the country, a few of them on the continent, were much like normal people. To outsiders, their relationship was not apparent; they certainly never revealed it; they never met. They became traders, captains of ships that traded with the Indies, soldiers, parliamentarians, agriculturalists; some plunged into, some avoided, the constitutional struggles that dogged most of the seventeenth century. But they were all—male or female—Franks. They had the inexpressible benefit of their progenitor's one hundred and seventy-odd years' experience, and not only of his, but of all the other Franks. It was small wonder that, with few exceptions, whatever they did they prospered.

By the time George III came to the throne and rebellion broke out in the British colonies in America the tenth generation of Franks numbered 2,160.

The ambition of the original Frank had not died; it had grown subtler. It had become a wish to sample everything. The more bodily habitations there were with which to sample, the more tantalizing the idea seemed: for many experiences, belonging only to one brief era, are never repeated, and may be gone before they are perceived and tasted.

Such an era was the Edwardian decade from 1901 to 1911. It suited Frank's Elizabethan spirit, with its bounce and vulgarity and the London streets packed tight with horse vehicles. His manifestations prospered; by the outbreak of World War I they numbered over three and a half million.

The war, whose effect on the outlook and technology of the whole world was to be incalculable, had a terrific influence on the wide-spread shared consciousness of Frank.

Many Franks of the sixteenth generation were killed in the muck of the trenches, he died not once but many times, developing an obsessive dread of war which never left him.

By the time the Americans entered the war, he was turning his many thoughts to politics.

It was not an easy job. Until now, he had concentrated on diversity in occupations, savoring them all. He rode the fiery horses of the Camargue; he played in the orchestras of La Scala, Milan; he farmed daffodils in the Scilly Isles; he built dikes along the Zuyder Zee; filmed with Réné Clair; preached in Vienna cathedral; operated in Bart's; fished in the bilious Bay of Biscay; argued with the founder of the Bauhaus. Now he turned the members of his consciousness among the rising generation into official posts, compensating for the sameness and grayness of their jobs with the thought that the change was temporary.

His plans had not gone far enough before the Second World War broke out. His consciousness, spread over eleven million people, suffered from Plymouth and Guernsey to Siam and Hong Kong. It was too much. By the time the war ended, world domination had become his aim.

Frank's chromosome was now breeding as true as ever. Blood group, creed, color of skin—nothing was proof against it. The numbers with shared consciousness, procreating for all they were worth, trebled every generation.

Seventeenth generation: eleven millions in 1940.

Eighteenth generation: thirty-three millions in 1965.

Nineteenth generation: a hundred million in 1990.

Twentieth generation: three hundred million in 2015.

Frank was well placed to stand as Member of Parliament, for all his alter egos could vote for him. He stood as several members, one of whom eventually became Prime Minister; but the intricacies of office proved a dismal job. There was, after all, a simpler and far more thorough way of ruling the country: by simple multiplication.

At this task, all the Franks set to with a will.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Great Britain consisted only of Franks. Like a great multiplicity of mirrors, they faced each other across counter and club; young or old, fat or thin, rich or poor, all shared one massive consciousness.

Many modifications in private and public life took place. Privacy ceasing to exist, all new houses were glass-built, curtains abolished, walls pulled down. Police went, the entire legal structure vanished overnight—a man does not litigate against himself. A parody of Parliament remained, to deal with foreign affairs, but party politics, elections, leaders in newspapers (even newspapers themselves) were scrapped.

Most of the arts went. One manifestation of Frank did not care to see another manifestation of Frank performing. TV, publishing, Tin Pan Alley, film studios . . . out like lights.

The surplus Franks, freed from all these dead enterprises and many more, went abroad to beget more Franks.

All these radical changes in the habits of the proverbially conservative British were noticed elsewhere, particularly by the Americans and Canadians. They sent observers over to report on the scene.

Before long, the same radical changes were sweeping Europe. Frank's chromosome conquered everywhere. Peace was guaranteed.

By the end of another century's ruthless intermarriage, Russia and Asia were engulfed as thoroughly as Europe, and by the same loving methods. Billions of people: one consciousness.

And then came Frank's first set-back in all the centuries of his polydextrous existence. He turned his reproductive powers toward the Americas. He was repulsed.

From Argentine to Alaska, and all ports in between, the conqueror chromosome failed to conquer.

The massive, massed intellect set itself to work on the problem, soon arriving at the answer. Another chromosome had got there first. Evidence of the truth of this came when the drastic modifications in domestic and public life which had swept the rest of the world swept the linked continents of North and South America. There was a second shared consciousness.

By various deductions, Frank concluded that the long-dead Frank II's visit to Hispaniola had scattered some of the vital chromosome there. Not properly stable at that time, it had developed its own separate shared conscious-

ness, which had spread through the Americas much as the Frank chromosome had spread round the rest of the world.

It was a difficult situation. The Franks and the Hispaniolas shared the globe without speaking to each other. After a decade of debate, the Franks took an obvious way out of the impasse: they built themselves a fleet of space ships and headed into the solar system.

That, ladies, gentleman and neuters, is a brief account of the extraordinary race which recently landed on our planet, Venus, as they call it. I think we may congratulate ourselves that our method of perpetuating our species is so vastly different from theirs; nothing else could have saved us from that insidious form of conquest.

THE WONDER HORSE

George Byram

George Byram explains his single excursion into science fantasy as a sort of daydream-on-paper. Born in Mississippi in 1920, Byram grew up in Florida, and, after a desultory two years of college, wandered west and "fell in love with the vast, mean, windy, cold, murderous, wonderful country of north-central Wyoming," where (except for two years in the Army Signal Corps in WW II) he stayed until 1950; then "caught the universal postwar disease of securityitis," and left the range to go to work (eventually) as a television announcer.

In 1950, he also sold his first story to *Colliers;* the next, in 1954, was to the *Saturday Evening Post;* then a broad assortment including *True West, Atlantic* and *Sports Afield.* Meanwhile, he started a horse-breeding program in Colorado, "paying for what I lose on the ranch out of what I earn in television and writing." He has published two novels, *The Piper's Tune* and *Tomorrow's Hidden Season.*

"The Wonder Horse" first appeared in *Atlantic* (August, 1957), and was reprinted in the 3rd Annual.

WEBSTER SAYS a mutation is a sudden variation, the offspring differing from the parents in some well-marked character or characters—and that certainly fits Red Eagle. He was foaled of registered parents, both his sire and dam descending from two of the best bloodlines in the breed. But the only thing normal about this colt was his color, a beautiful chestnut.

I attended Red Eagle's arrival into the world. He was kicking at the sac that enclosed him as I freed his nostrils from the membrane. He was on his feet in one minute. He was straight and steady on his pasterns by the time his dam had him licked dry. He had his first feeding before he was five minutes old, and he was beginning to buck and rear

and prance by the time I got my wits about me and called Ben.

Ben came in the other end of the ramshackle barn from the feed lot. He was small as men go, but big for a jockey. Not really old at forty-two, his hair was gray and he was old in experience of horses.

Ben came into the box stall and as he saw the colt he stopped and whistled. He pushed back his hat and studied the red colt for a full five minutes. Even only minutes old a horseman could see he was markedly different. The bones from stifle to hock and elbow to knee were abnormally long. There was unusual length and slope of shoulder. He stood high in the croup and looked like he was running downhill. He had a very long underline and short back. All this spelled uniquely efficient bone levers, and these levers were connected and powered by the deepest hard-twisted muscles a colt ever brought into this world. Unbelievable depth at the girth and immense spring to the ribs meant an engine of heart and lungs capable of driving those muscled levers to their maximum. Red Eagle's nostrils were a third larger than any we had ever seen and he had a large, loose windpipe between his broad jaws. He would be able to fuel the engine with all the oxygen it could use. Most important of all, the clean, sharp modeling of his head and the bigness and luster of his eyes indicated courage, will to win. But because of his strange proportions he looked weird.

"Holy Mary," said Ben softly, and I nodded agreement.

Ben and I had followed horses all our lives. I as a veterinarian and trainer for big breeders, Ben as a jockey. Each of us had outserved his usefulness. Ben had got too heavy to ride; I had got too cantankerous for the owners to put up with. I had studied bloodlines and knew the breeders were no longer improving the breed, but I could never make anyone believe in my theories. One owner after another had decided he could do without my services. Ben and I had pooled our savings and bought a small ranch in Colorado. We had taken the mare that had just foaled in lieu of salary from our last employer. Barton Croupwell had laughed when we had asked for the mare rather than our money.

"Costello," he said to me, "you and Ben have twenty-five

hundred coming. That mare is nineteen years old. She could drop dead tomorrow."

"She could have one more foal too," I said.

"She could, but it's five to two she won't."

"That's good enough odds for the kind of blood she's carrying."

Croupwell was a gambler who raised horses for only one reason: to make money. He shook his head. "I've seen old codgers set in their thinking, but you're the worst. I suppose you've got a stallion picked out—in case this mare'll breed."

"He doesn't belong to you," I said.

That needled him. "I've got stallions that bring five thousand for a stud fee. Don't tell me they aren't good enough."

"Their bloodlines are wrong," I answered. "Mr. Carvelliers has a stallion called Wing Away."

"Carvelliers' stallions cost money. Are you and Ben that flush?" He already knew what I had in mind.

"You and Carvelliers trade services," I said. "It wouldn't cost you anything to have the mare bred."

He threw back his head and laughed. He was a tall, thin man, always beautifully tailored, with black hair and a line of mustache. "I'm not a philanthropist," he said. "Do you really want this mare?"

"I said I did."

"You really think she'll get with foal?"

"I'll turn your odds around. I say it's five to two she will."

"I'll gamble with you," he said. "I'll send the mare over to Carvelliers'. If she settles I'll take care of the stud fee. If she doesn't, I keep the mare."

"And my and Ben's twenty-five hundred?"

"Of course."

"You're no gambler," I said, looking him in the eye, "but I'll take the bet."

Now, Ben and I were looking at a running machine that was something new on the face of the earth.

Our ranch was perfect for training the colt. It was out of the way and we took particular care that no one ever saw Red Eagle. By the time he was a yearling, our wildest estimate of what he would be had fallen short. Ben began

to ride him when he was a coming two-year-old. By that time he had reached seventeen hands, weighed twelve hundred pounds, and could carry Ben's hundred and twenty-six as if Ben were nothing. Every time Ben stepped off him he was gibbering like an idiot. I was little better. This horse didn't run; he flowed. Morning after morning as Ben began to open him up I would watch him coming down the track we had dozed out of the prairie and he looked like a great wheel with flashing spokes rolling irresistibly forward. Carrying as much weight as mature horses are asked to carry, our stop watch told us Red Eagle had broken every world record for all distances and this on an imperfect track. Ben and I were scared.

One night when the racing season was close upon us, Ben said nervously, "I've made a few calls to some jockeys I know. Croupwell's and Carvelliers' and some others. The best two-year-olds they got are just normal, good colts. Red Eagle will beat them twenty lengths."

"You've got to keep him under restraint, Ben. You can't let anybody know what he can do."

"I can do anything with him out here by himself. But who knows what he'll do with other horses?"

"You've got to hold him."

"Listen, Cos, I've ridden some of the best and some of the toughest. I know what I can hold and what I can't. If Eagle ever takes it in his head to run, there'll not be a hell of a lot I can do about it."

"We've trained him careful."

"Yes, but if I've got him figured, he'll go crazy if a horse starts to crowd him. Another thing, any horseman will see at a glance what we've got. They'll know we're not letting him extend himself."

We were standing out by the pine pole paddock and I turned and looked at Red Eagle. Have you ever seen a cheetah? It's a cat. It runs faster than any other living creature. It's long-legged and long-bodied and it moves soft and graceful until it starts to run; then it becomes a streak with a blur of legs beneath. Red Eagle looked more like a twelve-hundred-pound cheetah than a horse and he ran the same way.

"Well, he's a race horse," I said. "If we don't race him, what'll we do with him?"

"We'll race him," said Ben, "but things ain't ever goin' to be the same again."

That turned out to be pure prophecy.

We decided to start him on a western track. We had to mortgage the ranch to get the money for his entry fee, but we had him entered in plenty of time. Two days before the race we hauled him, blanketed, in a closed trailer and put him into his stall without anyone getting a good look at him. We worked him out at dawn each morning before any other riders were exercising their horses.

This track was one where a lot of breeders tried their two-year-olds. The day of the race the first person I saw was Croupwell. His mild interest told me he already knew we had an entry. He looked at my worn Levis and string-bean frame. "What's happened these three years, Costello? You don't appear to have eaten regular."

"After today it'll be different," I told him.

"That colt you have entered, eh? He's not the bet you won from me, is he?"

"The same."

"I see by the papers Ben's riding. Ben must have lost weight too."

"Not so's you'd notice."

"You're not asking a two-year-old to carry a hundred and twenty-eight pounds on its first start!"

"He's used to Ben," I said casually.

"Costello, I happen to know you mortgaged your place to get the entry fee." He was looking at me speculatively. His gambler's instinct told him something was amiss. "Let's have a look at the colt."

"You'll see him when we bring him out to be saddled," I said and walked away.

You can't lead a horse like that among a group of horsemen without things happening. Men who spend their lives with horses know what gives a horse reach and speed and staying power. It didn't take an expert to see what Red Eagle had. When we took the blanket off him in the saddle paddock every jockey and owner began to move close. In no time there was a milling group of horsemen in front of where Ben and I were saddling Eagle.

Carvelliers, a handsome, white-haired Southern gentle-

man, called me to him. "Costello, is that Wing Away's colt?"

"Your signature's on his papers," I said.

"I'll give you fifty thousand dollars for his dam."

"She's dead," I said. "She died two weeks after we'd weaned this colt."

"Put a price on the colt," he said without hesitation.

"He's not for sale," I answered.

"We'll talk later," he said and turned and headed for the betting windows. Every man in the crowd followed him. I saw several stable hands pleading with acquaintances to borrow money to bet on Eagle despite the extra weight he would be spotting the other horses. By the time the pari-mutuel windows closed, our horse was the odds-on favorite and nobody had yet seen him run.

"I'm glad we didn't have any money to bet," said Ben, as I legged him up. "A dollar'll only make you a dime after what they've done to the odds."

The falling odds on Red Eagle had alerted the crowd to watch for him. As the horses paraded before the stands there was a rippling murmur of applause. He looked entirely unlike the other eight horses on the track. He padded along, his head bobbing easily, his long hind legs making him look like he was going downhill. He took one step to the other mincing throughbreds' three.

I had gone down to the rail and as Ben brought him by, heading for the backstretch where the six-furlong race would start, I could see the Eagle watching the other horses, his ears flicking curiously. I looked at Ben. He was pale. "How is he?" I called.

Ben glanced at me out of the corners of his eyes. "He's different."

"Different!" I called back edgily. "How?"

"Your guess is good as mine," Ben called over his shoulder.

Eagle went into the gate at his assigned place on the outside as docilely as we'd trained him to. But when the gate flew open, the rush of horses startled him. Breaking on top, he opened up five lengths on the field in the first sixteenth of a mile. The crowd went whoosh with a concerted sigh of amazement.

"Father in heaven, hold him," I heard myself saying.

Through my binoculars, I could see the riders on the other horses studying the red horse ahead of them. Many two-year-olds break wild, but no horse opens five lengths in less than two hundred yards. I saw Ben steadying him gently, and as they went around the first turn, Ben had slowed him until the pack moved up to within a length.

That was as close as any horse ever got. Around the turn a couple of riders went after Eagle and the pack spread briefly into groups of three and two and two singles. I could see the two horses behind Eagle make their move. Eagle opened another three lengths before they hit the turn into the stretch and I could see Ben fighting him. The two that had tried to take the lead were used up and the pack came by them as all the riders turned their horses on for the stretch drive. Eagle seemed to sense the concerted effort behind him and his rate of flow changed. It was as if a racing car had its accelerator floorboarded. He came into the stretch gaining a half length every time his feet hit the turf.

When he hit the wire he was a hundred yards ahead of the nearest horse and still going away. Ben had to take him completely around the track before Eagle realized there were no horses behind him. By the time Ben walked him into the winner's circle, Eagle's sides were rising and falling evenly. He was only damp, not having got himself hot enough to sweat.

The first thing I remember seeing was Ben's guilty expression. "I tried to hold him," he said. "When he realized something was trying to outrun him he got so damn mad he didn't even know I was there."

The loudspeaker had gone into a stuttering frenzy. Yes, the world's record for six furlongs had been broken. Not only broken, ladies and gentlemen; five seconds had been cut from it. No, the win was not official. Track veterinarians had to examine the horse. Please keep your seats, ladies and gentlemen.

Keep their seats, hell! Every man, woman, and child was going to see at close range the horse that could run like that. There had been tears in my eyes as Eagle rolled down the stretch. You couldn't stay calm when you saw what these people had seen.

The rest of that day sorts itself into blurred episodes.

First, the vets checked Eagle's teeth, his registration papers, his date of foaling, and finally rechecked the number tattooed in his lip to make sure he was a two-year-old. Then they found that he had not been stimulated. They also found measurements so unbelievable they seriously questioned whether this animal was a horse. They went into a huddle with the track officials.

There was loose talk of trying to rule the Eagle off the tracks. Carvelliers pointed out that Eagle's papers were in perfect order, his own stallion had sired him, he was a thoroughbred of accepted bloodlines, and there was no way he could legally be ruled ineligible.

"If that horse is allowed to run," said one track official, "who will race against him?"

Croupwell was seated at the conference table, as were most of the other owners. "Gentlemen," he said suavely, "aren't you forgetting the handicapper?"

The job of a handicapper is to figure how much weight each horse is to carry. It is a known fact that a good handicapper can make any field of horses come in almost nose and nose by imposing greater weights on the faster horses. But Croupwell was forgetting something. Usually, only older horses run in handicaps.

I jumped to my feet. "You know two-year-olds are not generally handicapped," I said. "They race under allowance conditions."

"True," said Croupwell. "Two-year-olds usually do run under arbitrary weights. But it is a flexible rule, devised to fit the existing situation. Now that the situation has changed, arbitrarily the weights must be changed."

Carvelliers frowned angrily. "Red Eagle was carrying a hundred and twenty-eight against a hundred and four for the other colts. You would have to impose such weights to bring him down to an ordinary horse that you'd break him down."

Croupwell shrugged. "If that should be true, it is unfortunate. But we have to think of the good of racing. You know that its lifeblood is betting. There will be no betting against this horse in any race it's entered."

Carvelliers rose. "Gentlemen," and the way he said it was an insult, "I have been breeding and racing horses all my life. It has always been my belief that racing was to

improve the breed, not kill the best horses." He turned to Ben and me. "At your convenience I would like to speak with you."

Ben and I paid off the loan we'd used for the entry fee, bought ourselves some presentable clothes, and went up to Carvelliers' hotel.

"Hello, Ben; good to see you," he said. "Costello, I owe you an apology. I've disagreed with you on bloodlines for years. You've proven me wrong."

"You've been wrong," I agreed, "but Red Eagle is not the proof. He would have been a good colt if he was normal—maybe the best, but what he actually is has nothing to do with bloodlines."

"Do you think he's a mutation—something new?"

"Completely."

"How much weight do you think he can carry and still win?"

I turned to Ben and Ben said, "He'll win carrying any weight. He'll kill himself to win."

"It's too bad you couldn't have held him," said Carvelliers. "My God, five seconds cut from the record. Don't fool yourself, they'll weight him until even tendons and joints such as his can't stand it. Will you run him regardless?"

"What else will there be to do?"

"Hmmmm. Yes. Well, maybe you're right. But if they break him down, I have a proposition to make you."

We thanked him and left.

Ben and I planned our campaign carefully. "We've got to train him with other horses," Ben told me. "If I can get him used to letting a horse stay a few lengths behind, I can hold him down."

We bought two fairly good platers with the rest of our first winnings and hired neighboring ranch kids to ride them. We began to see men with binoculars on the hills around our track. We let the Eagle loaf and the boys with the binoculars never saw any great times.

The racing world had gone crazy over what Red Eagle had done to the records. But as time passed and the binocular boys reported he wasn't burning up his home track, the writers began to hint that it had been a freak perfor-

mance—certainly remarkable, but could he do it again? This was the attitude we wanted. Then we put Red Eagle in his second race, this one a mile and a sixteenth.

It was a big stakes race for two-year-olds. We didn't enter him until the last minute. Even so, the news got around and the track had never had such a large attendance and such little betting. The people didn't dare bet against the Eagle, but he had only run at six furlongs and they weren't ready to believe in him and bet on him to run a distance. Because of the low pari-mutuel take, we were very unpopular with the officials of that track.

"If there's any way you can do it," I told Ben, "hold him at the gate."

"I'll hold him if I can."

By this time Red Eagle had become used to other horses and would come out of the gate running easily. When they sprung the gate on those crack two-year-olds that day, Ben had a tight rein and the pack opened a length on the Eagle before he understood he'd been double-crossed. When he saw horses *ahead* of him he went crazy.

He swung far outside and caught the pack before they were in front of the stands. He'd opened five lengths at the first turn. He continued to accelerate in the back stretch, and the crowd had gone crazy too. When he turned into the stretch the nearest thing to him was the starting gate the attendants hadn't quite had time to pull out of the way. Eagle swerved wide to miss the gate and then, as if the gate had made him madder, really turned it on. When he crossed the finish line the first horse behind him hadn't entered the stretch. I sat down weakly and cried. He had cut *ten* seconds off the world's record for a mile and a sixteenth.

The pandemonium did not subside when the race was over. Front-page headlines all over the world said, "New Wonder Horse Turns Racing World Topsy-turvy." That was an understatement.

"The next time we run him," I told Ben, "they'll put two sacks of feed and a bale of hay on him."

Ben was gazing off into the distance. "You can't imagine what it's like to sit on all that power and watch a field of horses go by you backward, blip, like that. You know something, Cos? He still wasn't flat out."

"Fine," I said sarcastically. "We'll run him against Mercedes and Jaguars."

Well, they weighted him. The handicapper called for one hundred thirty-seven pounds. It was an unheard-of weight for a two-year-old to carry, but it wasn't as bad as I had expected.

At home we put the one thirty-seven on him and eased him along for a few weeks. He didn't seem to notice the weight. The first time Ben let him out he broke his own record. I kept tabs on his legs and he never heated in the joints or swelled.

We entered him in the next race to come up. It rained for two days before the race and the track was a sea of mud. Some thought the "flying machine," as Red Eagle was beginning to be called, could not set his blazing pace in mud.

"What do you think?" I asked Ben. "He's never run in mud."

"Hell, Cos, that horse don't notice what he's running on. He just feels the pressure of something behind him trying to outrun him and it pushes him like a jet."

Ben was right. When the pack came out of the gate that day, Red Eagle squirted ahead like a watermelon seed squeezed from between your fingers. He sprayed the pack briefly with mud, then blithely left them, and when he came down the stretch he was completely alone.

During the next several races, three things became apparent. First, the handicapper had no measuring stick to figure what weight Eagle should carry. They called for one hundred forty, forty-two, then forty-five, and Eagle came down the stretch alone. The second thing became apparent after Eagle had won carrying one forty-five. His next race he started alone. No one would enter against him. Third, Eagle was drawing the greatest crowds in the history of racing.

There were two big races left that season. They were one day and a thousand miles apart. The officials at both tracks were in a dilemma. Whichever race Eagle entered would have a huge crowd, but it would be a walkaway and that crowd would bet its last dollar on Eagle, because the track was required by law to pay ten cents on the dollar. The officials resolved their dilemma by using the old adage:

You can stop a freight train if you put enough weight on it. Red Eagle was required to carry the unheard-of weight of one hundred and seventy pounds. Thus they hoped to encourage other owners to race against us and at the same time they'd have Eagle's drawing power.

Ben grew obstinate. "I don't want to hurt him and that weight'll break him down."

"Great," I replied. "Two worn-out old duffers with the world's greatest horse end up with two platers, a sandhills ranch, and the winnings from a few races."

"I know how you feel," said Ben. "The only thing you could have got out of this was money, but I get to ride him."

"Well," I said, trying to be philosophical about it, "I get to watch him and that's almost as good as riding him." I stopped and grabbed Ben's arm. "What did I say?"

Ben jerked his arm away. "You gone nuts?"

"Get to watch him! Ben, what's happened every time the Eagle's run?"

"He's broke a record," said Ben matter-of-factly.

"He's sent several thousand people into hysterics," I amended.

Ben looked at me. "Are you thinking people would pay to see just one horse run?"

"Has there ever been more than one when the Eagle's run? Come on. We're going to enter him."

We entered Eagle in the next to the last race of the season. What I'd expected happened. All the other owners pulled out. They weren't having any of the Eagle even carrying a hundred and seventy pounds. They all entered in the last race. No horse, not even the Eagle—they thought—had the kind of stamina to make two efforts on successive days with a plane trip sandwiched between, so they felt safe.

The officials at the second track were jubilant. They had the largest field they had ever run. The officials at the first track had apoplexy. They wanted to talk to us. They offered plane fare and I flew down.

"Would you consider an arrangement," they asked, "whereby you would withdraw your horse?"

"I would not," I replied.

"The public won't attend a walkaway," they groaned, "even with the drawing power of your horse." What they were thinking of was that ten cents on the dollar.

"That's where you're wrong," I told them. "Advertise that the wonder horse is running unweighted against his own record and you'll have a sellout."

Legally, they could not call off the race, so they had to agree.

On the way home I stopped off at Carvelliers'. We had a long talk and drew up an agreement. "It'll work," I said. "I know it will."

"Yes," agreed Carvelliers, "it will work, but you must persuade Ben to run him just once carrying the hundred and seventy. We've got to scare the whole racing world to death."

"I'll persuade him," I promised.

When I got home I took Ben aside. "Ben," I said, "every cow horse has to carry more than a hundred and seventy pounds."

"Yeah, but a cow horse don't run a mile in just over a minute."

"Nevertheless," I said, "he'll run as fast as he can carrying that weight and it doesn't hurt him."

"But a cow horse has pasterns and joints like a work horse. They just ain't built like a thoroughbred."

"Neither is Red Eagle," I answered.

"What's this all about? You already arranged for him not to carry any weight."

"That's for the first race."

"*First race!* You ain't thinkin' of runnin' in both of them?"

"Yes, and that second one will be his last race. I'll never ask you to ride him carrying that kind of weight again."

"You ought to be ashamed to ask me to ride him carrying it at all." Then what I had said sunk in. "*Last* race! How do you know it'll be his last race?"

"I forgot to tell you I had a talk with Carvelliers."

"So you had a talk with Carvelliers. So what?"

"Ben," I pleaded, "trust me. See what the Eagle can do with a hundred and seventy."

"All right," said Ben grudgingly, "but I ain't goin' to turn him on."

"Turn him on!" I snorted. "You ain't ever been able to turn him off."

Ben was surprised but I wasn't when Red Eagle galloped easily under the weight. Ben rode him for a week before he got up the nerve to let him run. Eagle was still way ahead of every record except his own. He stayed sound.

When we entered him in the second race all but five owners withdrew their horses. These five knew their animals were the best of that season, barring our colt. And they believed that the Eagle after a plane ride, a run the day before, and carrying a hundred and seventy pounds was fair competition.

At the first track Eagle ran unweighted before a packed stand. The people jumped and shouted with excitement as the red streak flowed around the track, racing the second hand of the huge clock that had been erected in front of the odds board. Ben was worried about the coming race and only let him cut a second off his previous record. But that was enough. The crowd went mad. And I had the last ammunition I needed.

The next day dawned clear and sunny. The track was fast. Every seat in the stand was sold and the infield was packed. The press boxes overflowed with writers, anxiously waiting to report to the world what the wonder horse would do. The crowd that day didn't have to be told. They bet their last dollar on him to win.

Well, it's all history now. Red Eagle, carrying one hundred and seventy pounds, beat the next fastest horse five lengths. All the fences in front of the stands were torn down by the crowd trying to get a close look at the Eagle. The track lost a fortune and three officials had heart attacks.

A meeting was called and they pleaded with us to remove our horse from competition.

"Gentlemen," I said, "we'll make you a proposition. You noticed yesterday that the gate for Eagle's exhibition was the largest that track ever had. Do you understand? People will pay to watch Eagle run against time. If you'll guarantee us two exhibitions a season at each major track and give us sixty per cent of the gate, we'll agree never to run the Eagle in competition."

It was such a logical move that they wondered they

hadn't thought of it themselves. It worked out beautifully. Owners of ordinary horses could run them with the conviction that they would at least be somewhere in the stretch when the race finished. The officials were happy, because not only was racing secure again, but they made money out of their forty per cent of the gates of Eagle's exhibitions. And we were happy, because we made even more money. Everything has been serene for three seasons. But I'm a little concerned about next year.

I forgot to tell you the arrangement Carvelliers and I had made. First, we had discussed a little-known aspect of mutations: namely, that they pass on to their offspring their new characteristics. Carvelliers has fifty brood mares on his breeding farm, and Red Eagle proved so sure at stud that next season fifty carbon copies of him will be hitting the tracks. You'd never believe it, but they run just like their sire, and Ben and I own fifty per cent of each of them. Ben feels somewhat badly about it, but, as I pointed out, we only promised not to run the Eagle.

NOBODY BOTHERS GUS

Algis Budrys

Algis Budrys is in a sense the prototype writer for this anthology: first published in 1952, he had an immediate success, wrote prolifically through the fifties, and tapered off, after 1957, to a full stop in the early sixties. Typically, too, his work was primarily sociological and psychological in orientation.

In no other way is Budrys typical of anything. The son of a Free Lithuanian diplomat, he came to the U.S. at the age of five in 1936; wrote his first story (science fiction) six years later, and sold his first (science fiction) ten years after that. He had half a dozen books in print, and was widely published in magazines, in and out of s-f, when he moved to Chicago in 1961 to become editor of Regency Books, and then editorial director of *Playboy*'s book-publishing division.

Except for a few articles *(Esquire, Saturday Evening Post)*, he virtually stopped writing until 1966, when his first suspense story, "The Master of the Hounds", was nominated for an "Edgar" award, and he began selling to the SF magazines again. A new science-fiction novel is now completed, and a suspense novel is in work.

Budrys' work has appeared in three Annuals: "Silent Brother" and "The Edge of the Sea" were in the 2nd and 4th; "Nobody Bothers Gus" was first published in *Astounding* in November, 1955, under the pseudonym, "Paul Janvier," and reprinted in the 1st Annual.

TWO YEARS EARLIER, Gus Kusevic had been driving slowly down the narrow back road into Boonesboro.

It was good country for slow driving, particularly in the late spring. There was nobody else on the road. The woods were just blooming into a deep, rich green as yet unburned by summer, and the afternoons were still cool and fresh. And, just before he reached the Boonesboro town line, he saw the locked and weathered cottage standing for sale on its quarter-acre lot.

He had pulled his roadcar up to a gentle stop, swung sideways in his seat, and looked at it.

It needed paint; the siding had gone from white to gray, and the trim was faded. There were shingles missing here and there from the roof, leaving squares of darkness on the sun-bleached rows of cedar, and inevitably, some of the windowpanes had cracked. But the frame hadn't slouched out of square, and the roof hadn't sagged. The chimney stood up straight.

He looked at the straggled clumps and windrowed hay that were all that remained of the shrubbery and the lawn. His broad, homely face bunched itself into a quiet smile along its well-worn seams. His hands itched for the feel of a spade.

He got out of the roadcar, walked across the road and up to the cottage door, and copied down the name of the real estate dealer listed on the card tacked to the doorframe.

Now it was almost two years later, early in April, and Gus was top-dressing his lawn.

Earlier in the day he'd set up a screen beside the pile of topsoil behind his house, shoveled the soil through the screen, mixed it with broken peat moss, and carted it out to the lawn, where he left it in small piles. Now he was carefully raking it out over the young grass in a thin layer that covered only the roots, and let the blades peep through. He intended to be finished by the time the second half of the Giants-Kodiaks doubleheader came on. He particularly wanted to see it because Halsey was pitching for the Kodiaks, and he had something of an avuncular interest in Halsey.

He worked without waste motion or excess expenditure of energy. Once or twice he stopped and had a beer in the shade of the rose arbor he'd put up around the front door. Nevertheless, the sun was hot; by early afternoon, he had his shirt off.

Just before he would have been finished, a battered flivver settled down in front of the house. It parked with a flurry of its rotors, and a gangling man in a worn serge suit, with thin hair plastered across his tight scalp, climbed out and looked at Gus uncertainly.

Gus had glanced up briefly while the flivver was on its silent way down. He'd made out the barely-legible "Falmouth County Clerk's Office" lettered over the faded paint on its door, shrugged, and gone on with what he was doing.

Gus was a big man. His shoulders were heavy and broad; his chest was deep, grizzled with thick, iron-gray hair. His stomach had gotten a little heavier with the years, but the muscles were still there under the layer of flesh. His upper arms were thicker than a good many thighs, and his forearms were enormous.

His face was seamed by a network of folds and creases. His flat cheeks were marked out by two deep furrows that ran from the sides of his bent nose, merged with the creases bracketing his wide lips, and converged toward the blunt point of his jaw. His pale blue eyes twinkled above high cheekbones which were covered with wrinkles. His close-cropped hair was as white as cotton.

Only repeated and annoying exposure would give his body a tan, but his face was permanently browned. The pink of his body sunburn was broken in several places by white scar tissue. The thin line of a knife cut emerged from the tops of his pants and faded out across the right side of his stomach. The other significant area of scarring lay across the uneven knuckles of his heavy-fingered hands.

The clerk looked at the mailbox to make sure of the name, checking it against an envelope he was holding in one hand. He stopped and looked at Gus again, mysteriously nervous.

Gus abruptly realized that he probably didn't present a reassuring appearance. With all the screening and raking he'd been doing, there'd been a lot of dust in the air. Mixed with perspiration, it was all over his face, chest, arms, and back. Gus knew he didn't look very gentle even at his cleanest and best-dressed. At the moment, he couldn't blame the clerk for being skittish.

He tried to smile disarmingly.

The clerk ran his tongue over his lips, cleared his throat with a slight cough, and jerked his head toward the mailbox. "Is that right? You Mr. Kusevic?"

Gus nodded. "That's right. What can I do for you?"

The clerk held up the envelope. "Got a notice here from the County Council," he muttered, but he was obviously

much more taken up by his effort to equate Gus with the rose arbor, the neatly edged and carefully tended flower beds, the hedges, the flagstoned walk, the small goldfish pond under the willow tree, the white-painted cottage with its window boxes and bright shutters, and the curtains showing inside the sparkling windows.

Gus waited until the man was through with his obvious thoughts, but something deep inside him sighed quietly. He had gone through this moment of bewilderment with so many other people that he was quite accustomed to it, but that is not the same thing as being oblivious.

"Well, come on inside," he said after a decent interval. "It's pretty hot out here, and I've got some beer in the cooler."

The clerk hesitated again. "Well, all I've got to do is deliver this notice—" he said, still looking around. "Got the place fixed up real nice, don't you?"

Gus smiled. "It's my home. A man likes to live in a nice place. In a hurry?"

The clerk seemed to be troubled by something in what Gus had said. Then he looked up suddenly, obviously just realizing he'd been asked a direct question. "Huh?"

"You're not in any hurry, are you? Come on in; have a beer. Nobody's expected to be a ball of fire on a spring afternoon."

The clerk grinned uneasily. "No . . . nope, guess not." He brightened. "O.K.! Don't mind if I do."

Gus ushered him into the house, grinning with pleasure. Nobody'd seen the inside of the place since he'd fixed it up; the clerk was the first visitor he'd had since moving in. There weren't even any delivery men; Boonesboro was so small you had to drive in for your own shopping. There wasn't any mail carrier service, of course—not that Gus ever received any mail.

He showed the clerk into the living room. "Have a seat. I'll be right back." He went quickly out to the kitchen, took some beer out of the cooler, loaded a tray with glasses, a bowl of chips and pretzels, and the beer, and carried it out.

The clerk was up, looking around the library that covered two of the living room walls.

Looking at his expression, Gus realized with genuine regret that the man wasn't the kind to doubt whether an obvious clod like Kusevic had read any of this stuff. A man like that could still be talked to, once the original misconceptions were knocked down. No, the clerk was too plainly mystified that a grown man would fool with books. Particularly a man like Gus; now, one of these kids that messed with college politics, that was something else. But a grown man oughtn't to act like that.

Gus saw it had been a mistake to expect anything of the clerk. He should have known better, whether he was hungry for company or not. He'd *always* been hungry for company, and it was time he realized, once and for all, that he just plain wasn't going to find any.

He set the tray down on the table, uncapped a beer quickly, and handed it to the man.

"Thanks," the clerk mumbled. He took a swallow, sighed loudly, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He looked around the room again. "Cost you a lot to have all this put in?"

Gus shrugged. "Did most of it myself. Built the shelves and furniture; stuff like that. Some of the paintings I had to buy, and the books and records."

The clerk grunted. He seemed to be considerably ill at ease, probably because of the notice he'd brought, whatever it was. Gus found himself wondering what it could possibly be, but, now that he'd made the mistake of giving the man a beer, he had to wait politely until it was finished before he could ask.

He went over to the TV set. "Baseball fan?" he asked the clerk.

"Sure!"

"Giants-Kodiaks ought to be on." He switched the set on and pulled up a hassock, sitting on it so as not to get one of the chairs dirty. The clerk wandered over and stood looking at the screen, taking slow swallows of his beer.

The second game had started, and Halsey's familiar figure appeared on the screen as the set warmed up. The lithe young lefthander was throwing with his usual boneless motion, apparently not working hard at all, but the ball was whipping past the batters with a sizzle that the home plate microphone was picking up clearly.

Gus nodded toward Halsey. "He's quite a pitcher, isn't he?"

The clerk shrugged. "Guess so. Walker's their best man, though."

Gus sighed as he realized he'd forgotten himself again. The clerk wouldn't pay much attention to Halsey, naturally.

But he was getting a little irritated at the man, with his typical preconceptions of what was proper and what wasn't, of who had a right to grow roses and who didn't.

"Offhand," Gus said to the clerk, "could you tell me what Halsey's record was, last year?"

The clerk shrugged. "Couldn't tell you. Wasn't bad—I remember that much. 13-7, something like that."

Gus nodded to himself. "Uh-huh. How'd Walker do?"

"Walker! Why, man, Walker just won something like twenty-five games, that's all. And three no-hitters. How'd Walker do? Huh!"

Gus shook his head. "Walker's a good pitcher, all right—but he didn't pitch any no-hitters. And he only won eighteen games."

The clerk wrinkled his forehead. He opened his mouth to argue and then stopped. He looked like a sure-thing bettor who'd just realized that his memory had played him a trick.

"Say—I think you're right! Huh! Now what the Sam Hill made me think Walker was the guy? And you know something—I've been talking about him all winter, and nobody once called me wrong?" The clerk scratched his head. "Now, *somebody* pitched them games! Who the dickens was it?" He scowled in concentration.

Gus silently watched Halsey strike out his third batter in a row, and his face wrinkled into a slow smile. Halsey was still young; just hitting his stride. He threw himself into the game with all the energy and enjoyment a man felt when he realized he was at his peak, and that, out there on the mound in the sun, he was as good as any man who ever had gone before him in this profession.

Gus wondered how soon Halsey would see the trap he'd set for himself.

Because it wasn't a contest. Not for Halsey. For Christy Mathewson, it had been a contest. For Lefty Grove and

Dizzy Dean, for Bob Feller and Slats Gould, it had been a contest. But for Halsey it was just a complicated form of solitaire that always came out right.

Pretty soon, Halsey'd realize that you can't handicap yourself at solitaire. If you knew where all the cards are; if you knew that unless you deliberately cheated against yourself, you couldn't help but win—what good was it? One of these days, Halsey'd realize there wasn't a game on Earth he couldn't beat; whether it was a physical contest, organized and formally recognized as a game, or whether it was the billion-triggered pinball machine called Society.

What then, Halsey? What then? And if you find out, please, in the name of whatever kind of brotherhood we share, let me know.

The clerk grunted. "Well, it don't matter, I guess. I can always look it up in the record book at home."

Yes, you can, Gus commented silently. But you won't notice what it says, and, if you do, you'll forget it and never realize you've forgotten.

The clerk finished his beer, set it down on the tray, and was free to remember what he'd come here for. He looked around the room again, as though the memory were a cue of some kind.

"Lots of books," he commented.

Gus nodded, watching Halsey walk out to the pitcher's mound again.

"Uh . . . you read 'em all?"

Gus shook his head.

"How about that one by that Miller fellow? I hear that's a pretty good one."

So. The clerk had a certain narrow interest in certain aspects of certain kinds of literature.

"I suppose it is," Gus answered truthfully. "I read the first three pages, once." And, having done so, he'd known how the rest of it was going to go, who would do what when, and he'd lost interest. The library had been a mistake, just one of a dozen similar experiments. If he'd wanted an academic familiarity with human literature, he could just as easily have picked it up by browsing through bookstores, rather than buying the books and doing substantially the same thing at home. He couldn't hope to extract any emotional empathies, no matter what he did.

Face it, though; rows of even useless books were better than bare wall. The trappings of culture were a bulwark of sorts, even though it was a learned culture and not a *felt* one, and meant no more to him than the culture of the Incas. Try as he might, he could never be an Inca. Nor even a Maya or an Aztec, or any kind of kin, except by the most tenuous of extensions.

But he had no culture of his own. There was the thing; the emptiness that nevertheless ached; the rootlessness, the complete absence of a place to stand and say: "This is my own."

Halsey struck out the first batter in the inning with three pitches. Then he put a slow floater precisely where the next man could get the best part of his bat on it, and did not even look up as the ball screamed out of the park. He struck out the next two men with a total of eight pitches.

Gus shook his head slowly. That was the first symptom; when you didn't bother to be subtle about your handicapping any more.

The clerk held out the envelope. "Here," he said brusquely, having finally shilly-shallied his resolution up to the point of doing it despite his obvious nervousness at Gus' probable reaction.

Gus opened the envelope and read the notice. Then, just as the clerk had been doing, he looked around the room. A dark expression must have flickered over his face, because the clerk became even more hesitant. "I . . . I want you to know I regret this. I guess all of us do."

Gus nodded hastily. "Sure, sure." He stood up and looked out the front window. He smiled crookedly, looking at the top-dressing spread carefully over the painstakingly rolled lawn, which was slowly taking form on the plot where he had plowed last year and picked out pebbles, seeded and watered, shoveled topsoil, laid out flower beds . . . ah, there was no use going into that now. The whole plot, cottage and all, was condemned, and that was that.

"They're . . . they're turnin' the road into a twelve-lane freight highway," the clerk explained.

Gus nodded absently.

The clerk moved closer and dropped his voice. "Look—I was told to tell you this. Not in writin'." He sidled even

closer, and actually looked around before he spoke. He laid his hand confidentially on Gus' bare forearm.

"Any price you ask for," he muttered, "is gonna be O.K., as long as you don't get too greedy. The county isn't paying this bill. Not even the state, if you get what I mean."

Gus got what he meant. Twelve-lane highways aren't built by anything but national governments.

He got more than that. National governments don't work this way unless there's a good reason.

"Highway between Hollister and Farnham?" he asked.

The clerk paled. "Don't know for sure," he muttered.

Gus smiled thinly. Let the clerk wonder how he'd guessed. It couldn't be much of a secret, anyway—not after the grade was laid out and the purpose became self-evident. Besides, the clerk wouldn't wonder very long.

A streak of complete perversity shot through Gus. He recognized its source in his anger at losing the cottage, but there was no reason why he shouldn't allow himself to cut loose.

"What's your name?" he asked the clerk abruptly.

"Uh . . . Harry Danvers."

"Well, Harry, suppose I told you I could stop that highway, if I wanted to? Suppose I told you that no bulldozer could get near this place without breaking down, that no shovel could dig this ground, that sticks of dynamite just plain wouldn't explode if they tried to blast? Suppose I told you that if they did put in the highway, it would turn soft as ice cream if I wanted it to, and run away like a river?"

"Huh?"

"Hand me your pen."

Danvers reached out mechanically and handed it to him. Gus put it between his palms and rolled it into a ball. He dropped it and caught it as it bounced up sharply from the soft, thick rug. He pulled it out between his fingers, and it returned to its cylindrical shape. He unscrewed the cap, flattened it out into a sheet between two fingers, scribbled on it, rolled it back into a cap, and, using his fingernail to draw out the ink which was now part of it, permanently inscribed Danvers' name just below the surface of the metal. Then he screwed the cap on again

and handed the pen back to the county clerk. "Souvenir," he said.

The clerk looked down at it.

"Well?" Gus asked. "Aren't you curious about how I did it and what I am?"

The clerk shook his head. "Good trick. I guess you magician fellows must spend a lot of time practicing, huh? Can't say I could see myself spendin' that much working time on a hobby."

Gus nodded. "That's a good, sound, practical point of view," he said. Particularly when all of us automatically put out a field that damps curiosity, he thought. What point of view *could* you have?

He looked over the clerk's shoulder at the lawn, and one side of his mouth twisted sadly.

Only God can make a tree, he thought, looking at the shrubs and flower beds. Should we all, then, look for our challenge in landscape gardening? Should we become the gardeners of the rich humans in their expensive houses, driving up in our old, rusty trucks, oiling our lawnmowers, kneeling on the humans' lawns with our clipping shears, coming to the kitchen door to ask for a drink of water on a hot summer day?

The highway. Yes, he could stop the highway. Or make it go around him. There was no way of stopping the curiosity damper, no more than there was a way of willing his heart to stop, but it could be stepped up. He could force his mind to labor near overload, and no one would ever even *see* the cottage, the lawn, the rose arbor, or the battered old man, drinking his beer. Or rather, seeing them, would pay them absolutely no attention.

But the first time he went into town, or when he died, the field would be off, and then what? Then curiosity, then investigation, then, perhaps a fragment of theory here or there to be fitted to another somewhere else. And then what? Pogrom?

He shook his head. The humans couldn't win, and would lose monstrously. *That* was why he couldn't leave the humans a clue. He had no taste for slaughtering sheep, and he doubted if his fellows did.

His fellows. Gus stretched his mouth. The only one he could be sure of was Halsey. There had to be others, but

there was no way of finding them. They provoked no reaction from the humans; they left no trail to follow. It was only if they showed themselves, like Halsey, that they could be seen. There was, unfortunately, no private telepathic party line among them.

He wondered if Halsey hoped someone would notice him and get in touch. He wondered if Halsey even suspected there were others like himself. He wondered if anyone had noticed *him,* when Gus Kusevic's name had been in the papers occasionally.

It's the dawn of my race, he thought. The first generation—or is it, and does it matter?—and I wonder where the females are.

He turned back to the clerk. "I want what I paid for the place," he said. "No more."

The clerk's eyes widened slightly, then relaxed, and he shrugged. "Suit yourself. But if it was me, I'd soak the government good."

Yes, Gus thought, you doubtless would. But I don't want to, because you simply don't take candy from babies.

So the superman packed his bags and got out of the human's way. Gus choked a silent laugh. The damping field. The damping-field. The thrice-cursed, ever-benevolent, foolproof, autonomic, protective damping field.

Evolution had, unfortunately, not yet realized that there was such a thing as human society. It produced a being with a certain modification from the human stock, thereby arriving at practical psi. In order to protect this feeble new species, whose members were so terribly sparse, it gave them the perfect camouflage.

Result: When young Augustin Kusevic was enrolled in school, it was discovered that he had no birth certificate. No hospital recalled his birth. As a matter of brutal fact, his human parents sometimes forgot his existence for days at a time.

Result: When young Gussie Kusevic tried to enter high school, it was discovered that he had never entered grammar school. No matter that he could quote teachers' names, textbooks, or classroom numbers. No matter if he could produce report cards. They were misfiled, and the anguished interviews forgotten. No one doubted his exis-

tence—people remembered the fact of his being, and the fact of his having acted and being acted upon. But only as though they had read it in some infinitely boring book.

He had no friends, no girl, no past, no present, no love. He had no place to stand. Had there been such things as ghosts, he would have found his fellowship there.

By the time of his adolescence, he had discovered an absolute lack of involvement with the human race. He studied it, because it was the salient feature of his environment. He did not live with it. It said nothing to him that was of personal value; its motivations, morals, manners and morale did not find responsive reactions in him. And his, of course, made absolutely no impression on it.

The life of the peasant of ancient Babylon is of interest to only a few historical anthropologists, none of whom actually want to *be* Babylonian peasants.

Having solved the human social equation from his dispassionate viewpoint, and caring no more than the naturalist who finds that deer are extremely fond of green aspen leaves, he plunged into physical release. He discovered the thrill of picking fights and winning them; of *making* somebody pay attention to him by smashing his nose.

He might have become a permanent fixture on the Manhattan docks, if another longshoreman hadn't slashed him with a carton knife. The cultural demand on him had been plain. He'd had to kill the man.

That had been the end of unregulated personal combat. He discovered, not to his horror but to his disgust, that he could get away with murder. No investigation had been made; no search was attempted.

So that had been the end of that, but it had led him to the only possible evasion of the trap to which he had been born. Intellectual competition being meaningless, organized sports became the only answer. Simultaneously regulating his efforts and annotating them under a mound of journalistic record-keeping, they furnished the first official continuity his life had ever known. People still forgot his accomplishments, but when they turned to the records, his name was undeniably there. A dossier can be misfiled. School records can disappear. But something more than a damping field was required to shunt aside the mountain

of news copy and statistics that drags, ball-like, at the ankle of even the mediocre athlete.

It seemed to Gus—and he thought of it a great deal—that this chain of progression was inevitable for any male of his kind. When, three years ago, he had discovered Halsey, his hypothesis was bolstered. But what good was Halsey to another male? To hold mutual consolation sessions with? He had no intention of ever contacting the man.

The clerk cleared his throat. Gus jerked his head around to look at him, startled. He'd forgotten him.

"Well, guess I'll be going. Remember, you've only got two months."

Gus gestured noncommittally. The man had delivered his message. Why didn't he acknowledge he'd served his purpose, and go?

Gus smiled ruefully. What purpose did *homo nondescriptus* serve, and where was he going? Halsey was already walking downhill along the well-marked trail. *Were* there others? If so, then they were in another rut, somewhere, and not even the tops of their heads showed. He and his kind could recognize each other only by an elaborate process of elimination; they had to watch for the people no one noticed.

He opened the door for the clerk, saw the road, and found his thoughts back with the highway.

The highway would run from Hollister, which was a railroad junction, to the Air Force Base at Farnham, where his calculations in sociomathematics had long ago predicted the first starship would be constructed and launched. The trucks would rumble up the highway, feeding the open maw with men and material.

He cleaned his lips. Up there in space, somewhere; somewhere outside the Solar System, was another race. The imprint of their visits here was plain. The humans would encounter them, and again he could predict the result; the humans would win.

Gus Kusevic could not go along to investigate the challenges that he doubted lay among the stars. Even with scrapbooks full of notices and clippings, he had barely made his career penetrate the public consciousness. Halsey, who had exuberantly broken every baseball record in

the books, was known as a "pretty fair country pitcher."

What credentials could he present with his application to the Air Force? Who would remember them the next day if he had any? What would become of the records of his inoculations, his physical check-ups, his training courses? Who would remember to reserve a bunk for him, or stow supplies for him, or add his consumption to the total when the time came to allow for oxygen?

Stow away? Nothing easier. But, again; who would die so he could live within the tight lattice of shipboard economy? Which sheep would he slaughter, and to what useful purpose, in the last analysis?

"Well, so long," the clerk said.

"Good-by," Gus said.

The clerk walked down the flagstones and out to his flivver.

I think, Gus said to himself, it would have been much better for us if Evolution had been a little less protective and a little more thoughtful. An occasional pogrom wouldn't have done us any harm. A ghetto at least keeps the courtship problem solved.

Our seed has been spilt on the ground.

Suddenly, Gus ran forward, pushed by something he didn't care to name. He looked up through the flivver's open door, and the clerk looked down apprehensively.

"Danvers, you're a sports fan," Gus said hastily, realizing his voice was too urgent; that he was startling the clerk with his intensity.

"That's right," the clerk answered, pushing himself nervously back along the seat.

"Who's heavyweight champion of the world?"

"Mike Frazier. Why?"

"Who'd he beat for the title? Who used to be champion?"

The clerk pursed his lips. "Huh! It's been years— Gee, I don't know. I don't remember. I could look it up, I guess."

Gus exhaled slowly. He half-turned and looked back toward the cottage, the lawn, the flower beds, the walk, the arbor, and the fish pond under the willow tree. "Never

mind," he said, and walked back into the house while the clerk wobbled his flivver into the air.

The TV set was blaring with sound. He checked the status of the game.

It had gone quickly. Halsey had pitched a one-hitter so far, and the Giants' pitcher had done almost as well. The score was tied at 1-1, the Giants were at bat, and it was the last out in the ninth inning. The camera boomed in on Halsey's face.

Halsey looked at the batter with complete disinterest in his eyes, wound up, and threw the home-run ball.

THE PRIZE OF PERIL

Robert Sheckley

Robert Sheckley was born in New York City in 1928, but grew up in Maplewood, N. J. After high school, he spent two years in Korea with the occupation forces, then enrolled in N.Y.U. in 1948; graduated in '51, and sold his first story the same year; published ten stories in '52, and close to fifty in '53. His first book, *Untouched by Human Hands,* was published in 1954, and he has hardly slowed down since, although his short-story production tapered off sharply after 1957, in favor of novels and scriptwriting. He has now published 17 books, among them *The Game of X,* a spy novel, and *Mindswap* (Delacorte, 1966). His television and film credits include *The People Trap,* and *The Tenth Victim,* which he wrote twice——as a short story, "The Seventh Victim", in 1953, and as a "novelization" of the film based on the first version. Three other stories are now being filmed, and a new novel, *Maze of Mirrors,* will be published by Delacorte in 1968.

"The Prize of Peril" was reprinted in the 4th SF Annual, from *Fantasy & Science Fiction,* May, 1958.

RAEDER LIFTED HIS HEAD CAUTIOUSLY above the window sill. He saw the fire escape, and below it a narrow alley. There was a weatherbeaten baby carriage in the alley, and three garbage cans. As he watched, a black-sleeved arm moved from behind the farthest can, with something shiny in its fist. Raeder ducked down. A bullet smashed through the window above his head and punctured the ceiling, showering him with plaster.

Now he knew about the alley. It was guarded, just like the door.

He lay at full length on the cracked linoleum, staring at the bullet hole in the ceiling, listening to the sounds outside the door. He was a tall man with bloodshot eyes and a two-day stubble. Grime and fatigue had etched lines into his face. Fear had touched his features, tightening a muscle here and twitching a nerve there. The results were startling. His face had character now, for it was reshaped by the expectation of death.

There was a gunman in the alley and two on the stairs. He was trapped. He was dead.

Sure, Raeder thought, he still moved and breathed; but that was only because of death's inefficiency. Death would take care of him in a few minutes. Death would poke holes in his face and body, artistically dab his clothes with blood, arrange his limbs in some grotesque position of the graveyard ballet . . . Raeder bit his lip sharply. He wanted to live. There had to be a way.

He rolled onto his stomach and surveyed the dingy cold-water apartment into which the killers had driven him. It was a perfect little one-room coffin. It had a door, which was watched, and a fire escape, which was watched. And it had a tiny windowless bathroom.

He crawled to the bathroom and stood up. There was a ragged hole in the ceiling, almost four inches wide. If he could enlarge it, crawl through into the apartment above . . .

He heard a muffled thud. The killers were impatient. They were beginning to break down the door.

He studied the hole in the ceiling. No use even considering it. He could never enlarge it in time.

They were smashing against the door, grunting each time they struck. Soon the lock would tear out, or the hinges would pull out of the rotting wood. The door would go down, and the two blank-faced men would enter, dusting off their jackets. . . .

But surely someone would help him! He took the tiny television set from his pocket. The picture was blurred, and he didn't bother to adjust it. The audio was clear and precise.

He listened to the well-modulated voice of Mike Terry addressing his vast audience.

". . . *terrible spot,*" Terry was saying. "*Yes, folks, Jim Raeder is in a truly terrible predicament. He had been hiding, you'll remember, in a third-rate Broadway hotel under an assumed name. It seemed safe enough. But the bellhop recognized him, and gave that information to the Thompson gang.*"

The door creaked under repeated blows. Raeder clutched the little television set and listened.

"*Jim Raeder just managed to escape from the hotel!*

Closely pursued, he entered a brownstone at one fifty-six West End Avenue. His intention was to go over the roofs. And it might have worked, folks, it just might have worked. But the roof door was locked. It looked like the end. . . . But Raeder found that apartment seven was unoccupied and unlocked. He entered . . ."

Terry paused for emphasis, then cried: *"—and now he's trapped there, trapped like a rat in a cage! The Thompson gang is breaking down the door! The fire escape is guarded! Our camera crew, situated in a near-by building, is giving you a closeup now. Look, folks, just look! Is there no hope for Jim Raeder?"*

Is there no hope? Raeder silently echoed, perspiration pouring from him as he stood in the dark, stifling little bathroom, listening to the steady thud against the door.

"Wait a minute!" Mike Terry cried. *"Hang on, Jim Raeder, hang on a little longer. Perhaps there* is *hope! I have an urgent call from one of our viewers, a call on the Good Samaritan Line! Here's someone who thinks he can help you, Jim. Are you listening, Jim Raeder?"*

Raeder waited, and heard the hinges tearing out of rotten wood.

"Go right ahead, sir," said Mike Terry. *"What is your name, sir?"*

"Er—Felix Bartholemow."

"Don't be nervous, Mr. Bartholemow. Go right ahead."

"Well, OK. Mr. Raeder," said an old man's shaking voice, *"I used to live at one five six West End Avenue. Same apartment you're trapped in, Mr. Raeder—fact! Look, that bathroom* has *got a window, Mr. Raeder. It's been painted over, but it* has *got a—"*

Raeder pushed the television set into his pocket. He located the outlines of the window and kicked. Glass shattered, and daylight poured startlingly in. He cleared the jagged sill and quickly peered down.

Below was a long drop to a concrete courtyard.

The hinges tore free. He heard the door opening. Quickly Raeder climbed through the window, hung by his fingertips for a moment, and dropped.

The shock was stunning. Groggily he stood up. A face appeared at the bathroom window.

"Tough luck," said the man, leaning out and taking careful aim with a snub-nosed .38.

At that moment a smoke bomb exploded inside the bathroom.

The killer's shot went wide. He turned, cursing. More smoke bombs burst in the courtyard, obscuring Raeder's figure.

He could hear Mike Terry's frenzied voice over the TV set in his pocket. *"Now run for it!"* Terry was screaming. *"Run, Jim Raeder, run for your life. Run* now, *while the killer's eyes are filled with smoke. And thank Good Samaritan Sarah Winters, of three four one two Edgar Street, Brockton, Mass., for donating five smoke bombs and employing the services of a man to throw them!"*

In a quieter voice, Terry continued: *"You've saved a man's life today, Mrs. Winters. Would you tell our audience how it—"*

Raeder wasn't able to hear any more. He was running through the smoke-filled courtyard, past clotheslines, into the open street.

He walked down 63d Street, slouching to minimize his height, staggering slightly from exertion, dizzy from lack of food and sleep.

"Hey you!"

Raeder turned. A middle-aged woman was sitting on the steps of a brownstone, frowning at him.

"You're Raeder, aren't you? The one they're trying to kill?"

Raeder started to walk away.

"Come inside here, Raeder," the woman said.

Perhaps it was a trap. But Raeder knew that he had to depend upon the generosity and goodheartedness of the people. He was their representative, a projection of themselves, an average guy in trouble. Without them, he was lost. With them, nothing could harm him.

Trust in the people, Mike Terry had told him. They'll never let you down.

He followed the woman into her parlor. She told him to sit down and left the room, returning almost immediately with a plate of stew. She stood watching him while he ate, as one would watch an ape in the zoo eat peanuts.

Two children came out of the kitchen and stared at him.

Three overalled men came out of the bedroom and focused a television camera on him. There was a big television set in the parlor. As he gulped his food, Raeder watched the image of Mike Terry, and listened to the man's strong, sincere, worried voice.

"There he is, folks," Terry was saying. *"There's Jim Raeder now, eating his first square meal in two days. Our camera crews have really been working to cover this for you! Thanks, boys. . . . Folks, Jim Raeder has been given a brief sanctuary by Mrs. Velma O'Dell, of three forty-three Sixty-Third Street. Thank you, Good Samaritan O'Dell! It's really wonderful how people from all walks of life have taken Jim Raeder to their hearts!"*

"You better hurry," Mrs. O'Dell said.

"Yes, ma'am," Raeder said.

"I don't want no gunplay in my apartment."

"I'm almost finished, ma'am."

One of the children asked, "Aren't they going to kill him?"

"Shut up," said Mrs. O'Dell.

"Yes, Jim," chanted Mike Terry, *"you'd better hurry. Your killers aren't far behind. They aren't stupid men, Jim. Vicious, warped, insane—yes! But not stupid. They're following a trail of blood—blood from your torn hand, Jim!"*

Raeder hadn't realized until now that he'd cut his hand on the window sill.

"Here, I'll bandage that," Mrs. O'Dell said. Raeder stood up and let her bandage his hand. Then she gave him a brown jacket and a gray slouch hat.

"My husband's stuff," she said.

"He has a disguise, folks!" Mike Terry cried delightedly. *"This is something new! A* disguise! *With seven hours to go until he's safe!"*

"Now get out of here," Mrs. O'Dell said.

"I'm going, ma'am," Raeder said. "Thanks."

"I think you're stupid," she said. "I think you're stupid to be involved in this."

"Yes, ma'am."

"It just isn't worth it."

Raeder thanked her and left. He walked to Broadway, caught a subway to 59th Street, then an uptown local to

86th. There he bought a newspaper and changed for the Manhassett through-express.

He glanced at his watch. He had six and a half hours to go.

The subway roared under Manhattan. Raeder dozed, his bandaged hand concealed under the newspaper, the hat pulled over his face. Had he been recognized yet? Had he shaken the Thompson gang? Or was someone telephoning them now?

Dreamily he wondered if he had escaped death. Or was he still a cleverly animated corpse, moving around because of death's inefficiency? (My dear, death is so *laggard* these days! Jim Raeder walked about for hours after he died, and actually answered people's *questions* before he could be decently buried!)

Raeder's eyes snapped open. He had dreamed something . . . unpleasant. He couldn't remember what.

He closed his eyes again and remembered, with mild astonishment, a time when he had been in no trouble.

That was two years ago. He had been a big, pleasant young man working as a truck driver's helper. He had no talents. He was too modest to have dreams.

The tight-faced little truck driver had the dreams for him. "Why not try for a television show, Jim? I would if I had your looks. They like nice average guys with nothing much on the ball. As contestants. Everybody likes guys like that. Why not look into it?"

So he had looked into it. The owner of the local television store had explained it further.

"You see, Jim, the public is sick of highly trained athletes with their trick reflexes and their professional courage. Who can feel for guys like that? Who can identify? People want to watch exciting things, sure. But not when some joker is making it his business for fifty thousand a year. That's why organized sports are in a slump. That's why the thrill shows are booming."

"I see," said Raeder.

"Six years ago, Jim, Congress passed the Voluntary Suicide Act. Those old senators talked a lot about free will and self-determinism at the time. But that's all crap. You know what the Act really means? It means that amateurs

can risk their lives for the big loot, not just professionals. In the old days you had to be a professional boxer or footballer or hockey player if you wanted your brains beaten out legally for money. But now that opportunity is open to ordinary people like you, Jim."

"I see," Raeder said again.

"It's a marvelous opportunity. Take you. You're no better than anyone, Jim. Anything you can do, anyone can do. You're *average*. I think the thrill shows would go for you."

Raeder permitted himself to dream. Television shows looked like a sure road to riches for a pleasant young fellow with no particular talent or training. He wrote a letter to a show called *Hazard* and enclosed a photograph of himself.

Hazard was interested in him. The JBC network investigated, and found that he was average enough to satisfy the wariest viewer. His parentage and affiliations were checked. At last he was summoned to New York, and interviewed by Mr. Moulian.

Moulian was dark and intense, and chewed gum as he talked. "You'll do," he snapped. "But not for *Hazard*. You'll appear on *Spills*. It's a half-hour daytime show on Channel Three."

"Gee," said Raeder.

"Don't thank me. There's a thousand dollars if you win or place second, and a consolation prize of a hundred dollars if you lose. But that's not important."

"No, sir."

"*Spills* is a *little* show. The JBC network uses it as a testing ground. First- and second-place winners on *Spills* move on to *Emergency*. The prizes are much bigger on *Emergency*."

"I know they are, sir."

"And if you do well on *Emergency* there are the first-class thrill shows, like *Hazard* and *Underwater Perils*, with their nationwide coverage and enormous prizes. And then comes the really big time. How far you go is up to you."

"I'll do my best, sir," Raeder said.

Moulian stopped chewing gum for a moment and said, almost reverently, "You can do it, Jim. Just remember. You're *the people*, and *the people* can do anything."

The way he said it made Raeder feel momentarily sorry

for Mr. Moulian, who was dark and frizzy-haired and pop-eyed, and was obviously not *the people.*

They shook hands. Then Raeder signed a paper absolving the JBC of all responsibility should he lose his life, limbs or reason during the contest. And he signed another paper exercising his rights under the Voluntary Suicide Act. The law required this, and it was a mere formality.

In three weeks, he appeared on *Spills.*

The program followed the classic form of the automobile race. Untrained drivers climbed into powerful American and European competition cars and raced over a murderous twenty-mile course. Raeder was shaking with fear as he slid his big Maserati into the wrong gear and took off.

The race was a screaming, tire-burning nightmare. Raeder stayed back, letting the early leaders smash themselves up on the counter-banked hairpin turns. He crept into third place when a Jaguar in front of him swerved against an Alfa-Romeo, and the two cars roared into a plowed field. Raeder gunned for second place on the last three miles, but couldn't find passing room. An S-curve almost took him, but he fought the car back on the road, still holding third. Then the lead driver broke a crankshaft in the final fifty yards, and Jim ended in second place.

He was now a thousand dollars ahead. He received four fan letters, and a lady in Oshkosh sent him a pair of argyles. He was invited to appear on *Emergency.*

Unlike the others, *Emergency* was not a competition-type program. It stressed individual initiative: For the show, Raeder was knocked out with a non-habit-forming narcotic. He awoke in the cockpit of a small airplane, cruising on autopilot at ten thousand feet. His fuel gauge showed nearly empty. He had no parachute. He was supposed to land the plane.

Of course, he had never flown before.

He experimented gingerly with the controls, remembering that last week's participant had recovered consciousness in a submarine, had opened the wrong valve, and had drowned.

Thousands of viewers watched spellbound as this average man, a man just like themselves, struggled with the situation just as they would do. Jim Raeder was *them.* Any-

thing he could do, they could do. He was representative of *the people.*

Raeder managed to bring the ship down in some semblance of a landing. He flipped over a few times, but his seat belt held. And the engine, contrary to expectation, did not burst into flames.

He staggered out with two broken ribs, three thousand dollars, and a chance, when he healed, to appear on *Torero.*

At last, a first-class thrill show! *Torero* paid ten thousand dollars. All you had to do was kill a black Miura bull with a sword, just like a real trained matador.

The fight was held in Madrid, since bullfighting was still illegal in the United States. It was nationally televised.

Raeder had a good cuadrilla. They liked the big, slow-moving American. The picadors really leaned into their lances, trying to slow the bull for him. The banderilleros tried to run the beast off his feet before driving in their banderillas. And the second matador, a mournful man from Algeciras, almost broke the bull's neck with fancy cape work.

But when all was said and done it was Jim Raeder on the sand, a red muleta clumsily gripped in his left hand, a sword in his right, facing a ton of black, blood-streaked, wide-horned bull.

Someone was shouting, "Try for the lung, *hombre.* Don't be a hero, stick him in the lung." But Jim only knew what the technical adviser in New York had told him: Aim with the sword and go in over the horns.

Over he went. The sword bounced off bone, and the bull tossed him over its back. He stood up, miraculously ungouged, took another sword and went over the horns again with his eyes closed. The god who protects children and fools must have been watching, for the sword slid in like a needle through butter, and the bull looked startled, stared at him unbelievingly, and dropped like a deflated balloon.

They paid him ten thousand dollars, and his broken collar bone healed in practically no time. He received twenty-three fan letters, including a passionate invitation from a girl in Atlantic City, which he ignored. And they asked him if he wanted to appear on another show.

He had lost some of his innocence. He was now fully aware that he had been almost killed for pocket money. The

big loot lay ahead. Now he wanted to be almost killed for something worthwhile.

So he appeared on *Underwater Perils,* sponsored by Fairlady's Soap. In face mask, respirator, weighted belt, flippers and knife, he slipped into the warm waters of the Caribbean with four other contestants, followed by a cage-protected camera crew. The idea was to locate and bring up a treasure which the sponsor had hidden there.

Mask diving isn't especially hazardous. But the sponsor had added some frills for public interest. The area was sown with giant clams, moray eels, sharks of several species, giant octopuses, poison coral, and other dangers of the deep.

It was a stirring contest. A man from Florida found the treasure in a deep crevice, but a moray eel found him. Another diver took the treasure, and a shark took him. The brilliant blue-green water became cloudy with blood, which photographed well on color TV. The treasure slipped to the bottom and Raeder plunged after it, popping an eardrum in the process. He plucked it from the coral, jettisoned his weighted belt and made for the surface. Thirty feet from the top he had to fight another diver for the treasure.

They feinted back and forth with their knives. The man struck, slashing Raeder across the chest. But Raeder, with the self-possession of an old contestant, dropped his knife and tore the man's respirator out of his mouth.

That did it. Raeder surfaced, and presented the treasure at the stand-by boat. It turned out to be a package of Fairlady's Soap—"The Greatest Treasure of All."

That netted him twenty-two thousand dollars in cash and prizes, and three hundred and eight fan letters, and an interesting proposition from a girl in Macon, which he seriously considered. He received free hospitalization for his knife slash and burst eardrum, and injections for coral infection.

But best of all, he was invited to appear on the biggest of the thrill shows, *The Prize of Peril.*

And that was when the real trouble began. . . .

The subway came to a stop, jolting him out of his reverie. Raeder pushed back his hat and observed, across the aisle, a man staring at him and whispering to a stout woman. Had they recognized him?

He stood up as soon as the doors opened, and glanced at his watch. He had five hours to go.

At the Manhasset station he stepped into a taxi and told the driver to take him to New Salem.

"New Salem?" the driver asked, looking at him in the rear vision mirror.

"That's right."

The driver snapped on his radio. "Fare to New Salem. Yep, that's right. *New Salem.*"

They drove off. Raeder frowned, wondering if it had been a signal. It was perfectly usual for taxi drivers to report to their dispatchers, of course. But something about the man's voice. . .

"Let me off here," Raeder said.

He paid the driver and began walking down a narrow country road that curved through sparse woods. The trees were too small and too widely separated for shelter. Raeder walked on, looking for a place to hide.

There was a heavy truck approaching. He kept on walking, pulling his hat low on his forehead. But as the truck drew near, he heard a voice from the television set in his pocket. It cried, *"Watch out!"*

He flung himself into the ditch. The truck careened past, narrowly missing him, and screeched to a stop. The driver was shouting, "There he goes! Shoot, Harry, shoot!"

Bullets clipped leaves from the trees as Raeder sprinted into the woods.

"It's happened again!" Mike Terry was saying, his voice high-pitched with excitement. *"I'm afraid Jim Raeder let himself be lulled into a false sense of security. You can't do that, Jim! Not with your* life *at stake! Not with* killers *pursuing you! Be careful, Jim, you still have four and a half hours to go!"*

The driver was saying, "Claude, Harry, go around with the truck. We got him boxed."

"They've got you boxed, Jim Raeder!" Mike Terry cried. *"But they haven't got you yet! And you can thank Good Samaritan Susy Peters of twelve Elm Street, South Orange, New Jersey, for that warning shout just when the truck was bearing down on you. We'll have little Susy on stage in just a moment. . . . Look, folks, our studio helicop-*

ter has arrived on the scene. Now you can see Jim Raeder running, and the killers pursuing, surrounding him . . . "

Raeder ran through a hundred yards of woods and found himself on a concrete highway, with open woods beyond. One of the killers was trotting through the woods behind him. The truck had driven to a connecting road, and was now a mile away, coming toward him.

A car was approaching from the other direction. Raeder ran into the highway, waving frantically. The car came to a stop.

"Hurry!" cried the blond young woman driving it.

Raeder dived in. The woman made a U-turn on the highway. A bullet smashed through the windshield. She stamped on the accelerator, almost running down the lone killer who stood in the way.

The car surged away before the truck was within firing range.

Raeder leaned back and shut his eyes tightly. The woman concentrated on her driving, watching for the truck in her rear-vision mirror.

"It's happened again!" cried Mike Terry, his voice ecstatic. *"Jim Raeder has been plucked again from the jaws of death, thanks to Good Samaritan Janice Morrow of four three three Lexington Avenue, New York City. Did you ever see anything like it, folks? The way Miss Morrow drove through a fusillade of bullets and plucked Jim Raeder from the mouth of doom! Later we'll interview Miss Morrow and get her reactions. Now, while Jim Raeder speeds away—perhaps to safety, perhaps to further peril—we'll have a short announcement from our sponsor. Don't go away! Jim's got four hours and ten minutes until he's safe.* Anything *can happen!"*

"OK," the girl said. "We're off the air now. Raeder, what in the hell is the matter with you?"

"Eh?" Raeder asked. The girl was in her early twenties. She looked efficient, attractive, untouchable. Raeder noticed that she had good features, a trim figure. And he noticed that she seemed angry.

"Miss," he said, "I don't know how to thank you for—"

"Talk straight," Janice Morrow said. "I'm no Good Samaritan. I'm employed by the JBC network."

"So the program had me rescued!"

"Cleverly reasoned," she said.

"But why?"

"Look, this is an expensive show, Raeder. We have to turn in a good performance. If our rating slips, we'll all be in the street selling candy apples. And you aren't co-operating."

"What? Why?"

"Because you're terrible," the girl said bitterly. "You're a flop, a fiasco. Are you trying to commit suicide? Haven't you learned *anything* about survival?"

"I'm doing the best I can."

"The Thompsons could have had you a dozen times by now. We told them to take it easy, stretch it out. But it's like shooting a clay pigeon six feet tall. The Thompsons are co-operating, but they can only fake so far. If I hadn't come along, they'd have had to kill you—air-time or not."

Raeder stared at her, wondering how such a pretty girl could talk that way. She glanced at him, then quickly looked back to the road.

"Don't give me that look!" she said. "*You* chose to risk your life for money, buster. And plenty of money! You knew the score. Don't act like some innocent little grocer who finds the nasty hoods are after him. That's a different plot."

"I know," Raeder said.

"If you can't live well, at least try to die well."

"You don't mean that," Raeder said.

"Don't be too sure. . . . You've got three hours and forty minutes until the end of the show. If you can stay alive, fine. The boodle's yours. But if you can't, at least try to give them a run for the money."

Raeder nodded, staring intently at her.

"In a few moments we're back on the air. I develop engine trouble, let you off. The Thompsons go all out now. They kill you when and if they can, as soon as they can. Understand?"

"Yes," Raeder said. "If I make it, can I see you some time?"

She bit her lip angrily. "Are you trying to kid me?"

"No. I'd like to see you again. May I?"

She looked at him curiously. "I don't know. Forget it. We're almost on. I think your best bet is the woods to the right. Ready?"

"Yes. Where can I get in touch with you? Afterward, I mean."

"Oh, Raeder, you aren't paying attention. Go through the woods until you find a washed-out ravine. It isn't much, but it'll give you some cover."

"Where can I get in touch with you?" Raeder asked again.

"I'm in the Manhattan telephone book." She stopped the car. "OK, Raeder, start running."

He opened the door.

"Wait," she leaned over and kissed him on the lips. "Good luck, you idiot. Call me if you make it."

And then he was on foot, running into the woods.

He ran through birch and pine, past an occasional split-level house with staring faces at the big picture window. Some occupant of those houses must have called the gang, for they were close behind him when he reached the washed-out little ravine. Those quiet, mannerly, law-abiding people didn't want him to escape, Raeder thought sadly. They wanted to see a killing. Or perhaps they wanted to see him *narrowly escape* a killing.

It came to the same thing, really.

He entered the ravine, burrowed into the thick underbrush and lay still. The Thompsons appeared on both ridges, moving slowly, watching for any movement. Raeder held his breath as they came parallel to him.

He heard the quick explosion of a revolver. But the killer had only shot a squirrel. It squirmed for a moment, then lay still.

Lying in the underbrush, Raeder heard the studio helicopter overhead. He wondered if any cameras were focused on him. It was possible. And if someone were watching, perhaps some Good Samaritan would help.

So looking upward, toward the helicopter, Raeder arranged his face in a reverent expression, clasped his hands and prayed. He prayed silently, for the audience didn't like religious ostentation. But his lips moved. That was every man's privilege.

And a real prayer was on his lips. Once, a lip-reader in the audience had detected a fugitive *pretending* to pray, but actually just reciting multiplication tables. No help for that man!

Raeder finished his prayer. Glancing at his watch, he saw that he had nearly two hours to go.

And he didn't want to die! It wasn't worth it, no matter how much they paid! He must have been crazy, absolutely insane to agree to such a thing. . . .

But he knew that wasn't true. And he remembered just how sane he had been.

One week ago he had been on the *Prize of Peril* stage, blinking in the spotlight, and Mike Terry had shaken his hand.

"Now, Mr. Raeder," Terry had said solemnly, "do you understand the rules of the game you are about to play?"

Raeder nodded.

"If you accept, Jim Raeder, you will be a *hunted man* for a week. *Killers* will follow you, Jim. *Trained* killers, men wanted by the law for other crimes, granted immunity for this single killing under the Voluntary Suicide Act. They will be trying to kill *you,* Jim. Do you understand?"

"I understand," Raeder said. He also understood the two hundred thousand dollars he would receive if he could live out the week.

"I ask you again, Jim Raeder. We force no man to play for stakes of death."

"I want to play," Raeder said.

Mike Terry turned to the audience. "Ladies and gentlemen, I have here a copy of an exhaustive psychological test which an impartial psychological testing firm made on Jim Raeder at our request. Copies will be sent to anyone who desires them for twenty-five cents to cover the cost of mailing. The test shows that Jim Raeder is sane, well-balanced, and fully responsible in every way." He turned to Raeder. "Do you still want to enter the contest, Jim?"

"Yes, I do."

"Very well!" cried Mike Terry. "Jim Raeder, meet your would-be killers!"

The Thompson gang moved on stage, booed by the audience.

"Look at them, folks," said Mike Terry, with undisguised contempt. "Just look at them! Antisocial, thoroughly vicious, completely amoral. These men have no code but the criminal's warped code, no honor but the honor of the cowardly hired killer. They are doomed men, doomed by our society which will not sanction their activities for long, fated to an early and unglamorous death."

The audience shouted enthusiastically.

"What have you to say, Claude Thompson?" Terry asked.

Claude, the spokesman of the Thompsons, stepped up to the microphone. He was a thin, clean-shaven man, conservatively dressed.

"I figure," Claude Thompson said hoarsely, "I figure we're no worse than anybody. I mean, like soldiers in a war, *they* kill. And look at the graft in government, and the unions. Everybody's got their graft."

That was Thompson's tenuous code. But how quickly, with what precision, Mike Terry destroyed the killer's rationalizations! Terry's questions pierced straight to the filthy soul of the man.

At the end of the interview Claude Thompson was perspiring, mopping his face with a silk handkerchief and casting quick glances at his men.

Mike Terry put a hand on Raeder's shoulder. "Here is the man who has agreed to become your victim—if you can catch him."

"We'll catch him," Thompson said, his confidence returning.

"Don't be too sure," said Terry. "Jim Raeder has fought wild bulls—now he battles jackals. He's an average man. He's *the people*—who mean ultimate doom to you and your kind."

"We'll get him," Thompson said.

"And one thing more," Terry said, very softly. "Jim Raeder does not stand alone. The folks of America are for him. Good Samaritans from all corners of our great nation stand ready to assist him. Unarmed, defenseless, Jim Raeder can count on the aid and goodheartedness of *the people,* whose representative he is. So don't be too sure, Claude Thompson! The average men are for Jim Raeder—and there are a lot of average men!"

Raeder thought about it, lying motionless in the underbrush. Yes, *the people* had helped him. But they had helped the killers, too.

A tremor ran through him. He had chosen, he reminded himself. He alone was responsible. The psychological test had proved that.

And yet, how responsible were the psychologists who had given him the test? How responsible was Mike Terry for offering a poor man so much money? Society had woven the noose and put it around his neck, and he was hanging himself with it, and calling it free will.

Whose fault?

"Aha!" someone cried.

Raeder looked up and saw a portly man standing near him. The man wore a loud tweed jacket. He had binoculars around his neck, and a cane in his hand.

"Mister," Raeder whispered, "please don't tell—"

"Hi!" shouted the portly man, pointing at Raeder with his cane. "Here he is!"

A madman, thought Raeder. The damned fool must think he's playing Hare and Hounds.

"Right over here!" the man screamed.

Cursing, Raeder sprang to his feet and began running. He came out of the ravine and saw a white building in the distance. He turned toward it. Behind him he could still hear the man.

"That way, over there. Look, you fools, can't you see him yet?"

The killers were shooting again. Raeder ran, stumbling over uneven ground, past three children playing in a tree house.

"Here he is!" the children screamed. "Here he is!"

Raeder groaned and ran on. He reached the steps of the building, and saw that it was a church.

As he opened the door, a bullet struck him behind the right kneecap.

He fell, and crawled inside the church.

The television set in his pocket was saying, *"What a finish, folks, what a finish! Raeder's been hit! He's been hit, folks, he's crawling now, he's in pain, but he hasn't given up! Not Jim Raeder!"*

Raeder lay in the aisle near the altar. He could hear a

child's eager voice saying, "He went in there, Mr. Thompson. Hurry, you can still catch him!"

Wasn't a church considered a sanctuary? Raeder wondered.

Then the door was flung open, and Raeder realized that the custom was no longer observed. He gathered himself together and crawled past the altar, out the back door of the church.

He was in an old graveyard. He crawled past crosses and stars, past slabs of marble and granite, past stone tombs and rude wooden markers. A bullet exploded on a tombstone near his head, showering him with fragments. He crawled to the edge of an open grave.

They had received him, he thought. All of those nice average normal people. Hadn't they said he was their representative? Hadn't they sworn to protect their own? But no, they loathed him. Why hadn't he seen it? Their hero was the cold, blank-eyed gunman, Thompson, Capone, Billy the Kid, Young Lochinvar, El Cid, Cuchulain, the man without human hopes or fears. They worshiped him, that dead, implacable, robot gunman, and lusted to feel his foot in their face.

Raeder tried to move, and slid helplessly into the open grave.

He lay on his back, looking at the blue sky. Presently a black silhouette loomed above him, blotting out the sky. Metal twinkled. The silhouette slowly took aim.

And Raeder gave up all hope forever. "WAIT, THOMPSON!" roared the amplified voice of Mike Terry.

The revolver wavered.

"*It is one second past five o'clock! The week is up!* JIM RAEDER HAS WON!"

There was a pandemonium of cheering from the studio audience.

The Thompson gang, gathered around the grave, looked sullen.

"*He's won, friends, he's won!*" Mike Terry cried. "*Look, look on your screen! The police have arrived, they're taking the Thompsons away from their victim—the victim they could not kill. And all this is thanks to* you, *Good Samaritans of America. Look, folks, tender hands are lifting Jim Raeder from the open grave that was his final refuge. Good*

Samaritan Janice Morrow is there. Could this be the beginning of a romance? Jim seems to have fainted, friends, they're giving him a stimulant. He's won two hundred thousand dollars! Now we'll have a few words from Jim Raeder!"

There was a short silence.

"That's odd," said Mike Terry. *"Folks, I'm afraid we can't hear from Jim just now. The doctors are examining him. Just one moment . . ."*

There was a silence. Mike Terry wiped his forehead and smiled.

"It's the strain, folks, the terrible strain. The doctor tells me . . . Well, folks, Jim Raeder is temporarily not himself. But it's only temporary! JBC is hiring the best psychiatrists and psychoanalysts in the country. We're going to do everything humanly possible for this gallant boy. And entirely at our own expense."

Mike Terry glanced at the studio clock. *"Well, it's about time to sign off, folks. Watch for the announcement of our next great thrill show. And don't worry, I'm sure that very soon we'll have Jim Raeder back with us."*

Mike Terry smiled, and winked at the audience. *"He's bound to get well, friends. After all, we're all pulling for him!"*

THE HANDLER
Damon Knight

"The Handler" was selected for the 5th *SF Annual* from *Rogue*, August, 1960.

WHEN THE BIG MAN CAME IN, there was a movement in the room like a lot of bird dogs pointing. Piano player quits pounding, the two singing drunks shut up, all the beautiful people with cocktails in their hands stop talking and laughing.

"Pete!" the nearest women shrilled, and he walked straight into the room, arms around two girls, hugging them tight. "How's my sweetheart? Susy, you look good enough to eat, but I had it for lunch. George, you pirate"—he let go both girls, grabbed a bald blushing little man and thumped him on the arm— "you were great, sweatheart, I mean it, really great. Now HEAR THIS!" he shouted, over all the voices that were clamoring Pete this, Pete that.

Somebody put a martini in his hand and he stood holding it, bronzed and tall in his dinner jacket, teeth gleaming white as his shirt cuffs. "We had a show!" he told them.

A shriek of agreement went up, a babble of did we have a *show* my God Pete listen a *show*—

He held up his hand. "It was a good show!"

Another shriek and babble.

"The sponsor kinda liked it—he just signed for another one in the fall!"

A shriek, a roar, people clapping, jumping up and down. The big man tried to say something else, but gave up, grinning, while men and women crowded up to him. They were all trying to shake his hand, talk in his ear, put their arms around him.

"I love ya *all!*" he shouted. "Now what do you say, let's live a little!"

The murmuring started again as people sorted themselves out. There was a clinking from the bar. "Jesus, Pete," a skinny pop-eyed little guy was saying, crouching in adoration, "when you dropped that fishbowl I thought I'd pee myself, honest to God—"

The big man let out a bark of happy laughter. "Yeah, I can still see the look on your face. And the fish, flopping all over the stage. So what can I *do,* I get down there on my knees—" The big man did so, bending over and staring at imaginary fish on the floor. "And I say, 'Well, fellows, back to the drawing board!' "

Screams of laughter as the big man stood up. The party was arranging itself around him in arcs of concentric circles, with people in the back standing on sofas and the piano bench so they could see. Somebody yelled, "Sing the goldfish song, Pete!"

Shouts of approval, please-do-Pete, the goldfish song.

"Okay, okay." Grinning, the big man sat on the arm of a chair and raised his glass. "And a vun, and a doo—vere's de moosic?" A scuffle at the piano bench. Somebody banged out a few chords. The big man made a comic face and sang, "Ohhh . . . how I wish . . . I was a little fish . . . and when I want some quail . . . I'd flap my little tail."

Laughter, the girls laughing louder than anybody and their red mouths farther open. One flushed blonde had her hand on the big man's knee, and another was sitting close behind him.

"But seriously—" the big man shouted. More laughter.

"No, seriously," he said in a vibrant voice as the room quieted, "I want to tell you in all seriousness I couldn't have done it alone. And incidentally I see we have some foreigners, litvaks and other members of the press here tonight, so I want to introduce all the important people. First of all, George here, the three-fingered band leader—and there isn't a guy in the world could have done what he did this afternoon—George, I love ya." He hugged the blushing little bald man.

"Next my real sweetheart, Ruthie, where are ya. Honey, you were the greatest, really perfect—I mean it, baby—" He kissed a dark girl in a red dress who cried a little and hid her face on his broad shoulder. "And Frank—" He

reached down and grabbed the skinny pop-eyed guy by the sleeve. "What can I tell you? A sweetheart?" The skinny guy was blinking, all choked up; the big man thumped him on the back. "Sol and Ernie and Mack, my writers, Shakespeare should have been so lucky—" One by one, they came up to shake the big man's hand as he called their names; the women kissed him and cried. "My stand-in," the big man was calling out, and "my caddy," and "now," he said, as the room quieted a little, people flushed and sore-throated with enthusiasm, "I want you to meet my handler."

The room fell silent. The big man looked thoughtful and startled, as if he had had a sudden pain. Then he stopped moving. He sat without breathing or blinking his eyes. After a moment there was a jerky motion behind him. The girl who was sitting on the arm of the chair got up and moved away. The big man's dinner jacket split open in the back, and a little man climbed out. He had a perspiring brown face under a shock of black hair. He was a very small man, almost a dwarf, stoop-shouldered and round-backed in a sweaty brown singlet and shorts. He climbed out of the cavity in the big man's body, and closed the dinner jacket carefully. The big man sat motionless and his face was doughy.

The little man got down, wetting his lips nervously. Hello, Fred, a few people said. "Hello," Fred called, waving his hand. He was about forty, with a big nose and big soft brown eyes. His voice was cracked and uncertain. "Well, we sure put on a show, didn't we?"

Sure did, Fred, they said politely. He wiped his brow with the back of his hand. "Hot in there," he explained, with an apologetic grin. Yes, I guess it must be Fred, they said. People around the outskirts of the crowd were beginning to turn away, form conversational groups; the hum of talk rose higher. "Say, Tim, I wonder if I could have something to drink," the little man said. "I don't like to leave him—you know—" He gestured toward the silent big man.

"Sure, Fred, what'll it be?"

"Oh—you know—a glass of beer?"

Tim brought him a beer in a pilsener glass and he drank

it thirstily, his brown eyes darting nervously from side to side. A lot of people were sitting down now; one or two were at the door leaving.

"Well," the little man said to a passing girl, "Ruthie, that was quite a moment there, when the fishbowl busted, wasn't it?"

"Huh? Excuse me, honey. I didn't hear you." She bent nearer.

"Oh—well, it don't matter. Nothing."

She patted him on the shoulder once, and took her hand away. "Well, excuse me, sweetie, I have to catch Robbins before he leaves." She went on toward the door.

The little man put his beer glass down and sat, twisting his knobby hands together. The bald man and the pop-eyed man were the only ones still sitting near him. An anxious smile flickered on his lips; he glanced at one face, then another. "Well," he began, "that's one show under our belts, huh, fellows, but I guess we got to start, you know, thinking about—"

"Listen, Fred," said the bald man seriously, leaning forward to touch him on the wrist, "why don't you get back inside?"

The little man looked at him for a moment with sad hound-dog eyes, then ducked his head, embarrassed. He stood up uncertainly, swallowed and said, "Well—" He climbed up on the chair behind the big man, opened the back of the dinner jacket and put his legs in one at a time. A few people were watching him, unsmiling. "Thought I'd take it easy a while," he said weakly, "but I guess—" He reached in and gripped something with both hands, then swung himself inside. His brown, uncertain face disappeared.

The big man blinked suddenly and stood up. "Well, *hey* there," he called, "what's a matter with this party anyway? Let's see some life, some action—" Faces were lighting up around him. People began to move in closer. "What I mean, let me hear that beat!"

The big man began clapping his hands rhythmically. The piano took it up. Other people began to clap. "What I mean, are we alive or just waiting for the wagon to pick us up? How's that again, can't *hear* you!" A roar of pleasure as he cupped his hand to his ear. "Well, come on,

let me hear it!" A louder roar. Pete, Pete; a gabble of voices. "I got nothing against Fred," said the bald man earnestly in the middle of the noise. "I mean for a square he's a nice guy." "Know what you mean," said the pop-eyed man, "I mean like he doesn't *mean* it." "Sure," said the bald man, "but, Jesus, that sweaty undershirt and all . . ." Then they both burst out laughing as the big man made a comic face, tongue lolling, eyes crossed. Pete, Pete, Pete; the room was really jumping; it was a great party, and everything was all right far into the night.

THE GOLEM
Avram Davidson

Avram Davidson is the author of nine books (plus one, *Joyleg*, in collaboration with Ward Moore) and editor of three, two of them being the annual collections of *The Best from Fantasy & Science Fiction*, representing his two years as editor of that magazine. His first crime story took first prize in the 1957 *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* contest, and in 1962 he edited a fact-crime collection, *Crimes and Chaos*.

The title story of his first collection of short stories, *Or All the Seas with Oysters*, won a "Hugo" in 1958, and was also included in the 4th *SF* Annual. (Two others, "Now Let Us Sleep" and "No Fire Burns" appeared in the 3rd and 5th Annuals.) His first hardcover collection, and first hardcover novel, *Bumberboom*, are both scheduled by Doubleday for this year.

Davidson says he "was born during the halcyon days of the Millard Filmore administration; he has one son, Ethan; and now lives at Mon Tsourice, the family plantation on Mauritius, where he raises dodoes for the export market." The *facts* are, he left Yonkers some time after his birth in 1923, for California, where he studied sheep raising and wrote scholarly articles until the publication of his first story, "My Boyfriend's Name is Jello", in 1954.

"The Golem" was his second story, in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, March, 1955; it is reprinted from the 1st SF Annual, and also appeared in *Or All the Seas with Oysters*.

■■■■

THE GRAY-FACED PERSON came along the street where old Mr. and Mrs. Gumbeiner lived. It was afternoon, it was autumn, the sun was warm and soothing to their ancient bones. Anyone who attended the movies in the twenties or the early thirties has seen that street a thousand times. Past these bungalows with their half-double roofs Edmund Lowe walked arm-in-arm with Leatrice Joy and Harold Lloyd was chased by Chinamen waving hatchets. Under these squamous palm trees Laurel kicked Hardy and Woolsey beat Wheeler upon the head with codfish. Across these pocket-handkerchief-sized lawns the juveniles of the Our Gang Comedies pursued one another and were pursued by angry fat men in golf knickers. On this same

street—or perhaps on some other one of five hundred streets exactly like it.

Mrs. Gumbeiner indicated the gray-faced person to her husband.

"You think maybe he's got something the matter?" she asked. "He walks kind of funny, to me."

"Walks like a *golem,*" Mr. Gumbeiner said indifferently.

The old woman was nettled.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "*I* think he walks like your cousin, Mendel."

The old man pursed his mouth angrily and chewed on his pipestem. The gray-faced person turned up the concrete path, walked up the steps to the porch, sat down in a chair. Old Mr. Gumbeiner ignored him. His wife stared at the stranger.

"Man comes in without a hello, goodby, or howareyou, sits himself down and right away he's at home. . . . The chair is comfortable?" she asked. "Would you like maybe a glass tea?"

She turned to her husband.

"Say something, Gumbeiner!" she demanded. "What are you, made of wood?"

The old man smiled a slow, wicked, triumphant smile.

"Why should *I* say anything?" he asked the air. "Who am I? Nothing, that's who."

The stranger spoke. His voice was harsh and monotonous. "When you learn who—or, rather, what—I am, the flesh will melt from your bones in terror." He bared porcelain teeth.

"Never mind about my bones!" the old woman cried. "You've got a lot of nerve talking about my bones!"

"You will quake with fear," said the stranger. Old Mrs. Gumbeiner said that she hoped he would live so long. She turned to her husband once again.

"Gumbeiner, when are you going to mow the lawn?"

"All mankind—" the stranger began.

"*Shah!* I'm talking to my husband. . . . He talks *eppis* kind of funny, Gumbeiner, no?"

"Probably a foreigner," Mr. Gumbeiner said, complacently.

"You think so?" Mrs. Gumbeiner glanced fleetingly at the stranger. "He's got a very bad color in his face, *nebbich.*

I suppose he came to California for his health."

"Disease, pain, sorrow, love, grief—all are nought to—"

Mr. Gumbeiner cut in on the stranger's statement.

"Gall bladder," the old man said. "Guinzburg down at the *shule* looked exactly the same before his operation. Two professors they had in for him, and a private nurse day and night."

"I am not a human being!" the stranger said loudly.

"Three thousand seven hundred fifty dollars it cost his son, Guinzburg told me. 'For you, Poppa, nothing is too expensive—only get well,' the son told him."

"I am not a human being!"

"Ai, is that a son for you!" the old woman said, rocking her head. "A heart of gold, pure gold." She looked at the stranger. "All right, all right, I heard you the first time. Gumbeiner! I asked you a question. When are you going to cut the lawn?"

"On Wednesday, *odder* maybe Thursday, comes the Japaneser to the neighborhood. To cut lawns is *his* profession. *My* profession is to be a glazier—retired."

"Between me and all mankind is an inevitable hatred," the stranger said. "When I tell you what I am, the flesh will melt—"

"You said, you said already," Mr. Gumbeiner interrupted.

"In Chicago where the winters were as cold and bitter as the Czar of Russia's heart," the old woman intoned, "you had strength to carry the frames with the glass together day in and day out. But in California with the golden sun to mow the lawn when your wife asks, for this you have no strength. Do I call in the Japaneser to cook for you supper?"

"Thirty years Professor Allardyce spent perfecting his theories. Electronics, neuronics—"

"Listen, how educated he talks," Mr. Gumbeiner said, admiringly. "Maybe he goes to the University here?"

"If he goes to the University, maybe he knows Bud?" his wife suggested.

"Probably they're in the same class and he came to see him about the homework, no?"

"Certainly he must be in the same class. How many classes are there? Five *in ganzen:* Bud showed me on his program card." She counted off on her fingers. "Television

Appreciation and Criticism, Small Boat Building, Social Adjustment, The American Dance . . . The American Dance—nu, Gumbeiner—"

"Contemporary Ceramics," her husband said, relishing the syllables. "A fine boy, Bud. A pleasure to have him for a boardner."

"After thirty years spent in these studies," the stranger, who had continued to speak unnoticed, went on, "he turned from the theoretical to the pragmatic. In ten years' time he had made the most titanic discovery in history: he made mankind, *all* mankind, superfluous: he made *me.*"

"What did Tillie write in her last letter?" asked the old man.

The old woman shrugged.

"What should she write? The same thing. Sidney was home from the Army, Naomi has a new boy friend—"

"*He made* ME!"

"Listen, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is," the old woman said; "maybe where you came from is different, but in *this* country you don't interrupt people the while they're talking. . . . Hey. Listen—what do you mean, he *made* you? What kind of talk is that?"

The stranger bared all his teeth again, exposing the too-pink gums.

"In his library, to which I had a more complete access after his sudden and as yet undiscovered death from entirely natural causes, I found a complete collection of stories about androids, from Shelley's *Frankenstein* through Capek's *R.U.R.* to Asimov's—"

"Frankenstein?" said the old man, with interest. "There used to be Frankenstein who had the soda-*wasser* place on Halstead Street: a Litvack, *nebbich.*"

"What are you talking?" Mrs. Gumbeiner demanded. "His name was Franken*thal,* and it wasn't on Halstead, it was on Roosevelt."

"—clearly shown that all mankind has an instinctive antipathy towards androids and there will be an inevitable struggle between them—"

"Of course, of course!" Old Mr. Gumbeiner clicked his teeth against his pipe. "I am always wrong, you are always right. How could you stand to be married to such a stupid person all this time?"

"I don't know," the old woman said. "Sometimes I wonder, myself. I think it must be his good looks." She began to laugh. Old Mr. Gumbeiner blinked, then began to smile, then took his wife's hand.

"Foolish old woman," the stranger said; "why do you laugh? Do you not know I have come to destroy you?"

"What!" old Mr. Gumbeiner shouted. "Close your mouth, you!" He darted from his chair and struck the stranger with the flat of his hand. The stranger's head struck against the porch pillar and bounced back.

"When you talk to my wife, talk respectable, you hear?"

Old Mrs. Gumbeiner, cheeks very pink, pushed her husband back in his chair. Then she leaned forward and examined the stranger's head. She clicked her tongue as she pulled aside the flap of gray, skin-like material.

"Gumbeiner, look! He's all springs and wires inside!"

"I *told* you he was a *golem,* but no, you wouldn't listen," the old man said.

"You said he *walked* like a *golem."*

"How could he walk like a *golem* unless he *was* one?"

"All right, all right. . . . You broke him, so now fix him."

"My grandfather, his light shines from Paradise, told me that when MoHaRaL—Moreynu Ha-Rav Löw—his memory for a blessing, made the *golem* in Prague, three hundred? four hundred years ago? he wrote on his forehead the Holy Name."

Smiling reminiscently, the old woman continued, "And the *golem* cut the rabbi's wood and brought his water and guarded the ghetto."

"And one time only he disobeyed the Rabbi Löw, and Rabbi Löw erased the *Shem Ha-Mephorash* from the *golem*'s forehead and the *golem* fell down like a dead one. And they put him up in the attic of the *shule* and he's still there today if the Communisten haven't sent him to Moscow. . . . This is not just a story," he said.

"*Avadda* not!" said the old woman.

"I myself have seen both the *shule* and the rabbi's grave," her husband said, conclusively.

"But I think this must be a different kind *golem,* Gumbeiner. See, on his forehead: nothing written."

"What's the matter, there's a law I can't write some-

thing there? Where is that lump clay Bud brought us from his class?"

The old man washed his hands, adjusted his little black skullcap, and slowly and carefully wrote four Hebrew letters on the gray forehead.

"Ezra the Scribe himself couldn't do better," the old woman said, admiringly. "Nothing happens," she observed, looking at the lifeless figure sprawled in the chair.

"Well, after all, am I Rabbi Löw?" her husband asked, deprecatingly. "No," he answered. He leaned over and examined the exposed mechanism. "This spring goes here . . . this wire comes with this one . . ." The figure moved. "But this one goes where? And this one?"

"Let be," said his wife. The figure sat up slowly and rolled its eyes loosely.

"Listen, Reb *Golem,*" the old man said, wagging his finger. "Pay attention to what I say—you understand?"

"Understand . . ."

"If you want to stay here, you got to do like Mr. Gumbeiner says."

"Do-like-Mr.-Gumbeiner-says . . ."

"*That's* the way I like to hear a *golem* talk. Malka, give here the mirror from the pocketbook. Look, you see your face? You see on the forehead, what's written? If you don't do like Mr. Gumbeiner says, he'll wipe out what's written and you'll be no more alive."

"No-more-alive . . ."

"*That's* right. Now, listen. Under the porch you'll find a lawnmower. Take it. And cut the lawn. Then come back. Go."

"Go . . ." The figure shambled down the stairs. Presently the sound of the lawnmower whirred through the quiet air in the street just like the street where Jackie Cooper shed huge tears on Wallace Beery's shirt and Chester Conklin rolled his eyes at Marie Dressler.

"So what will you write to Tillie?" old Mr. Gumbeiner asked.

"What should I write?" old Mrs. Gumbeiner shrugged. "I'll write that the weather is lovely out here and that we are both, Blessed be the Name, in good health."

The old man nodded his head slowly, and they sat together on the front porch in the warm afternoon sun.

THE SOUND SWEEP
J. G. Ballard

Six Ballard stories have appeared in the SF Annuals.

"Prima Belladonna" (2nd Annual) and "The Insane Ones" (the 8th) were also included in the 1962 collection, *Billenium*.

"The Terminal Beach" (in the 10th) was also the title story of two (only partly matching) collections: one from Berkley in 1964, and one in England (Gollancz), which also included "The Volcano Dances" and "The Drowned Giant" (both in the 11th). "Giant" (titled "Souvenir" in *Playboy*) also appeared in the first annual *Nebula Award Stories* (both 1966).

"The Sound Sweep", originally published in *Science Fantasy*, February, 1960, was reprinted in *The Voices of Time* (Berkley, 1962), and *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare* (Gollancz, 1963), as well as in the 5th SF Annual.

1

BY MIDNIGHT Madame Gioconda's headache had become intense. All day the derelict walls and ceiling of the sound stage had reverberated with the endless din of traffic accelerating across the mid-town flyover which arched fifty feet above the studio's roof, a frenzied hypomaniac babel of jostling horns, shrilling tires, plunging brakes and engines that hammered down the empty corridors and stairways to the sound stage on the second floor, making the faded air feel leaden and angry.

Exhausting but at least impersonal, these sounds Madame Gioconda could bear. At dusk, however, when the flyover quietened, they were overlaid by the mysterious clapping of her phantoms, the sourceless applause that rustled down onto the stage from the darkness around her,

at first a few scattered ripples from the front rows that soon spread to the entire auditorium, mounting to a tumultuous ovation in which she suddenly detected a note of sarcasm, a single shout of derision that drove a spear of pain through her forehead, followed by an uproar of boos and catcalls that filled the tortured air, driving her away toward her couch where she lay gasping helplessly until Mangon arrived at midnight, hurrying onto the stage with his sonovac.

Understanding her, he first concentrated on sweeping the walls and ceiling clean, draining away the heavy depressing underlayer of traffic noises. Carefully he ran the long snout of the sonovac over the ancient scenic flats (relics of her previous roles at the Metropolitan Opera House) which screened in Madame Gioconda's makeshift home—the great collapsing Byzantine bed *(Othello)* mounted against the microphone turret; the huge framed mirrors with their peeling silverscreen *(Orpheus)* stacked in one corner by the bandstand; the stove *(Trovatore)* set up on the program director's podium; the gilt-trimmed dressing table and wardrobe *(Figaro)* stuffed with newspaper and magazine cuttings. He swept them methodically, moving the sonovac's nozzle in long strokes, drawing out the dead residues of sound that had accumulated during the day.

By the time he finished the air was clear again, the atmosphere lightened, its overtones of fatigue and irritation dissipated. Gradually Madame Gioconda recovered. Sitting up weakly, she smiled wanly at Mangon. Mangon grinned back encouragingly, slipped the kettle onto the stove for Russian tea, sweetened by the usual phenobarbitone chaser, switched off the sonovac and indicated to her that he was going outside to empty it.

Down in the alley behind the studio he clipped the sonovac onto the intake manifold of the sound truck. The vacuum drained in a few seconds, but he waited a discretionary two or three minutes before returning, keeping up the pretense that Madame Gioconda's phantom audience was real. Of course the cylinder was always empty, containing only the usual daily detritus—the sounds of a door slam, a partition collapsing somewhere or the kettle whistling, a grunt or two, and later, when the headaches began, Ma-

dame Gioconda's pitiful moanings. The riotous applause, that would have lifted the roof off the Met, let alone a small radio station, the jeers and hoots of derision were, he knew, quite imaginary, figments of Madame Gioconda's world of fantasy, phantoms from the past of a once great prima donna who had been dropped by her public and had retreated in her imagination, each evening conjuring up a blissful dream of being once again applauded by a full house at the Metropolitan, a dream that guilt and resentment turned sour by midnight, inverting it into a nightmare of fiasco and failure.

Why she should torment herself was difficult to understand, but at least the nightmare kept Madame Gioconda just this side of sanity and Mangon, who revered and loved Madame Gioconda, would have been the last person in the world to disillusion her. Each evening, when he finished his calls for the day, he would drive his sound truck all the way over from the West Side to the abandoned radio station under the flyover at the deserted end of F Street, go through the pretense of sweeping Madame Gioconda's apartment on the stage of studio 2, charging no fee, make tea and listen to her reminiscences and plans for revenge, then see her asleep and tiptoe out, a wry but pleased smile on his youthful face.

He had been calling on Madame Gioconda for nearly a year, but what his precise role was in relation to her he had not yet decided. Oddly enough, although he was more or less indispensable now to the effective operation of her fantasy world, she showed little personal interest or affection for Mangon; but he assumed that this indifference was merely part of the autocratic personality of a world-famous prima donna, particularly one very conscious of the tradition, now alas meaningless, Melba—Callas—Gioconda. To serve at all was the privilege. In time, perhaps, Madame Gioconda might accord him some sign of favor.

Without him, certainly, her prognosis would have been poor. Lately the headaches had become more menacing, as she insisted that the applause was growing stormier, the boos and catcalls more vicious. Whatever the psychic mechanism generating the fantasy system, Mangon realized that ultimately she would need him at the studio all day,

holding back the enveloping tides of nightmare and insanity with dummy passes of the sonovac. Then, perhaps, when the dream crumbled, he would regret having helped her to delude herself. With luck though she might achieve her ambition of making a comeback. She had told him something of her scheme—a serpentine mixture of blackmail and bribery—and privately Mangon hoped to launch a plot of his own to return her to popularity. By now she had unfortunately reached the point where success alone could save her from disaster.

She was sitting up when he returned, propped back on an enormous gold lamé cushion, the single lamp at the foot of the couch throwing a semicircle of light onto the great flats which divided the sound stage from the auditorium. These were all from her last operatic role—*The Medium*—and represented a complete interior of the old spiritualist's séance chamber, the one coherent feature in Madame Gioconda's present existence. Surrounded by fragments from a dozen roles, even Madame Gioconda herself, Mangon reflected, seemed compounded of several separate identities. A tall regal figure, with full shapely shoulders and massive rib-cage, she had a large handsome face topped by a magnificent coiffure of rich blue-black hair—the exact prototype of the classical diva. She must have been almost fifty, yet her soft creamy complexion and small features were those of a child. The eyes, however, belied her. Large and watchful, slashed with mascara, they regarded the world around her balefully, narrowing even as Mangon approached. Her teeth too were bad, stained by tobacco and cheap cocaine. When she was roused, and her full violet lips curled with rage revealing the blackened hulks of her dentures and the acid flickering tongue, her mouth looked like a very vent of hell. Altogether she was a formidable woman.

As Mangon brought her tea she heaved herself up and made room for him by her feet among the debris of beads, loose diary pages, horoscopes and jeweled address books that littered the couch. Mangon sat down, surreptitiously noting the time (his first calls were at 9:30 the next morning and loss of sleep deadened his acute hearing), and prepared himself to listen to her for half an hour.

Suddenly she flinched, shrank back into the cushion and gestured agitatedly in the direction of the darkened bandstand.

"They're still clapping!" she shrieked. "For God's sake sweep them away, they're driving me insane. Oooohh . . ." she rasped theatrically, "over there, quickly . . . !"

Mangon leapt to his feet. He hurried over to the bandstand and carefully focused his ears on the tiers of seats and plywood music stands. They were all immaculately clean, well below the threshold at which embedded sounds began to radiate detectable echoes. He turned to the corner walls and ceiling. Listening very carefully he could just hear seven muted pads, the dull echoes of his footsteps across the floor. They faded and vanished, followed by a low threshing noise like blurred radio static—in fact Madame Gioconda's present tantrum. Mangon could almost distinguish the individual words, but repetition muffled them.

Madame Gioconda was still writhing about on the couch, evidently not to be easily placated, so Mangon climbed down off the stage and made his way through the auditorium to where he had left his sonovac by the door. The power lead was outside in the truck but he was sure Madame Gioconda would fail to notice.

For five minutes he worked away industriously, pretending to sweep the bandstand again, then put down the sonovac and returned to the couch.

Madame Gioconda emerged from the cushion, sounded the air carefully with two or three slow turns of the head, and smiled at him.

"Thank you, Mangon," she said silkily, her eyes watching him thoughtfully. "You've saved me again from my assassins. They've become so cunning recently, they can even hide from you."

Mangon smiled ruefully to himself at this last remark. So he had been a little too perfunctory earlier on; Madame Gioconda was keeping him up to the mark.

However, she seemed genuinely grateful. "Mangon, my dear," she reflected as she remade her face in the mirror of an enormous compact, painting on magnificent green eyes like a cobra's, "what would I do without you? How can I ever repay you for looking after me?"

The questions, whatever their sinister undertones (had he

detected them, Mangon would have been deeply shocked) were purely rhetorical, and all their conversations for that matter entirely one-sided. For Mangon was a mute. From the age of three, when his mother had savagely punched him in the throat to stop him crying, he had been stone dumb, his vocal cords irreparably damaged. In all their endless exchanges of midnight confidences, Mangon had contributed not a single spoken word.

His muteness, naturally, was part of the attraction he felt for Madame Gioconda. Both of them in a sense had lost their voices, he to a cruel mother, she to a fickle and unfaithful public. This bound them together, gave them a shared sense of life's injustice, though Mangon, like all innocents, viewed his misfortune without rancor. Both, too, were social outcasts. Rescued from his degenerate parents when he was four, Mangon had been brought up in a succession of state institutions, a solitary wounded child. His one talent had been his remarkable auditory powers, and at fourteen he was apprenticed to the Metropolitan Sonic Disposal Service. Regarded as little better than garbage collectors, the sound-sweeps were an outcast group of illiterates, mutes (the city authorities preferred these—their discretion could be relied upon) and social cripples who lived in a chain of isolated shacks on the edge of an old explosives plant in the sand dunes to the north of the city which served as the sonic dump.

Mangon had made no friends among the sound-sweeps, and Madame Gioconda was the first person in his life with whom he had been intimately involved. Apart from the pleasure of being able to help her, a considerable factor in Mangon's devotion was that until her decline she had represented (as to all mutes) the most painful possible reminder of his own voiceless condition, and that now he could at last come to terms with years of unconscious resentment.

This soon done, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to serving Madame Gioconda.

Inhaling moodily on a black cigarette clamped into a long jade holder, she was outlining her plans for a comeback. These had been maturing for several months and involved nothing less than persuading Hector LeGrande, chairman-in-chief of Video City, the huge corporation that transmitted a dozen TV and radio channels, into providing her

with a complete series of television spectaculars. Built around Madame Gioconda and lavishly dressed and orchestrated, they would spearhead the international revival of classical opera that was her unfading dream.

"La Scala, Covent Garden, the Met—what are they now?" she demanded angrily. "Bowling alleys! Can you believe, Mangon, that in those immortal theaters where I created my Tosca, my Butterfly, my Brünnhilde, they now have"—she spat out a gust of smoke—"beer and skittles!"

Mangon shook his head sympathetically. He pulled a pencil from his breast pocket and on the wrist-pad stitched to his left sleeve wrote: *Mr. LeGrande?*

Madame Gioconda read the note, let it fall to the floor.

"Hector? Those lawyers poison him. He's surrounded by them, I think they steal all my telegrams to him. Of course Hector had a complete breakdown on the spectaculars. Imagine, Mangon, what a scoop for him, a sensation! 'The great Gioconda will appear on television!' Not just some moronic bubblegum girl, but the Gioconda in person."

Exhausted by this vision Madame Gioconda sank back into her cushion, blowing smoke limply through the holder.

Mangon wrote: *Contract?*

Madame Gioconda frowned at the note, then pierced it with the glowing end of her cigarette.

"I am having a new contract drawn up. Not for the mere 300,000 I was prepared to take at first, not even 500,000. For each show I shall now demand precisely *one million* dollars. Nothing less! Hector will have to pay for ignoring me. Anyway, think of the publicity value of such a figure. Only a star could think of such vulgar extravagance. If he's short of cash he can sack all those lawyers. Or devalue the dollar, I don't mind."

Madame Gioconda hooted with pleasure at the prospect. Mangon nodded, then scribbled another message: *Be practical.*

Madame Gioconda ground out her cigarette. "You think I'm raving, don't you, Mangon? 'Fantastic dreams, million-dollar contracts, poor old fool.' But let me assure you that Hector will be only too eager to sign the contract. And I don't intend to rely solely on his good judgment as an impresario." She smirked archly to herself.

What else?

Madame Gioconda peered round the darkened stage, then lowered her eyes.

"You see, Mangon, Hector and I are very old friends. You know what I mean, of course?" She waited for Mangon, who had swept out a thousand honeymoon hotel suites, to nod and then continued, "How well I remember that first season at Bayreuth, when Hector and I . . ."

Mangon stared unhappily at his feet as Madame Gioconda outlined this latest venture into blackmail. Certainly she and LeGrande had been intimate friends—the cuttings scattered around the stage testified frankly to this. In fact, were it not for the small monthly check which LeGrande sent Madame Gioconda she would long previously have disintegrated. To turn on him and threaten ancient scandal (LeGrande was shortly to enter politics) was not only grotesque but extremely dangerous, for LeGrande was ruthless and unsentimental. Years earlier he had used Madame Gioconda as a stepping stone, reaping all the publicity he could from their affair, then abruptly kicking her away.

Mangon fretted. A solution to her predicament was hard to find. Brought about through no fault of her own, Madame Gioconda's decline was all the harder to bear. Since the introduction a few years earlier of ultrasonic music, the human voice—indeed, audible music of any type—had gone completely out of fashion. Ultrasonic music, employing a vastly greater range of octaves, chords and chromatic scales than perceptible to the human ear, provided a direct neural link between the sound stream and the auditory lobes, generating an apparently sourceless sensation of harmony, rhythm, cadence and melody uncontaminated by the noise and vibration of audible music. The rescoring of the classical repertoire allowed the ultrasonic audience the best of both worlds. The majestic rhythms of Beethoven, the popular melodies of Tchaikovsky, the complex fugal elaborations of Bach, the abstract images of Schoenberg—all these were raised in frequency above the threshold of conscious audibility. Not only did they become inaudible, but the original works were rescored for the much wider range of the ultrasonic orchestra, became richer in texture, more profound in theme, more sensitive, tender or lyrical as the ultrasonic arranger chose.

The first casualty in this change-over was the human voice. This alone of all instruments could not be rescored, because its sounds were produced by nonmechanical means which the neurophonic engineer could never hope, or bother, to duplicate.

The earliest ultrasonic recordings had met with resistance, even ridicule. Radio programs consisting of nothing but silence interrupted at half-hour intervals by commercial breaks seemed absurd. But gradually the public discovered that the silence was golden, that after leaving the radio switched to an ultrasonic channel for an hour or so a pleasant atmosphere of rhythm and melody seemed to generate itself spontaneously around them. When an announcer suddenly stated that an ultrasonic version of Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony* or Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* had just been played the listener identified the real source.

A second advantage of ultrasonic music was that its frequencies were so high they left no resonating residues in solid structures, and consequently there was no need to call in the sound-sweep. After an audible performance of most symphonic music, walls and furniture throbbed for days with disintegrating residues that made the air seem leaden and tumid, an entire room virtually uninhabitable.

An immediate result was the swift collapse of all but a few symphony orchestras and opera companies. Concert halls and opera houses closed overnight. In the age of noise the tranquilizing balms of silence began to be rediscovered.

But the final triumph of ultrasonic music had come with a second development—the short-playing record, spinning at 900 r.p.m., which condensed the 45 minutes of a Beethoven symphony to 20 seconds of playing time, the three hours of a Wagner opera to little more than two minutes. Compact and cheap, SP records sacrificed nothing to brevity. One 30-second SP record delivered as much neurophonic pleasure as a natural length recording, but with deeper penetration, greater total impact.

Ultrasonic SP records swept all others off the market. Sonic LP records became museum pieces—only a crank would choose to listen to an audible full-length version of *Siegfried* or the *Barber of Seville* when he could have both

wrapped up inaudibly inside the same five-minute package *and* appreciate their full musical value.

The heyday of Madame Gioconda was over. Unceremoniously left on the shelf, she had managed to survive for a few months vocalizing on radio commercials. Soon these too went ultrasonic. In a despairing act of revenge she bought out the radio station which fired her and made her home on one of the sound stages. Over the years the station became derelict and forgotten, its windows smashed, neon portico collapsing, aerials rusting. The huge eight-lane flyover built across it sealed it conclusively into the past.

Now Madame Gioconda proposed to win her way back at stiletto-point.

Mangon watched her impassively as she ranted on nastily in a cloud of purple cigarette smoke, a large seedy witch. The phenobarbitone was making her drowsy and her threats and ultimatums were becoming disjointed.

". . . memoirs too, don't forget, Hector. Frank exposure, no holes barred. I mean . . . damn, have to get a ghost. Hotel de Paris at Monte, lots of pictures. Oh, yes, I kept the photographs." She grubbed about on the couch, came up with a crumpled soap coupon and a supermarket pay slip. "Wait till those lawyers see them. Hector—" Suddenly she broke off, stared glassily at Mangon and sagged back.

Mangon waited until she was finally asleep, stood up and peered closely at her. She looked forlorn and desperate. He watched her reverently for a moment, then tiptoed to the rheostat mounted on the control panel behind the couch, damped down the lamp at Madame Gioconda's feet and left the stage.

He sealed the auditorium doors behind him, made his way down to the foyer and stepped out, sad but at the same time oddly exhilarated, into the cool midnight air. At last he accepted that he would have to act swiftly if he was to save Madame Gioconda.

2

Driving his sound truck into the city shortly after nine the next morning, Mangon decided to postpone his first call—

the weird Neo-Corbusier Episcopalian Oratory sandwiched among the office blocks in the downtown financial sector—and instead turned west on Mainway and across the park toward the white-faced apartment batteries which reared up above the trees and lakes along the north side.

The Oratory was a difficult and laborious job that would take him three hours of concentrated effort. The Dean had recently imported some rare 13th Century pediments from the Church of St. Francis at Assisi, beautiful sonic matrices rich with seven centuries of Gregorian chant, overlaid by the timeless tolling of the Angelus. Mounted into the altar they emanated an atmosphere resonant with litany and devotion, a mellow, deeply textured hymn that silently evoked the most sublime images of prayer and meditation.

But at 50,000 dollars each they also represented a terrifying hazard to the clumsy sound-sweep. Only two years earlier the entire north transept of Rheims Cathedral, rose window intact, purchased for a record 1,000,000 dollars and re-erected in the new Cathedral of St. Joseph at San Diego, had been drained of its priceless heritage of tonal inlays by a squad of illiterate sound-sweeps who had misread their instructions and accidentally swept the wrong wall.

Even the most conscientious sound-sweep was limited by his skill, and Mangon, with his auditory supersensitivity, was greatly in demand for his ability to sweep selectively, draining from the walls of the Oratory all extraneous and discordant noises—coughing, crying, the clatter of coins and mumble of prayer—leaving behind the chorales and liturgical chants which enhanced their devotional overtones. His skill alone would lengthen the life of the Assisi pediments by twenty years; without him they would soon become contaminated by the miscellaneous traffic of the congregation. Consequently he had no fears that the Dean would complain if he failed to appear as usual that morning.

Halfway along the north side of the park he swung off into the forecourt of a huge forty-story apartment block, a glittering white cliff ribbed by jutting balconies. Most of the apartments were Superlux duplexes occupied by show business people. No one was about, but as Mangon entered the hallway, sonovac in one hand, the marble walls and col-

umns buzzed softly with the echoing chatter of guests leaving parties four or five hours earlier.

In the elevator the residues were clearer—confident male tones, the sharp wheedling of querulous wives, soft negatives of amatory blondes, punctuated by countless repetitions of "dahling." Mangon ignored the echoes, which were almost inaudible, a dim insect hum. He grinned to himself as he rode up to the penthouse apartment; if Madame Gioconda had known his destination she would have strangled him on the spot.

Ray Alto, doyen of the ultrasonic composers and the man more than any other responsible for Madame Gioconda's decline, was one of Mangon's regular calls. Usually Mangon swept his apartment once a week, calling at three in the afternoon. Today, however, he wanted to make sure of finding Alto before he left for Video City, where he was a director of program music.

The houseboy let him in. He crossed the hall and made his way down the black glass staircase into the sunken lounge. Wide studio windows revealed an elegant panorama of park and midtown skyscrapers.

A white-slacked young man sitting on one of the long slab sofas—Paul Merrill, Alto's arranger—waved him back.

"Mangon, hold on to your dive breaks. I'm really on reheat this morning." He twirled the ultrasonic trumpet he was playing, a tangle of stops and valves from which half a dozen leads trailed off across the cushions to a cathode tube and tone generator at the other end of the sofa.

Mangon sat down quietly and Merrill clamped the mouthpiece to his lips. Watching the ray tube intently, where he could check the shape of the ultrasonic notes, he launched into a brisk allegretto sequence, then quickened and flicked out a series of brilliant arpeggios, stripping off high P and Q notes that danced across the cathode screen like frantic eels, fantastic glissandos that raced up twenty octaves in as many seconds, each note distinct and symmetrically exact, tripping off the tone generator in turn so that escalators of electronic chords interweaved the original scale, a multichannel melodic stream that crowded the cathode screen with exquisite, flickering patterns. The whole thing was inaudible, but the air around Mangon felt

vibrant and accelerated, charged with gaiety and sparkle, and he applauded generously when Merrill threw off a final dashing riff.

"Flight of the Bumble Bee," Merrill told him. He tossed the trumpet aside and switched off the cathode tube. He lay back and savored the glistening air for a moment. "Well, how are things?"

Just then the door from one of the bedrooms opened and Ray Alto appeared, a tall, thoughtful man of about forty, with thinning blond hair, wearing pale blue sunglasses over cool eyes.

"Hello, Mangon," he said, running a hand over Mangon's head. "You're early today. Full program?" Mangon nodded. "Don't let it get you down." Alto picked a dictaphone off one of the end tables, carried it over to an armchair. "Noise, noise, noise—the greatest single disease-vector of civilization. The whole world's rotting with it, yet all they can afford is a few people like Mangon fooling around with sonovacs. It's hard to believe that only a few years ago people completely failed to realize that sound left any residues."

"Are we any better?" Merrill asked. "This month's *Transonics* claims that eventually unswept sonic resonances will build up to a critical point where they'll literally start shaking buildings apart. The entire city will come down like Jericho."

"Babel," Alto corrected. "Okay, now, let's shut up. We'll be gone soon, Mangon. Buy him a drink would you, Paul."

Merrill brought Mangon a Coke from the bar, then wandered off. Alto flipped on the dictaphone, began to speak steadily into it. "Memo 7: Betty, when does the copyright on Stravinsky lapse? Memo 8: Betty, file melody for projected nocturne: L, L sharp, BB, Y flat, Q, VT, L, L sharp. Memo 9: Paul, the bottom three octaves of the ultra-tuba are within the audible spectrum of the canine ear—congrats on the SP of the *Anvil Chorus* last night; about three million dogs thought the roof had fallen in on them. Memo 10: Betty—" He broke off, put down the microphone. "Mangon, you look worried."

Mangon, who had been lost in reverie, pulled himself together and shook his head.

"Working too hard?" Alto pressed. He scrutinized Man-

gon suspiciously. "Are you still sitting up all night with that Gioconda woman?"

Embarrassed, Mangon lowered his eyes. His relationship with Alto was, obliquely, almost as close as that with Madame Gioconda. Although Alto was brusque and often irritable with Mangon, he took a sincere interest in his welfare. Possibly Mangon's muteness reminded him of the misanthropic motives behind his hatred of noise, made him feel indirectly responsible for the act of violence Mangon's mother had committed. Also, one artist to another, he respected Mangon's phenomenal auditory sensitivity.

"She'll exhaust you, Mangon, believe me." Alto knew how much the personal contact meant to Mangon and hesitated to be overcritical. "There's nothing you can do for her. Offering her sympathy merely fans her hopes for a comeback. She hasn't a chance."

Mangon frowned, wrote quickly on his wrist-pad: *She WILL sing again!*

Alto read the note pensively. Then, in a harder voice, he said, "She's using you for her own purposes, Mangon. At present you satisfy one whim of hers—the neurotic headaches and fantasy applause. God forbid what the next whim might be."

She is a great artist.

"She *was,*" Alto pointed out. "No more, though, sad as it is. I'm afraid that the times change."

Annoyed by this, Mangon gritted his teeth and tore off another sheet: *Entertainment, perhaps. Art, no!*

Alto accepted the rebuke silently; he reproved himself as much as Mangon did for selling out to Video City. In his four years there his output of original ultrasonic music consisted of little more than one nearly finished symphony—aptly titled *Opus Zero*—shortly to receive its first performance, a few nocturnes and one quartet. Most of his energies went into program music, prestige numbers for spectaculars and a mass of straight transcriptions of the classical repertoire. The last he particularly despised, fit work for Paul Merrill, but not for a responsible composer.

He added the sheet to the two in his left hand and asked, "Have you ever heard Madame Gioconda sing?"

Mangon's answer came back scornfully: *No! But you have. Please describe.*

Alto laughed shortly, tore up the sheets and walked across to the window.

"All right, Mangon, you've made your point. You're carrying a torch for art, doing your duty to one of the few perfect things the world has ever produced. I hope you're equal to the responsibility. La Gioconda might be quite a handful. Do you know that at one time the doors of Covent Garden, La Scala *and* the Met were closed to her? They said Callas had temperament, but she was a girl guide compared with Gioconda. Tell me, how is she? Eating enough?"

Mangon held up his Coke bottle.

"Snow? That's tough. But how does she afford it?" He glanced at his watch. "Dammit, I've got to leave. Clean this place out thoroughly, will you? It gives me a headache just listening to myself think."

He started to pick up the dictaphone but Mangon was scribbling rapidly on his pad: *Give Madame Gioconda a job.*

Alto read the note, then gave it back to Mangon, puzzled. "Where? In this apartment?" Mangon shook his head. "Do you mean at V.C.? *Singing?"* When Mangon began to nod vigorously he looked up at the ceiling with a despairing groan. "For heaven's sake, Mangon, the last vocalist sang at Video City over ten years ago. No audience would stand for it. If I even suggested such an idea they'd tear my contract into a thousand pieces." He shuddered, only half-playfully. "I don't know about you, Mangon, but I've got my ulcer to support."

He made his way to the staircase, but Mangon intercepted him, pencil flashing across the wrist-pad: *Please. Madame Gioconda will start blackmail soon. She is desperate. Must sing again. Could arrange make-believe program in research studios. Closed circuit.*

Alto folded the note carefully, left the dictaphone on the staircase and walked slowly back to the window.

"This blackmail. Are you absolutely sure? Who, though, do you know?" Mangon nodded, but looked away. "Okay, I won't press you. LeGrande, probably, eh?" Mangon turned round in surprise, then gave an elaborate parody of a shrug.

"Hector LeGrande. Obvious guess. But there are no secrets there, it's all on open file. I suppose she's just threat-

ening to make enough of an exhibition of herself to block his governorship." Alto pursed his lips. He loathed LeGrande, not merely for having bribed him into a way of life he could never renounce, but also because, once having exploited his weakness, LeGrande never hesitated to remind Alto of it, treating him and his music with contempt. If Madame Gioconda's blackmail had the slightest hope of success he would have been only too happy, but he knew LeGrande would destroy her, probably take Mangon too.

Suddenly he felt a paradoxical sense of loyalty for Madame Gioconda. He looked at Mangon, waiting patiently, big spaniel eyes wide with hope.

"The idea of a closed circuit program is insane. Even if we went to all the trouble of staging it she wouldn't be satisfied. She doesn't want to sing, she wants to be a *star.* It's the trappings of stardom she misses—the cheering galleries, the piles of bouquets, the greenroom parties. I could arrange a half-hour session on closed circuit with some trainee technicians—a few straight selections from *Tosca* and *Butterfly,* say, with even a sonic piano accompaniment, I'd be glad to play it myself—but I can't provide the gossip columns and theater reviews. What would happen when she found out?"

She wants to SING.

Alto reached out and patted Mangon on the shoulder. "Good for you. All right, then, I'll think about it. God knows how we'd arrange it. We'd have to tell her that she'll be making a surprise guest appearance on one of the big shows—that'll explain the absence of any program announcement and we'll be able to keep her in an isolated studio. Stress the importance of surprise, to prevent her from contacting the newspapers . . . Where are you going?"

Mangon reached the staircase, picked up the dictaphone and returned to Alto with it. He grinned happily, his jaw working wildly as he struggled to speak. Strangled sounds quavered in his throat.

Touched, Alto turned away from him and sat down. "Okay, Mangon," he snapped brusquely, "you can get on with your job. Remember, I haven't promised anything." He flicked on the dictaphone, then began: "Memo 11: Ray . . ."

3

It was just after four o'clock when Mangon braked the sound truck in the alley behind the derelict station. Overhead the traffic hammered along the flyover, dinning down into the cobbled walls. He had been trying to finish his rounds early enough to bring Madame Gioconda the big news before her headaches began. He had swept out the Oratory in an hour, whirled through a couple of movie theaters, the Museum of Abstract Art, and a dozen private calls in half his usual time, driven by his almost overwhelming joy at having won a promise of help from Ray Alto.

He ran through the foyer, already fumbling at his wrist-pad. For the first time in many years he really regretted his muteness, his inability to tell Madame Gioconda orally of his triumph that morning.

Studio 2 was in darkness, the rows of seats and litter of old programs and ice cream cartons reflected dimly in the single light masked by the tall flats. His feet slipped in some shattered plaster fallen from the ceiling and he was out of breath when he clambered up onto the stage and swung round the nearest flat.

Madame Gioconda had gone!

The stage was deserted, the couch a rumpled mess, a clutter of cold saucepans on the stove. The wardrobe door was open, dresses wrenched outwards off their hangers.

For a moment Mangon panicked, unable to visualize why she should have left, immediately assuming that she had discovered his plot with Alto.

Then he realized that never before had he visited the studio until midnight at the earliest, and that Madame Gioconda had merely gone out to the supermarket. He smiled at his own stupidity and sat down on the couch to wait for her, sighing with relief.

Suddenly the words struck him like the blows of a pole-ax!

As vivid as if they had been daubed in letters ten feet deep, they leapt out from the walls, nearly deafening him with their force.

"You grotesque old witch, you must be insane! You ever

threaten me again and I'll have you destroyed! LISTEN, you pathetic—"

Mangon spun round helplessly, trying to screen his ears. The words must have been hurled out in a paroxysm of abuse, they were only an hour old, vicious sonic scars slashed across the immaculately swept walls.

His first thought was to rush out for the sonovac and sweep the walls clear before Madame Gioconda returned. Then it dawned on him that she had already heard the original of the echoes—in the background he could just detect the muffled rhythms and intonations of her voice.

All too exactly, he could identify the man's voice.

He had heard it many times before, raging in the same ruthless tirades, when, deputizing for one of the sound-sweeps, he had swept out the main board room at Video City.

Hector LeGrande! So Madame Gioconda had been more desperate than he thought.

The bottom drawer of the dressing table lay on the floor, its contents upended. Propped against the mirror was an old silver portrait frame, dull and verdigrised, some cotton wool and a tin of cleansing fluid next to it. The photograph was one of LeGrande, taken twenty years earlier. She must have known LeGrande was coming and had searched out the old portrait, probably regretting the threat of blackmail.

But the sentiment had not been shared.

Mangon walked round the stage, his heart knotting with rage, filling his ears with LeGrande's taunts. He picked up the portrait, pressed it between his palms, and suddenly smashed it across the edge of the dressing table.

"Mangon!"

The cry riveted him to the air. He dropped what was left of the frame, saw Madame Gioconda step quietly from behind one of the flats.

"Mangon, please," she protested gently. "You frighten me." She sidled past him toward the bed, dismantling an enormous purple hat. "And do clean up all that glass, or I shall cut my feet."

She spoke drowsily and moved in a relaxed, sluggish way that Mangon first assumed indicated acute shock. Then

she drew from her handbag six white vials and lined them up carefully on the bedside table. These were her favorite confectionery—so LeGrande had sweetened the pill with another check. Mangon began to scoop the glass together with his feet, at the same time trying to collect his wits. The sounds of LeGrande's abuse dinned the air, and he broke away and ran off to fetch the sonovac.

Madame Gioconda was sitting on the edge of the bed when he returned, dreamily dusting a small bottle of bourbon which had followed the cocaine vials out of the handbag. She hummed to herself melodically and stroked one of the feathers in her hat.

"Mangon," she called when he had almost finished. "Come here."

Mangon put down the sonovac and went across to her.

She looked up at him, her eyes suddenly very steady. "Mangon, why did you break Hector's picture?" She held up a piece of the frame. "Tell me."

Mangon hesitated, then scribbled on his pad: *I am sorry. I adore you very much. He said such foul things to you.*

Madame Gioconda glanced at the note, then gazed back thoughtfully at Mangon. "Were you hiding here when Hector came?"

Mangon shook his head categorically. He started to write on his pad but Madame Gioconda restrained him.

"That's all right, dear. I thought not." She looked around the stage for a moment, listening carefully. "Mangon, when you came in could you hear what Mr. LeGrande said?"

Mangon nodded. His eyes flickered to the obscene phrases on the walls and he began to frown. He still felt LeGrande's presence and his attempt to humiliate Madame Gioconda.

Madame Gioconda pointed around them. "And you can actually hear what he said even now? How remarkable. Mangon, you have a wondrous talent."

I am sorry you have to suffer so much.

Madame Gioconda smiled at this. "We all have our crosses to bear. I have a feeling you may be able to lighten mine considerably." She patted the bed beside her. "Do sit down, you must be tired." When he was settled she went on. "I'm very interested, Mangon. Do you mean you can

distinguish entire phrases and sentences in the sounds you sweep? You can hear complete conversations hours after they have taken place?"

Something about Madame Gioconda's curiosity made Mangon hesitate. His talent, so far as he knew, was unique, and he was not so naïve as to fail to appreciate its potentialities. It had developed in his late adolescence and so far he had resisted any temptation to abuse it. He had never revealed the talent to anyone, knowing that if he did his days as a sound-sweep would be over.

Madame Gioconda was watching him, an expectant smile on her lips. Her thoughts, of course, were solely of revenge. Mangon listened again to the walls, focused on the abuse screaming out into the air. *Not complete conversations. Long fragments, up to twenty syllables. Depending on resonances and matrix. Tell no one. I will help you have revenge on LeGrande.*

Madame Gioconda squeezed Mangon's hand. She was about to reach for the bourbon bottle when Mangon suddenly remembered the point of his visit. He leapt off the bed and started frantically scribbling on his wrist-pad.

He tore off the first sheet and pressed it into her startled hands, then filled three more, describing his encounter with the musical director at V.C., the latter's interest in Madame Gioconda and the conditional promise to arrange her guest appearance. In view of LeGrande's hostility he stressed the need for absolute secrecy.

He waited happily while Madame Gioconda read quickly through the notes, tracing out Mangon's childlike script with a long scarlet fingernail. When she finished, he nodded his head rapidly and gestured triumphantly in the air.

Bemused, Madame Gioconda gazed uncomprehendingly at the notes. Then she reached out and pulled Mangon to her, taking his big faunlike head in her jeweled hands and pressing it to her lap.

"My dear child, how much I need you. You must never leave me now."

As she stroked Mangon's hair her eyes roved questingly around the walls.

The miracle happened shortly before eleven o'clock the next morning.

After breakfast, sprawled across Madame Gioconda's bed with her scrapbooks, an old gramophone salvaged by Mangon from one of the studios playing operatic selections, they had decided to drive out to the stockades—the sound-sweeps left for the city at nine and they would be able to examine the sonic dumps unmolested. Having spent so much time with Madame Gioconda and immersed himself so deeply in her world, Mangon was eager now to introduce Madame Gioconda to his. The stockades, bleak though they might be, were all he had to show her.

For Mangon, Madame Gioconda had now become the entire universe, a source of certainty and wonder as potent as the sun. Behind him his past life fell away like the discarded chrysalis of a brilliant butterfly, the gray years of his childhood at the orphanage dissolving into the magical kaleidoscope that revolved around him. As she talked and murmured affectionately to him, the drab flats and props in the studio seemed as brightly colored and meaningful as the landscape of a mescaline fantasy, the air tingling with a thousand vivid echoes of her voice.

They set off down F Street at ten, soon left behind the dingy warehouses and abandoned tenements that had enclosed Madame Gioconda for so long. Squeezed together in the driving cab of the sound truck they looked an incongruous pair—the gangling Mangon, in zip-fronted yellow plastic jacket and yellow peaked cap, at the wheel, dwarfed by the vast flamboyant Madame Gioconda, wearing a parrot-green cartwheel hat and veil, her huge creamy breast glittering with pearls, gold stars and jeweled crescents, a small selection of the orders that had showered upon her in her heyday.

She had breakfasted well, on one of the vials and a tooth glass of bourbon. As they left the city she gazed out amiably at the fields stretching away from the highway, and trilled out a light recitative from *Figaro*.

Mangon listened to her happily, glad to see her in such good form. Determined to spend every possible minute with Madame Gioconda, he had decided to abandon his calls for the day, if not for the next week and month. With her he at last felt completely secure. The pressure of her hand and the warm swell of her shoulder made him feel

confident and invigorated, all the more proud that he was able to help her back to fame.

He tapped on the windshield as they swung off the highway onto the narrow dirt track that led toward the stockades. Here and there among the dunes they could see the low ruined outbuildings of the old explosives plant, the white galvanized iron roof of one of the sound-sweeps' cabins. Desolate and unfrequented, the dunes ran on for miles. They passed the remains of a gateway that had collapsed to one side of the road; originally a continuous fence ringed the stockade, but no one had any reason for wanting to penetrate it. A place of strange echoes and festering silences, overhung by a gloomy miasma of a million compacted sounds, it remained remote and haunted, the graveyard of countless private babels.

The first of the sonic dumps appeared two or three hundred yards away on their right. This was reserved for aircraft sounds swept from the city's streets and municipal buildings, and was a tightly packed collection of sound-absorbent baffles covering several acres. The baffles were slightly larger than those in the other stockades; twenty feet high, and fifteen wide, each supported by heavy wooden props, they faced each other in a random labyrinth of alleyways, like a store lot of advertisement hoardings. Only the top two or three feet were visible above the dunes, but the changed air hit Mangon like a hammer, a pounding niagara of airliners blaring down the glideway, the piercing whistle of jets jockeying at take-off, the ceaseless mind-sapping roar that hangs like a vast umbrella over any metropolitan complex.

All around, odd sounds shaken loose from the stockades were beginning to reach them. Over the entire area, fed from the dumps below, hung an unbroken phonic high, invisible but nonetheless as tangible and menacing as an enormous black thundercloud. Occasionally, when supersaturation was reached after one of the summer holiday periods, the sonic pressure fields would split and discharge, venting back into the stockades a nightmarish cataract of noise, raining onto the sound-sweeps not only the howling of cats and dogs, but the multilunged tumult of cars, express trains, fairgrounds and aircraft, the cacophonic *musique concrète* of civilization.

To Mangon the sounds reaching them, though scaled higher in the register, were still distinct, but Madame Gioconda could hear nothing and felt only an overpowering sense of depression and irritation. The air seemed to grate and rasp. Mangon noticed her beginning to frown and hold her hand to her forehead. He wound up his window and indicated to her to do the same. He switched on the sonovac mounted under the dashboard and let it drain the discordancies out of the sealed cabin.

Madame Gioconda relaxed in the sudden blissful silence. A little farther on, when they passed another stockade set closer to the road, she turned to Mangon and began to say something to him.

Suddenly she jerked violently in alarm, her hat toppling. Her voice had frozen! Her mouth and lips moved frantically, but no sounds emerged. For a moment she was paralyzed. Clutching her throat desperately, she filled her lungs and screamed.

A faint squeak piped out of her cavernous throat, and Mangon swung round in alarm to see her gibbering apoplectically, pointing helplessly to her throat.

He stared at her bewildered, then doubled over the wheel in a convulsion of silent laughter, slapping his thigh and thumping the dashboard. He pointed to the sonovac, then reached down and turned up the volume.

". . . aaauuuoooh," Madame Gioconda heard herself groan. She grasped her hat and secured it. "Mangon, what a dirty trick, you should have warned me."

Mangon grinned. The discordant sounds coming from the stockades began to fill the cabin again, and he turned down the volume. Gleefully, he scribbled on his wrist-pad: *Now you know what it is like!*

Madame Gioconda opened her mouth to reply, then stopped in time, hiccupped and took his arm affectionately.

4

Mangon slowed down as they approached a side road. Two hundred yards away on their left a small pink-washed cabin stood on a dune overlooking one of the stockades. They drove up to it, turned into a circular concrete apron below the cabin and backed up against one of the unload-

ing bays, a battery of red-painted hydrants equipped with manifold gauges and release pipes running off into the stockade. This was only twenty feet away at its nearest point, a forest of door-shaped baffles facing each other in winding corridors, like a set from a surrealist film.

As she climbed down from the truck Madame Gioconda expected the same massive wave of depression and overload that she had felt from the stockade of aircraft noises, but instead the air seemed brittle and frenetic, darting with sudden flashes of tension and exhilaration.

As they walked up to the cabin Mangon explained: *Party noises—company for me.*

The twenty or thirty baffles nearest the cabin he reserved for these screened him from the miscellaneous chatter that filled the rest of the stockade. When he woke in the mornings he would listen to the laughter and small talk, enjoy the gossip and wisecracks as much as if he had been at the parties himself.

The cabin was a single room with a large window overlooking the stockade, well insulated from the hubbub below. Madame Gioconda showed only a cursory interest in Mangon's meager belongings, and after a few general remarks came to the point and went over to the window. She opened it slightly, listened experimentally to the stream of atmospheric shifts that crowded past her.

She pointed to the cabin on the far side of the stockade. "Mangon, whose is that?"

Gallagher's. My partner. He sweeps City Hall, University, V.C., big mansions on 5th and A. Working now.

Madame Gioconda nodded and surveyed the stockade with interest. "How fascinating. It's like a zoo. All that talk, talk, talk. And *you* can hear it all." She snapped back her bracelets with swift decisive flicks of the wrist.

Mangon sat down on the bed. The cabin seemed small and dingy, and he was saddened by Madame Gioconda's disinterest. Having brought her all the way out to the dumps he wondered how he was going to keep her amused. Fortunately the stockade intrigued her. When she suggested a stroll through it, he was only too glad to oblige.

Down at the unloading bay he demonstrated how he emptied the tanker, clipping the exhaust leads to the hy-

drant, regulating the pressure through the manifold and then pumping the sound away into the stockade.

Most of the stockade was in a continuous state of uproar, sounding something like a crowd in a football stadium, and as he led her out among the baffles he picked their way carefully through the quieter aisles. Around them voices chattered and whined fretfully, fragments of conversation drifted aimlessly over the air. Somewhere a woman pleaded in thin nervous tones, a man grumbled to himself, another swore angrily, a baby bellowed. Behind it all was the steady background murmur of countless TV programs, the easy patter of announcers, the endless monotones of race-track commentators, the shrieking audiences of quiz shows, all pitched an octave up the scale so that they sounded an eerie parody of themselves.

A shot rang out in the next aisle, followed by screams and shouting. Although she heard nothing, the pressure pulse made Madame Gioconda stop.

"Mangon, wait. Don't be in so much of hurry. Tell me what they're saying."

Mangon selected a baffle and listened carefully. The sounds appeared to come from an apartment over a launderette. A battery of washing machines chuntered to themselves, a cash register slammed interminably, there was a dim almost subthreshold echo of a 60-cycle hum from an SP record player.

He shook his head, waved Madame Gioconda on.

"Mangon, what did they *say?*" she pestered him. He stopped again, sharpened his ears and waited. This time he was more lucky, an overemotional female voice was gasping, ". . . but if he finds you here he'll kill you, he'll kill us both, what shall we do . . ." He started to scribble down this outpouring, Madame Gioconda craning breathlessly over his shoulder, then recognized its source and screwed up the note.

"Mangon, for heaven's sake, what was it? Don't throw it away! Tell me!" She tried to climb under the wooden superstructure of the baffle to recover the note, but Mangon restrained her and quickly scribbled another message: *Adam and Eve. Sorry.*

"What, the film? Oh, how ridiculous! Well, come on, try again."

Eager to make amends, Mangon picked the next baffle, one of a group serving the staff married quarters of the University. Always a difficult job to keep clean, he struck paydirt almost at once.

". . . my God, there's Bartók all over the place, that damned Steiner woman, I'll swear she's sleeping with her . . ."

Mangon took it all down, passing the sheets to Madame Gioconda as soon as he covered them. Squinting hard at his crabbed handwriting, she gobbled them eagerly, disappointed when, after half a dozen, he lost the thread and stopped.

"Go on, Mangon, what's the matter?" She let the notes fall to the ground. "Difficult, isn't it? We'll have to teach you shorthand."

They reached the baffles Mangon had just filled from the previous day's rounds. Listening carefully he heard Paul Merrill's voice: ". . . month's *Transonics* claims that . . . the entire city will come down like Jericho."

He wondered if he could persuade Madame Gioconda to wait for fifteen minutes, when he would be able to repeat a few carefully edited fragments from Alto's promise to arrange her guest appearance, but she seemed eager to move deeper into the stockade.

"You said your friend Gallagher sweeps out Video City, Mangon. Where would that be?"

Hector LeGrande. Of course, Mangon realized, why had he been so obtuse. This was the chance to pay the man back.

He pointed to an area a few aisles away. They climbed between the baffles, Mangon helping Madame Gioconda over the beams and props, steering her full skirt and wide hat brim away from splinters and rusted metalwork.

The task of finding LeGrande was simple. Even before the baffles were in sight Mangon could hear the hard unyielding bite of the tycoon's voice, dominating every other sound from the Video City area. Gallagher in fact swept only the senior dozen or so executive suites at V.C., chiefly to relieve their occupants of the distasteful echoes of LeGrande's voice.

Mangon steered their way among these, searching for

LeGrande's master suite, where anything of a really confidential nature took place.

There were about twenty baffles, throwing off an unending chorus of "Yes, H. L.," "Thanks, H. L.," "Brilliant, H. L." Two or three seemed strangely quiet, and he drew Madame Gioconda over to them.

This was LeGrande with his personal secretary and PA. He took out his pencil and focused carefully.

". . . of Third National Bank, transfer two million to private holding and threatened claim for stock depreciation . . . redraft escape clauses, including nonliability purchase benefits . . . "

Madame Gioconda tapped his arm but he gestured her away. Most of the baffle appeared to be taken up by dubious financial dealings, but nothing that would really hurt LeGrande if revealed.

Then he heard—

". . . Bermuda Hilton. Private Island, with anchorage, have the beach cleaned up, last time the water was full of fish. . . . I don't care, poison them, hang some nets out. . . . Imogene will fly in from Idlewild as Mrs. Edna Burgess, warn customs to stay away. . . ."

". . . call Cartier's, something for the Contessa, 17 carats say, ceiling of ten thousand. No, make it eight thousand. . . ."

". . . hat-check girl at Tropicabana. Usual dossier . . ."

Mangon scribbled furiously, but LeGrande was speaking at rapid dictation speed and he could get down only a few fragments. Madame Gioconda barely deciphered his handwriting, and became more and more frustrated as her appetite was whetted. Finally she flung away the notes in a fury of exasperation.

"This is absurd, you're missing everything!" she cried. She pounded on one of the baffles, then broke down and began to sob angrily. "Oh, God, God, *God,* how ridiculous! Help me, I'm going insane. . . ."

Mangon hurried across to her, put his arms round her shoulders to support her. She pushed him away irritably, railing at herself to discharge her impatience. "It's useless, Mangon, it's stupid of me, I was a fool—"

"STOP!"

The cry split the air like the blade of a guillotine.

They both straightened, stared at each other blankly. Mangon put his fingers slowly to his lips, then reached out tremulously and put his hands in Madame Gioconda's. Somewhere within him a tremendous tension had begun to dissolve.

"Stop," he said again in a rough but quiet voice. "Don't cry. I'll help you."

Madame Gioconda gaped at him with amazement. Then she let out a tremendous whoop of triumph.

"Mangon, you can talk! You've got your voice back! It's absolutely astounding! Say something, quickly, for heaven's sake!"

Mangon felt his mouth again, ran his fingers rapidly over his throat. He began to tremble with excitement, his face brightened, he jumped up and down like a child.

"I can talk," he repeated wonderingly. His voice was gruff, then seesawed into a treble. "I can talk," he said louder, controlling its pitch. "I can talk, I can talk, *I can talk!*" He flung his head back, let out an ear-shattering shout. "I CAN TALK! HEAR ME!" He ripped the wrist-pad off his sleeve, hurled it away over the baffles.

Madame Gioconda backed away, laughing agreeably. "We can hear you, Mangon. Dear me, how sweet." She watched Mangon thoughtfully as he cavorted happily in the narrow interval between the aisles. "Now don't tire yourself out or you'll lose it again."

Mangon danced over to her, seized her shoulders and squeezed them tightly. He suddenly realized that he knew no diminutive or Christian name for her.

"Madame Gioconda," he said earnestly, stumbling over the syllables, the words that were so simple yet so enormously complex to pronounce. "You gave me back my voice. Anything you want—" He broke off, stuttering happily, laughing through his tears. Suddenly he buried his head in her shoulder, exhausted by his discovery, and cried gratefully, "It's a *wonderful* voice."

Madame Gioconda steadied him maternally. "Yes, Mangon," she said, her eyes on the discarded notes lying in the dust. "You've got a wonderful voice, all right." Sotto voce, she added, "But your hearing is even more wonderful."

Paul Merrill switched off the SP player, sat down on the

arm of the sofa and watched Mangon quizzically.

"Strange. You know, my guess is that it was psychosomatic."

Mangon grinned. "Psychosemantic," he repeated, garbling the word half-deliberately. "Clever. You can do amazing things with words. They help to crystallize the truth."

Merrill groaned playfully. "God, you sit there, you drink your Coke, you philosophize. Don't you realize you're supposed to stand quietly in a corner, positively dumb with gratitude? Now you're even ramming your puns down my throat. Never mind, tell me again how it happened."

"Once a pun a time—" Mangon ducked the magazine Merrill flung at him, let out a loud "Olee!"

For the last two weeks he had been *en fête.*

Every day he and Madame Gioconda followed the same routine; after breakfast at the studio they drove out to the stockade, spent two or three hours compiling their confidential file on LeGrande, lunched at the cabin and then drove back to the city, Mangon going off on his rounds while Madame Gioconda slept until he returned shortly before midnight. For Mangon their existence was idyllic; not only was he rediscovering himself in terms of the complex spectra and patterns of speech—a completely new category of existence—but at the same time his relationship with Madame Gioconda revealed areas of sympathy, affection and understanding that he had never previously seen. If he sometimes felt that he was too preoccupied with his side of their relationship and the extraordinary benefits it had brought him, at least Madame Gioconda had been equally well served. Her headaches and mysterious phantoms had gone, she had cleaned up the studio and begun to salvage a little dignity and self-confidence, which made her single-minded sense of ambition seem less obsessive. Psychologically, she needed Mangon less now than he needed her, and he was sensible to restrain his high spirits and give her plenty of attention. During the first week Mangon's incessant chatter had been rather wearing, and once, on their way to the stockade, she had switched on the sonovac in the driving cab and left Mangon mouthing silently at the air like a stranded fish. He had taken the hint.

"What about the sound-sweeping?" Merrill asked. "Will you give it up?"

Mangon shrugged. "It's my talent, but living at the stockade, let in at back doors, cleaning up the verbal garbage—it's a degraded job. I want to help Madame Gioconda. She will need a secretary when she starts to go on tour."

Merrill shook his head warily. "You're awfully sure there's going to be a sonic revival, Mangon. Every sign is against it."

"They have not heard Madame Gioconda sing. Believe me, I know the power and wonder of the human voice. Ultrasonic music is great for atmosphere, but it has no content. It can't express ideas, only emotions."

"What happened to that closed circuit program you and Ray were going to put on for her?"

"It—fell through," Mangon lied. The circuits Madame Gioconda would perform on would be open to the world. He had told them nothing of the visits to the stockade, of his power to read the baffles, of the accumulating file on LeGrande. Soon Madame Gioconda would strike.

Above them in the hallway a door slammed, someone stormed through into the apartment in a tempest, kicking a chair against a wall. It was Alto. He raced down the staircase into the lounge, jaw tense, fingers flexing angrily.

"Paul, don't interrupt me until I've finished," he snapped, racing past without looking at them. "You'll be out of a job, but I warn you, if you don't back me up one hundred per cent I'll shoot you. That goes for you too, Mangon, I need you in on this." He whirled over to the window, bolted out the traffic noises below, then swung back and watched them steadily, feet planted firmly in the carpet. For the first time in the three years Mangon had known him he looked aggressive and confident.

"Headline," he announced. "The Gioconda is to sing again! Incredible and terrifying though the prospect may seem, exactly two weeks from now the live uncensored voice of the Gioconda will go out coast-to-coast on all three V.C. radio channels. Surprised, Mangon? It's no secret, they're printing the bills right now. Eight-thirty to nine-thirty, right up on the peak, even if they have to give the time away."

Merrill sat forward. "Bully for her. If LeGrande wants to drive the whole ship into the ground, why worry?"

Alto punched the sofa viciously. "Because you and I are going to be on board! Didn't you hear me? Eight-thirty, a fortnight today! *We* have a program on then. Well, guess who our guest star is?"

Merrill struggled to make sense of this. "Wait a minute, Ray. You mean she's actually going to appear—she's going to *sing*—in the middle of *Opus Zero?*" Alto nodded grimly. Merrill threw up his hands and slumped back. "It's crazy, she can't. Who says she will?"

"Who do you think? The great LeGrande." Alto turned to Mangon. "She must have raked up some real dirt to frighten him into this. I can hardly believe it."

"But why on *Opus Zero?*" Merrill pressed. "Let's switch the première to the week after."

"Paul, you're missing the point. Let me fill you in. Sometime yesterday Madame Gioconda paid a private call on LeGrande. Something she told him persuaded him that it would be absolutely wonderful for her to have a whole hour to herself on one of the feature music programs, singing a few old-fashioned songs from the old-fashioned shows, with a full-scale ultrasonic backing. Eager to give her a completely free hand he even asked her which of the regular programs she'd like. Well, as the last show she appeared on ten years ago was canceled to make way for Ray Alto's *Total Symphony* you can guess which one she picked."

Merrill nodded. "It all fits together. We're broadcasting from the concert studio. A single ultrasonic symphony, no station breaks, not even a commentary. Your first world première in three years. There'll be a big invited audience. White tie, something like the old days. Revenge is sweet." He shook his head sadly. "Hell, all that work."

Alto snapped, "Don't worry, it won't be wasted. Why should we pay the bill for LeGrande? This symphony is the one piece of serious music I've written since I joined V.C. and it isn't going to be ruined." He went over to Mangon, sat down next to him. "This afternoon I went down to the rehearsal studios. They'd found an ancient sonic grand somewhere and one of the old-timers was accompanying her. Mangon, it's ten years since she sang last. If she'd prac-

ticed for two or three hours a day she might have preserved her voice, but you sweep her radio station, you know she hasn't sung a note. She's an old woman now. What time alone hasn't done to her, cocaine and self-pity have." He paused, watching Mangon searchingly. "I hate to say it, Mangon, but it sounded like a cat being strangled."

You lie, Mangon thought icily. *You are simply so ignorant, your taste in music is so debased, that you are unable to recognise real genius when you see it.* He looked at Alto with contempt, sorry for the man, with his absurd silent symphonies. He felt like shouting: *I know what silence is! The voice of the Gioconda is a stream of gold, molten and pure, she will find it again as I found mine.* However, something about Alto's manner warned him to wait.

He said, "I understand." Then, "What do you want me to do?"

Alto patted him on the shoulder. "Good boy. Believe me, you'll be helping her in the long run. What I propose will save all of us from looking foolish. We've got to stand up to LeGrande, even if it means a one-way ticket out of V.C. Okay, Paul?" Merrill nodded firmly and he went on, "Orchestra will continue as scheduled. According to the program Madame Gioconda will be singing to an accompaniment by *Opus Zero,* but that means nothing and there'll be no connection at any point. In fact she won't turn up until the night itself. She'll stand well down-stage on a special platform, and the only microphone will be an aerial about twenty feet diagonally above her. It will be live—*but her voice will never reach it.* Because you, Mangon, will be in the cue-box directly in front of her, with the most powerful sonovac we can lay our hands on. As soon as she opens her mouth you'll let her have it. She'll be at least ten feet away from you so she'll hear herself and won't suspect what is happening."

"What about the audience?" Merrill asked.

"They'll be listening to my symphony, enjoying a neurophonic experience of sufficient beauty and power, I hope, to distract them from the sight of a blowzy prima donna gesturing to herself in a cocaine fog. They'll probably think she's conducting. Remember, they may be expecting her to sing but how many people still know what the word really

means? Most of them will assume its ultrasonic."

"And LeGrande?"

"He'll be in Bermuda. Business conference."

5

Madame Gioconda was sitting before her dressing table mirror, painting on a face like a Halloween mask. Beside her the gramophone played scratchy sonic selections from *Traviata.* The stage was still a disorganized jumble, but there was now an air of purpose about it.

Making his way through the flats, Mangon walked up to her quietly and kissed her bare shoulder. She stood up with a flourish, an enormous monument of a woman in a magnificent black silk dress sparkling with thousands of sequins.

"Thank you, Mangon," she sang out when he complimented her. She swirled off to a hat-box on the bed, pulled out a huge peacock feather and stabbed it into her hair.

Mangon had come round at six, several hours before usual; over the past two days he had felt increasingly uneasy. He was convinced that Alto was in error, and yet logic was firmly on his side. Could Madame Gioconda's voice have preserved itself? Her spoken voice, unless she was being particularly sweet, was harsh and uneven, recently even more so. He assumed that with only a week to her performance nervousness was making her irritable.

Again she was going out, as she had done almost every night. With whom, she never explained; probably to the theater restaurants, to renew contacts with agents and managers. He would like to have gone with her, but he felt out of place on this plane of Madame Gioconda's existence.

"Mangon, I won't be back until very late," she warned him. "You look rather tired and pasty. You'd better go home and get some sleep."

Mangon noticed he was still wearing his yellow peaked cap. Unconsciously he must already have known he would not be spending the night there.

"Do you want to go to the stockade tomorrow?" he asked.

"Hmmmh . . . I don't think so. It gives me rather a headache. Let's leave it for a day or two."

She turned on him with a tremendous smile, her eyes glittering with sudden affection.

"Good-by, Mangon, it's been wonderful to see you." She bent down and pressed her cheek maternally to his, engulfing him in a heady wave of powder and perfume. In an instant all his doubts and worries evaporated, he looked forward to seeing her the next day, certain that they would spend the future together.

For half an hour after she had gone he wandered around the deserted sound stage, going through his memories. Then he made his way out to the alley and drove back to the stockade.

As the day of Madame Gioconda's performance drew closer Mangon's anxieties mounted. Twice he had been down to the concert studio at Video City, had rehearsed with Alto his entry beneath the stage to the cue-box, a small compartment off the corridor used by the electronics engineers. They had checked the power points, borrowed a sonovac from the services section—a heavy duty model used for shielding VIP's and commentators at airports—and mounted its nozzle in the cue-hood.

Alto stood on the platform erected for Madame Gioconda, shouted at the top of his voice at Merrill sitting in the third row of the stalls.

"Hear anything?" he called afterward.

Merrill shook his head. "Nothing, no vibration at all."

Down below Mangon flicked the release toggle, vented a long drawn-out "Fiivvveeee! . . . Foouuurrr! . . . Thrreeeee! . . . Twooooo! . . . Onnneeee. . . !"

"Good enough," Alto decided. Chicago-style, they hid the sonovac in a triple-bass case, stored it in Alto's office.

"Do you want to hear her sing, Mangon?" Alto asked. "She should be rehearsing now."

Mangon hesitated, then declined.

"It's tragic that she's unable to realize the truth herself," Alto commented. "Her mind must be fixed fifteen or twenty years in the past, when she sang her greatest roles at La Scala. That's the voice she hears, the voice she'll probably always hear."

Mangon pondered this. Once he tried to ask Madame Gioconda how her practice sessions were going, but she

was moving into a different zone and answered with some grandiose remark. He was seeing less and less of her, whenever he visited the station she was either about to go out or else tired and eager to be rid of him. Their trips to the stockade had ceased. All this he accepted as inevitable; after the performance, he assured himself, after her triumph, she would come back to him.

He noticed, however, that he was beginning to stutter.

On the final afternoon, a few hours before the performance that evening, Mangon drove down to F Street for what was to be the last time. He had not seen Madame Gioconda the previous day and he wanted to be with her and give her any encouragement she needed.

As he turned into the alley he was surprised to see two large removal vans parked outside the station entrance. Four or five men were carrying out pieces of furniture and the great scenic flats from the sound stage.

Mangon ran over to them. One of the vans was full; he recognized all Madame Gioconda's possessions—the rococo wardrobe and dressing table, the couch, the huge Desdemona bed, up-ended and wrapped in corrugated paper—as he looked at it he felt that a section of himself had been torn from him and rammed away callously. In the bright daylight the peeling threadbare flats had lost all illusion of reality; with them Mangon's whole relationship with Madame Gioconda seemed to have been dismantled.

The last of the workmen came out with a gold cushion under his arm, tossed it into the second van. The foreman sealed the doors and waved on the driver.

"W . . . wh . . . where are you going?" Mangon asked him urgently.

The foreman looked him up and down. "You're the sweeper, are you?" He jerked a thumb toward the station. "The old girl said there was a message for you in there. Couldn't see one myself."

Mangon left him and ran into the foyer and up the stairway toward Studio 2. The removers had torn down the blinds and a gray light was flooding into the dusty auditorium. Without the flats the stage looked exposed and derelict.

He raced down the aisle, wondering why Madame Gio-

conda had decided to leave without telling him.

The stage had been stripped. The music stands had been kicked over, the stove lay on its side with two or three old pans around it, underfoot there was a miscellaneous litter of paper, ash and empty vials.

Mangon searched around for the message, probably pinned to one of the partitions.

Then he heard it screaming at him from the walls, violent and concise.

"GO AWAY YOU UGLY CHILD! NEVER TRY TO SEE ME AGAIN!"

He shrank back, involuntarily tried to shout as the walls seemed to fall in on him, but his throat had frozen.

As he entered the corridor below the stage shortly before eight-twenty, Mangon could hear the sounds of the audience arriving and making their way to their seats. The studio was almost full, a hubbub of well-heeled chatter. Lights flashed on and off in the corridor, and oblique atmospheric shifts cut through the air as the players on the stage tuned their instruments.

Mangon slid past the technicians manning the neurophonic rigs which supplied the orchestra, trying to make the enormous triple-bass case as inconspicuous as possible. They were all busy checking the relays and circuits, and he reached the cue-box and slipped through the door unnoticed.

The box was almost in darkness, a few rays of colored light filtering through the pink and white petals of the chrysanthemums stacked over the hood. He bolted the door, then opened the case, lifted out the sonovac and clipped the snout into the cannister. Leaning forward, with his hands he pushed a small aperture among the flowers.

Directly in front of him he could see a velvet-lined platform, equipped with a white metal rail to the center of which a large floral ribbon had been tied. Beyond was the orchestra, disposed in a semicircle, each of the twenty members sitting at a small boxlike desk on which rested his instrument, tone generator and cathode tube. They were all present, and the light reflected from the ray screens threw a vivid phosphorescent glow onto the silver wall behind them.

Mangon propped the nozzle of the sonovac into the aperture, bent down, plugged in the lead and switched on.

Just before eight twenty-five someone stepped across the platform and paused in front of the cue-hood. Mangon crouched back, watching the patent leather shoes and black trousers move near the nozzle.

"Mangon!" he heard Alto snap. He craned forward, saw Alto eyeing him. Mangon waved to him and Alto nodded slowly, at the same time smiling to someone in the audience, then turned on his heel and took his place in the orchestra.

At eight-thirty a sequence of red and green lights signaled the start of the program. The audience quietened, waiting while an announcer in an offstage booth introduced the program.

A compere appeared on stage, standing behind the cue-hood, and addressed the audience. Mangon sat quietly on the small wooden seat fastened to the wall, staring blankly at the cannister of the sonovac. There was a round of applause, and a steady green light shone downward through the flowers. The air in the cue-box began to sweeten, a cool motionless breeze eddied vertically around him as a rhythmic ultrasonic pressure wave pulsed past. It relaxed the confined dimensions of the box, and had a strange mesmeric tug that held his attention. Somewhere in his mind he realized that the symphony had started, but he was too distracted to pull himself together and listen to it consciously.

Suddenly, through the gap between the flowers and the sonovac nozzle, he saw a large white mass shifting about on the platform. He slipped off the seat and peered up.

Madame Gioconda had taken her place on the platform. Seen from below she seemed enormous, a towering cataract of glistening white satin that swept down to her feet. Her arms were folded loosely in front of her, fingers flashing with blue and white stones. He could only just glimpse her face, the terrifying witchlike mask turned in profile as she waited for some offstage signal.

Mangon mobilized himself, slid his hand down to the trigger of the sonovac. He waited, feeling the steady subliminal music of Alto's symphony swell massively within him, its tempo accelerating. Presumably Madame Gioconda's arranger was waiting for a climax at which to introduce her first aria.

Abruptly Madame Gioconda looked forward at the audience and took a short step to the rail. Her hands parted and opened palms upward, her head moved back, her bare shoulders swelled.

The wave front pulsing through the cue-box stopped, then soared off into a continuous unbroken crescendo. At the same time Madame Gioconda thrust her head out, her throat muscles contracted powerfully.

As the sound burst from her throat Mangon's finger locked rigidly against the trigger guard. An instant later, before he could think, a shattering blast of sound ripped through his ears, followed by a slightly higher note that appeared to strike a hidden ridge halfway along its path, wavered slightly, then recovered and sped on, like an express train crossing lines.

Mangon listened to her numbly, hands gripping the barrel of the sonovac. The voice exploded in his brain, flooding every nexus of cells with its violence. It was grotesque, an insane parody of a classical soprano. Harmony, purity, cadence had gone. Rough and cracked, it jerked sharply from one high note to a lower, its breath intervals uncontrolled, sudden precipices of gasping silence which plunged through the volcanic torrent, dividing it into a loosely connected sequence of bravura passages.

He barely recognized what she was singing: the Toreador song from *Carmen*. Why she had picked this he could not imagine. Unable to reach its higher notes she fell back on the swinging rhythm of the refrain, hammering out the rolling phrases with tosses of her head. After a dozen bars her pace slackened, she slipped into an extempore humming, then broke out of this into a final climactic assault.

Appalled, Mangon watched as two or three members of the orchestra stood up and disappeared into the wings. The others had stopped playing, were switching off their instruments and conferring with each other. The audience was obviously restive; Mangon could hear individual voices in the intervals when Madame Gioconda refilled her lungs.

Behind him someone hammered on the door. Startled, Mangon nearly tripped across the sonovac. Then he bent down and wrenched the plug out of its socket. Snapping open the two catches beneath the chassis of the sonovac, he pulled off the cannister to reveal the valves, amplifier and

generator. He slipped his fingers carefully through the leads and coils, seized them as firmly as he could and ripped them out with a single motion. Tearing his nails, he stripped the printed circuit off the bottom of the chassis and crushed it between his hands.

Satisfied, he dropped the sonovac to the floor, listened for a moment to the caterwauling above, which was now being drowned by the mounting vocal opposition of the audience, then unlatched the door.

Paul Merrill, his bow tie askew, burst in. He gaped blankly at Mangon, at the blood dripping from his fingers and the smashed sonovac on the floor.

He seized Mangon by the shoulders, shook him roughly. "Mangon, are you crazy? What are you trying to do?"

Mangon attempted to say something, but his voice had died. He pulled himself away from Merrill, pushed past into the corridor.

Merrill shouted after him. "Mangon, help me fix this! Where are you going?" He got down on his knees, started trying to piece the sonovac together.

From the wings Mangon briefly watched the scene on the stage.

Madame Gioconda was still singing, her voice completely inaudible in the uproar from the auditorium. Half the audience were on their feet, shouting toward the stage and apparently remonstrating with the studio officials. All but a few members of the orchestra had left their instruments, these sitting on their desks and watching Madame Gioconda in amazement.

The program director, Alto and one of the comperes stood in front of her, banging on the rail and trying to attract her attention. But Madame Gioconda failed to notice them. Head back, eyes on the brilliant ceiling lights, hands gesturing majestically, she soared along the private causeways of sound that poured unrelentingly from her throat, a great white angel of discord on her homeward flight.

Mangon watched her sadly, then slipped away through the stage hands pressing around him. As he left the theater by the stage door a small crowd was gathering by the main entrance. He flicked away the blood from his fingers, then bound his handkerchief round them.

He walked down the side street to where the sound truck

was parked, climbed into the cab and sat still for a few minutes, looking out at the bright evening lights in the bars and shop-fronts.

Opening the dashboard locker, he hunted through it and pulled out an old wrist-pad, clipped it into his sleeve.

In his ears the sound of Madame Gioconda singing echoed like an insane banshee.

He switched on the sonovac under the dashboard, turned it full on, then started the engine and drove off into the night.

HICKORY, DICKORY, KEROUAC

Richard Gehman

Richard Gehman owns nine typewriters and an unknown number of pen-names. Since leaving the Army for the freelance life in 1946, he has written some of everything for virtually everybody. (Reputedly, he once wrote six pieces for a single issue of *Cosmopolitan,* under six different names, in three days.) Born in Lancaster, Pa., he now lives wtih his wife and four children in Kent Cliffs, N.Y. His recent books include *Bogart* (Gold Medal, 1965), *Haphazard Gourmet* (Scribner, 1966), and *Playboy's Playboy* (Trident, 1966).

So far as I know, "Hickory, Dickory, Kerouac" was his only venture into fantasy—but I wouldn't have known about this one, either, since it appeared originally (in the March, 1958 *Playboy*) under the pseudonym of "Martin Scott." It is reprinted here from the 4th SF Annual.

IT WAS A SEASON of great restlessness and change for mice everywhere, a stirring time, a time of moods and urges and moves. The mouse felt it; his whiskers trembled in anticipation. One night there was a party in a stall, and an old badger came. He sat there drinking red wine and aspirin gravely, staring at a young and excitable squirrel who had been on cashews for months.

"It's the *time,* man!" the squirrel kept saying to the badger, but the mouse knew the message was for him. It had to be for him; the badger had fallen asleep after his third Sneaky Pete. That was the badger's way of rebellion. No squirrel could bug him.

The mouse got the message. He was quite possibly the hippest mouse that ever crept. He dug. He dug everything —he dug with his sharp little eyes, he dug with his pointy little nose, he dug with his little claws (under each of which

he kept a bit of dirt at all times, in case he might be invited to the Actors' Studio). The mouse dug the gray mice that lived in the universe that was his house, he dug the brown mice that were padded down in the vast unreachable reaches of the fields, and he dug the mice-colored mice that lived nowhere but stayed ever on the road. He even dug rats. Oh, how he dug; he dug the whole world, and he dug his hole-world. He was with it, he was of it, he was *in.*

This mouse was a *cat.*

He was well-known, too. He had eaten some pages of verse in some tiny magazines—*Trap, Silo Review* and *Barley*—and they had heard of him in San Francisco, where there was a small but pulsating and mysterious mouse revival swinging. But the season of restlessness caught him and he was hung, and although he had finished chewing three pages of a novel, he said to his mother, "Dad, I got to *go.*"

There was reason enough: nothing charged him. He'd been on *pot.* Nothing. He'd gone on *pot* again; still nothing. He'd then gone on *pan, kettle, roaster, colander, soup spoon;* he'd tried everything in the kitchen cabinet. No kicks.

The word was out—he'd seen it in the squirrel's eyes that night at the party. The hipsters had a new kick. *Go on clock,* the word came. *Man, get with the clock-way; man, it's time; make it, man, it's timeless.*

The mouse rushed first to the First National Corn Crib, where all the squares kept their hoards. He started to spit—but he dug it too much, there was too much love in him for squares and everybody else, they were all Zenned up like he was, and he could not do it. He changed his mind, then changed it again. He rushed on. Man, this was living! He rushed over to a haystack where a beetle had a pad and gnawed anarchist poetry. He seized six of the beetle's legs and shook them violently. The beetle opened three of his four eyes and regarded the mouse with utter serenity. He was stoned, but he had so many eyes he could be stoned and still see *everything.*

"Come *on,*" the mouse cried.

The beetle said nothing. That was what was so great about him, the mouse knew; he dug and he never spoke, like the crazy old mixed-up Zenners.

It was time to go again; time to go on time. The mouse ran and ran and ran and ran and finally he was there, at the clock. There it stood, wild as a skyscraper, tall and proud and like all America with a moon-face above it, waving its hands inscrutably and passively, cool as you please. The mouse wished he had a chick to dig it with him but knew that was childish; he was *himself,* he was with, in, of and *it.* The realization made his tail twitch. His ears rattled. Then the music came, long and mysterious, like some great old song chanted all the way from Tibet:

Hickory, dickory . . .

It was the moment of truth: reds and greens and blues crowded in and permeated his little red eyes, he broke out in a cold sweat, he broke in out of a hot sweat.

Dock!

That was it. He ran up, he ran down.

Nothing happened.

Hickory, dickory, dock! the unearthly music came again.

"I dig!" the mouse screamed, and ran up and down again.

"I'm *on the clock,* Dad!" he cried to no one in particular. Breathless, he shouted it again. A spider, observing him icily from a corner, shrugged and wondered what the younger generation was coming to.

The mouse glanced at the spider. That second was when he knew the truth. Pot was no good, pan was no good, clock was just as bad. There was no escaping it. In the final analysis, he had to look inward. He walked home slowly and chewed up the rest of his novel. Today he is rich, a trustee of the First National Corn Crib, and is thinking of eating another book as soon as he can find the time away from his job. The badger is dead, the beetle has turned chiropractor, and only God digs. *Hickory, dickory, dock.*

DREAMING IS A PRIVATE THING
Isaac Asimov

Isaac Asimov is the author (or editor, or collaborative author) of more than 80 books: science fiction, mystery, popular science, scientific textbooks, juveniles, and philosophic essays. His short stories and articles have appeared in publications ranging from *Esquire* to *Astonishing Stories to TV Guide* to the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists;* although writing and lecturing engagements now prevent his maintaining a teaching schedule, he is an Associate Professor of Biochemistry at the Boston University School of Medicine.

Born in Russia in 1920, Asimov was not yet three years old when his family moved to Brooklyn, N.Y. He sold his first story at the age of eighteen; three years later, when he took his M.A. in Chemistry at Columbia, he had sold almost two dozen more, including the first of the positronic robot stories (postulating the now classic "three laws of robotics") recently reprinted in *I, Robot* (1962) and *The Rest of the Robots* (1965). The stories composing *The Foundation Trilogy* (1964) were largely written while he was working for his Ph.D., after wartime service at the Naval Air Experimental Station in Philadelphia.

Asimov's nonfiction career began with a curious article in 1948 entitled "The Endochronic Properties of Resublimated Thiotimoline", which was responsible for his being the first science candidate for a Ph.D. to be asked a science-fiction question during his oral examination. In 1950, when his first S-F book *(Pebble in the Sky)* was published, he began writing his first textbook. By 1958, nonfiction writing was occupying him almost exclusively: among (many) other things, he began the monthly science articles still running in *Fantasy & Science Fiction,* and published (in 1960) the first edition of the recently revised, monumental, *New Intelligent Man's Guide to Science* (Basic Books, 1965). He is now (among other things) working on a volume called *It's Mentioned in the Bible,* and a book on Greek history.

He is also, happily, returning at last to writing some fiction (notably, "Eyes Do More Than See" in the 11th Annual).

"Dreaming is a Private Thing" first appeared in the December, 1955, *Fantasy & Science Fiction;* it is reprinted here, from the 1st SF Annual,

with the author's permission. His stories, "Each an Explorer" and "Let's Get Together" also appeared in the 2nd and 3rd Annuals, and an article, "The Thunder-Thieves", in the 4th.

JESSE WEILL looked up from his desk. His old spare body, his sharp high-bridge nose, deep-set shadowy eyes and amazing shock of white hair had trademarked his appearance during the years that Dreams, Inc. had become world-famous.

He said, "Is the boy here already, Joe?"

Joe Dooley was short and heavyset. A cigar caressed his moist lower lip. He took it away for a moment and nodded. "His folks are with him. They're all scared."

"You're sure this is not a false alarm, Joe? I haven't got much time." He looked at his watch. "Government business at two."

"This is a sure thing, Mr. Weill." Dooley's face was a study in earnestness. His jowls quivered with persuasive intensity. "Like I told you, I picked him up playing some kind of basketball game in the schoolyard. You should've seen the kid. He stunk. When he had his hands on the ball, his own team had to take it away, and fast, but just the same he had all the stance of a star player. Know what I mean? To me it was a giveaway."

"Did you talk to him?"

"Well, sure. I stopped him at lunch. You know me." Dooley gestured expansively with his cigar and caught the severed ash with his other hand. " 'Kid,' I said—"

"And he's dream material?"

"I said, 'Kid, I just came from Africa and—' "

"All right." Weill held up the palm of his hand. "Your word I'll always take. How you do it I don't know, but when you say a boy is a potential dreamer, I'll gamble. Bring him in."

The youngster came in between his parents. Dooley pushed chairs forward and Weill rose to shake hands. He smiled at the youngster in a way that turned the wrinkles of his face into benevolent creases.

"You're Tommy Slutsky?"

Tommy nodded wordlessly. He was about ten and a

little small for that. His dark hair was plastered down unconvincingly and his face was unrealistically clean.

Weill said, "You're a good boy?"

The boy's mother smiled at once and patted Tommy's head maternally (a gesture which did not soften the anxious expression on the youngster's face). She said, "He's always a very good boy."

Weill let this dubious statement pass. "Tell me, Tommy," he said, and held out a lollipop which was first hesitantly considered, then accepted. "Do you ever listen to dreamies?"

"Sometimes," said Tommy, in an uncertain treble.

Mr. Slutsky cleared his throat. He was broad-shouldered and thick-fingered, the type of laboring man who, every once in a while, to the confusion of eugenics, sired a dreamer. "We rented one or two for the boy. Real old ones."

Weill nodded. He said, "Did you like them, Tommy?"

"They were sort of silly."

"You think up better ones for yourself, do you?"

The grin that spread over the ten-year-old features had the effect of taking away some of the unreality of the slicked hair and washed face.

Weill went on, gently, "Would you like to make up a dream for me?"

Tommy was instantly embarrassed. "I guess not."

"It won't be hard. It's very easy. —Joe."

Dooley moved a screen out of the way and rolled forward a dream-recorder.

The youngster looked owlishly at it.

Weill lifted the helmet and brought it close to the boy. "Do you know what this is?"

Tommy shrank away. "No."

"It's a thinker. That's what we call it because people think into it. You put it on your head and think anything you want."

"Then what happens?"

"Nothing at all. It feels nice."

"No," said Tommy, "I guess I'd rather not."

His mother bent hurriedly toward him. "It won't hurt, Tommy. You do what the man says." There was an unmistakable edge to her voice.

Tommy stiffened and looked as though he might cry, but he didn't. Weill put the thinker on him.

He did it gently and slowly and let it remain there for some 30 seconds before speaking again, to let the boy assure himself it would do no harm, to let him get used to the insinuating touch of the fibrils against the sutures of his skull (penetrating the skin so finely as to be almost insensible), and finally to let him get used to the faint hum of the alternating field vortices.

Then he said, "Now would you think for us?"

"About what?" Only the boy's nose and mouth showed.

"About anything you want. What's the best thing you would like to do when school is out?"

The boy thought a moment and said, with rising inflection, "Go on a stratojet?"

"Why not? Sure thing. You go on a jet. It's taking off right now." He gestured lightly to Dooley, who threw the freezer into circuit.

Weill kept the boy only five minutes and then let him and his mother be escorted from the office by Dooley. Tommy looked bewildered but undamaged by the ordeal.

Weill said to the father, "Now, Mr. Slutsky, if your boy does well on this test, we'll be glad to pay you five hundred dollars each year until he finishes high school. In that time, all we'll ask is that he spend an hour a week some afternoon at our special school."

"Do I have to sign a paper?" Slutsky's voice was a bit hoarse.

"Certainly. This is business, Mr. Slutsky."

"Well, I don't know. Dreamers are hard to come by, I hear."

"They are. They are. But your son, Mr. Slutsky, is not a dreamer yet. He might never be. Five hundred dollars a year is a gamble for us. It's not a gamble for you. When he's finished high school, it may turn out he's not a dreamer, yet you've lost nothing. You've gained maybe four thousand dollars altogether. If he *is* a dreamer, he'll make a nice living and you certainly haven't lost then."

"He'll need special training, won't he?"

"Oh, yes, most intensive. But we don't have to worry about that till after he's finished high school. Then, after

two years with us, he'll be developed. Rely on me, Mr. Slutsky."

"Will you guarantee that special training?"

Weill, who had been shoving a paper across the desk at Slutsky, and punching a pen wrong-side-to at him, put the pen down and chuckled, "Guarantee? No. How can we when we don't know for sure yet if he's a real talent? Still, the five hundred a year will stay yours."

Slutsky pondered and shook his head. "I tell you straight out, Mr. Weill— After your man arranged to have us come here, I called Luster-Think. They said they'll guarantee training."

Weill sighed. "Mr. Slutsky, I don't like to talk against a competitor. If they say they'll guarantee training, they'll do as they say, but they can't make a boy a dreamer if he hasn't got it in him, training or not. If they take a plain boy without the proper talent and put him through a development course, they'll ruin him. A dreamer he won't be, that I guarantee you. And a normal human being he won't be, either. Don't take the chance of doing it to your son.

"Now Dreams, Inc. will be perfectly honest with you. If he can be a dreamer, we'll make him one. If not, we'll give him back to you without having tampered with him and say, 'Let him learn a trade.' He'll be better and healthier that way. I tell you, Mr. Slutsky—I have sons and daughters and grandchildren so I know what I say—I would not allow a child of mine to be pushed into dreaming if he's not ready for it. Not for a million dollars."

Slutsky wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and reached for the pen. "What does this say?"

"This is just an option. We pay you a hundred dollars in cash right now. No strings attached. We'll study the boy's reverie. If we feel it's worth following up, we'll call you in again and make the five-hundred-dollar-a-year deal. Leave yourself in my hands, Mr. Slutsky, and don't worry. You won't be sorry."

Slutsky signed.

Weill passed the document through the file slot and handed an envelope to Slutsky.

Five minutes later, alone in the office, he placed the unfreezer over his own head and absorbed the boy's reverie

intently. It was a typically childish daydream. First Person was at the controls of the plane, which looked like a compound of illustrations out of the filmed thrillers that still circulated among those who lacked the time, desire or money for dream-cylinders.

When he removed the unfreezer, he found Dooley looking at him.

"Well, Mr. Weill, what do you think?" said Dooley, with an eager and proprietary air.

"Could be, Joe. Could be. He has the overtones and for a ten-year-old boy without a scrap of training it's hopeful. When the plane went through a cloud, there was a distinct sensation of pillows. Also the smell of clean sheets, which was an amusing touch. We can go with him a ways."

"Good." Joe beamed happily at Weill's approval.

"But I tell you, Joe, what we really need is to catch them still sooner. And why not? Some day, Joe, every child will be tested at birth. A difference in the brain there positively must be and it should be found. Then we could separate the dreamers at the very beginning."

"Hell, Mr. Weill," said Dooley, looking hurt. "What would happen to my job then?"

Weill laughed. "No cause to worry yet, Joe. It won't happen in our lifetimes. In mine, certainly not. We'll be depending on good talent scouts like you for many years. You just watch the playgrounds and the streets"—Weill's gnarled hand dropped to Dooley's shoulder with a gentle, approving pressure—" and find us a few more Hillarys and Janows and Luster-Think won't ever catch us.—Now get out. I want lunch and then I'll be ready for my 2 o'clock appointment. The government, Joe, the government." And he winked portentously.

Jesse Weill's 2 o'clock appointment was with a young man, apple-cheeked, spectacled, sandy-haired and glowing with the intensity of a man with a mission. He presented his credentials across Weill's desk and revealed himself to be John J. Byrne, an agent of the Department of Arts and Sciences.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Byrne," said Weill. "In what way can I be of service?"

"Are we private here?" asked the agent. He had an unexpected baritone.

"Quite private."

"Then, if you don't mind, I'll ask you to absorb this." Byrne produced a small and battered cylinder and held it out between thumb and forefinger.

Weill took it, hefted it, turned it this way and that and said with a denture-revealing smile, "Not the product of Dreams, Inc., Mr. Byrne."

"I didn't think it was," said the agent. "I'd still like you to absorb it. I'd set the automatic cutoff for about a minute, though."

"That's all that can be endured?" Weill pulled the receiver to his desk and placed the cylinder in the unfreeze compartment. He removed it, polished either end of the cylinder with his handkerchief and tried again. "It doesn't make good contact," he said. "An amateurish job."

He placed the cushioned unfreeze helmet over his skull and adjusted the temple contacts, then set the automatic cutoff. He leaned back and clasped his hands over his chest and began absorbing.

His fingers grew rigid and clutched at his jacket. After the cutoff had brought absorption to an end, he removed the unfreezer and looked faintly angry. "A raw piece," he said. "It's lucky I'm an old man so that such things no longer bother me."

Byrne said stiffly, "It's not the worst we've found. And the fad is increasing."

Weill shrugged. "Pornographic dreamies. It's a logical development, I suppose."

The government man said, "Logical or not, it represents a deadly danger for the moral fiber of the nation."

"The moral fiber," said Weill, "can take a lot of beating. Erotica of one form or another has been circulated all through history."

"Not like this, sir. A direct mind-to-mind stimulation is much more effective than smoking-room stories or filthy pictures. Those must be filtered through the senses and lose some of their effect in that way."

Weill could scarcely argue that point. He said, "What would you have me do?"

"Can you suggest a possible source for this cylinder?"

"Mr. Byrne, I'm not a policeman."

"No, no, I'm not asking you to do our work for us. The

Department is quite capable of conducting its own investigations. Can you help us, I mean, from your own specialized knowledge? You say your company did not put out that filth. Who did?"

"No reputable dream-distributor. I'm sure of that. It's too cheaply made."

"That could have been done on purpose."

"And no professional dreamer originated it."

"Are you sure, Mr. Weill? Couldn't dreamers do this sort of thing for some small illegitimate concern for money—or for fun?"

"They could, but not this particular one. No overtones. It's two-dimensional. Of course, a thing like this doesn't need overtones."

"What do you mean, overtones?"

Weill laughed gently, "You are not a dreamie fan?"

Byrne tried not to look virtuous and did not entirely succeed. "I prefer music."

"Well, that's all right, too," said Weill, tolerantly, "but it makes it a little harder to explain overtones. Even people who absorb dreamies might not be able to explain if you asked them. Still they'd know a dreamie was no good if the overtones were missing, even if they couldn't tell you why. Look, when an experienced dreamer goes into reverie, he doesn't think a story like in the old-fashioned television or book-films. It's a series of little visions. Each one has several meanings. If you studied them carefully, you'd find maybe five or six. While absorbing them in the ordinary way, you would never notice, but careful study shows it. Believe me, my psychological staff puts in long hours on just that point. All the overtones, the different meanings, blend together into a mass of guided emotion. Without them, everything would be flat, tasteless.

"Now this morning, I tested a young boy. A ten-year-old with possibilities. A cloud to him isn't just a cloud, it's a pillow too. Having the sensations of both, it was more than either. Of course, the boy's very primitive. But when he's through with his schooling, he'll be trained and disciplined. He'll be subjected to all sorts of sensations. He'll store up experience. He'll study and analyze classic dreamies of the past. He'll learn how to control and direct his thoughts, though, mind you, I have always said that when

a good dreamer improvises—"

Weill halted abruptly, then proceeded in less impassionated tones, "I shouldn't get excited. All I'm trying to bring out now is that every professional dreamer has his own type of overtones which he can't mask. To an expert it's like signing his name on the dreamie. And I, Mr. Byrne, know all the signatures. Now that piece of dirt you brought me has no overtones at all. It was done by an ordinary person. A little talent, maybe, but like you and me, he can't think."

Byrne reddened a trifle. "Not everyone can't think, Mr. Weill, even if they don't make dreamies."

"Oh, tush," and Weill wagged his hand in the air. "Don't be angry with what an old man says. I don't mean *think* as in *reason*. I mean *think* as in *dream*. We all can dream after a fashion, just like we all can run. But can you and I run a mile in under four minutes? You and I can talk but are we Daniel Websters? Now when I think of a steak, I think of the word. Maybe I have a quick picture of a brown steak on a platter. Maybe you have a better pictorialization of it and you can see the crisp fat and the onions and the baked potato. I don't know. But a *dreamer* . . . He sees it and smells it and tastes it and everything about it, with the charcoal and the satisfied feeling in the stomach and the way the knife cuts through it and a hundred other things all at once. Very sensual. Very sensual. You and I can't do it."

"Well then," said Byrne, "no professional dreamer has done this. That's something anyway." He put the cylinder in his inner jacket pocket. "I hope we'll have your full cooperation in squelching this sort of thing."

"Positively, Mr. Byrne. With a whole heart."

"I hope so." Byrne spoke with a consciousness of power. "It's not up to me, Mr. Weill, to say what will be done and what won't be done, but this sort of thing"—he tapped the cylinder he had brought—"will make it awfully tempting to impose a really strict censorship on dreamies."

He rose. "Good day, Mr. Weill."

"Good day, Mr. Byrne. I'll hope always for the best."

Francis Belanger burst into Jesse Weill's office in his usual steaming tizzy, his reddish hair disordered and his face aglow with worry and a mild perspiration. He was

brought up sharply by the sight of Weill's head cradled in the crook of his elbow and bent on the desk until only the glimmer of white hair was visible.

Belanger swallowed. "Boss?"

Weill's head lifted. "It's you, Frank?"

"What's the matter, boss? Are you sick?"

"I'm old enough to be sick, but I'm on my feet. Staggering, but on my feet. A government man was here."

"What did he want?"

"He threatens censorship. He brought a sample of what's going round. Cheap dreamies for bottle parties."

"God damn!" said Belanger, feelingly.

"The only trouble is that morality makes for good campaign fodder. They'll be hitting out everywhere. And to tell the truth, we're vulnerable, Frank."

"*We* are? Our stuff is clean. We play up adventure and romance."

Weill thrust out his lower lip and wrinkled his forehead. "Between us, Frank, we don't have to make believe. Clean? It depends on how you look at it. It's not for publication, maybe, but you know and I know that every dreamie has its Freudian connotations. You can't deny it."

"Sure, if you *look* for it. If you're a psychiatrist—"

"If you're an ordinary person, too. The ordinary observer doesn't know it's there and maybe he couldn't tell a phallic symbol from a mother image even if you pointed them out. Still, his subconscious knows. And it's the connotations that make many a dreamie click."

"All right, what's the government going to do? Clean up the subconscious?"

"It's a problem. I don't know what they're going to do. What we have on our side, and what I'm mainly depending on, is the fact that the public loves its dreamies and won't give them up.—Meanwhile, what did you come in for? You want to see me about something, I suppose?"

Belanger tossed an object onto Weill's desk and shoved his shirt-tail deeper into his trousers.

Weill broke open the glistening plastic cover and took out the enclosed cylinder. At one end was engraved in a too-fancy script in pastel blue: *Along the Himalayan Trail.* It bore the mark of Luster-Think.

"The Competitor's Product." Weill said it with capitals

and his lips twitched. "It hasn't been published yet. Where did you get it, Frank?"

"Never mind. I just want you to absorb it."

Weill sighed. "Today, everyone wants me to absorb dreams. Frank, it's not dirty?"

Belanger said testily, "It has your Freudian symbols. Narrow crevasses between the mountain peaks. I hope that won't bother you."

"I'm an old man. It stopped bothering me years ago, but that other thing was so poorly done, it hurt.—All right, let's see what you've got here."

Again the recorder. Again the unfreezer over his skull and at the temples. This time, Weill rested back in his chair for fifteen minutes or more, while Francis Belanger went hurriedly through two cigarettes.

When Weill removed the headpiece and blinked dream out of his eyes, Belanger said, "Well, what's your reaction, boss?"

Weill corrugated his forehead. "It's not for me. It was repetitious. With competition like this, Dreams, Inc. doesn't have to worry yet."

"That's your mistake, boss. Luster-Think's going to win with stuff like this. We've got to do something."

"Now, Frank—"

"No, you listen. This is the coming thing."

"This?" Weill stared with half-humorous dubiety at the cylinder. "It's amateurish. It's repetitious. Its overtones are very unsubtle. The snow had a distinct lemon sherbet taste. Who tastes lemon sherbet in snow these days, Frank? In the old days, yes. Twenty years ago, maybe. When Lyman Harrison first made his Snow Symphonies for sale down south, it was a big thing. Sherbet and candy-striped mountain tops and sliding down chocolate-covered cliffs. It's slapstick, Frank. These days it doesn't go."

"Because," said Belanger, "you're not up with the times, boss, I've got to talk to you straight. When you started the dreamie business, when you bought up the basic patents and began putting them out, dreamies were luxury stuff. The market was small and individual. You could afford to turn out specialized dreamies and sell them to people at high prices."

"I know," said Weill, "and we've kept that up. But also

we've opened a rental business for the masses."

"Yes, we have and it's not enough. Our dreamies have subtlety, yes. They can be used over and over again. The tenth time you're still finding new things, still getting new enjoyment. But how many people are connoisseurs? And another thing. Our stuff is strongly individualized. They're First Person."

"Well?"

"Well, Luster-Think is opening dream-palaces. They've opened one with three hundred booths in Nashville. You walk in, take your seat, put on your unfreezer and get your dream. Everyone in the audience gets the same one."

"I've heard of it, Frank, and it's been done before. It didn't work the first time and it won't work now. You want to know why it won't work? Because in the first place, dreaming is a private thing. Do you like your neighbor to know what you're dreaming? In the second place, in a dream palace the dreams have to start on schedule, don't they? So the dreamer has to dream not when he wants to but when some palace manager says he should. Finally, a dream one person likes, another person doesn't like. In those three hundred booths, I guarantee you, a hundred and fifty people are dissatisfied. And if they're dissatisfied, they won't come back."

Slowly, Belanger rolled up his sleeves and opened his collar. "Boss," he said, "you're talking through your hat. What's the use of proving they won't work? They *are* working. The word came through today that Luster-Think is breaking ground for a thousand-booth palace in St. Louis. People can get used to public dreaming, if everyone else in the same room is having the same dream. And they can adjust themselves to having it at a given time, as long as it's cheap and convenient.

"Damn it, boss, it's a social affair. A boy and a girl go to a dream-palace and absorb some cheap romantic thing with stereotyped overtones and commonplace situations, but still they come out with stars sprinkling their hair. They've had the same dream together. They've gone through identical sloppy emotions. They're *in tune,* boss. You bet they go back to the dream-palace, and all their friends go, too."

"And if they don't like the dream?"

"That's the point. That's the nub of the whole thing.

They're bound to like it. If you prepare Hillary specials with wheels within wheels within wheels, with surprise twists on the third-level undertones, with clever shifts of significance and all the other things we're so proud of, why, naturally, it won't appeal to everyone. Specialized dreamies are for specialized tastes. But Luster-Think is turning out simple jobs in Third Person so both sexes can be hit at once. Like what you've just absorbed. Simple, repetitious, commonplace. They're aiming at the lowest common denominator. No one will love it, maybe, but no one will hate it."

Weill sat silent for a long time and Belanger watched him. Then Weill said, "Frank, I started on quality and I'm staying there. Maybe, you're right. Maybe dream-palaces are the coming thing. If so we'll open them, but we'll use good stuff. Maybe Luster-Think underestimates ordinary people. Let's go slowly and not panic. I have based all my policies on the theory that there's always a market for quality. Sometimes, my boy, it would surprise you how big a market."

"Boss—"

The sounding of the intercom interrupted Belanger.

"What is it, Ruth?" said Weill.

The voice of his secretary said, "It's Mr. Hillary, sir. He wants to see you right away. He says it's important."

"Hillary?" Weill's voice registered shock. Then, "Wait five minutes, Ruth, then send him in."

Weill turned to Belanger. "Today, Frank, is definitely not one of my good days. A dreamer should be at home with his thinker. And Hillary's our best dreamer, so he especially should be at home. What do you suppose is wrong with him?"

Belanger, still brooding over Luster-Think and dream-palaces, said shortly, "Call him in and find out."

"In one minute. Tell me, how was his last dream? I haven't absorbed the one that came in last week."

Belanger came down to earth. He wrinkled his nose. "Not so good."

"Why not?"

"It was ragged. Too jumpy. I don't mind sharp transitions for the liveliness, you know, but there's got to be some connection, even if only on a deep level."

"Is it a total loss?"

"No Hillary dream is a *total* loss. It took a lot of editing though. We cut it down quite a bit and spliced in some odd pieces he'd sent us now and then. You know, detached scenes. It's still not Grade A, but it will pass."

"You told him about this, Frank?"

"Think I'm crazy, boss? Think I'm going to say a harsh word to a dreamer?"

And at that point the door opened and Weill's comely young secretary smiled Sherman Hillary into the office.

Sherman Hillary, at the age of 31, could have been recognized as a dreamer by anyone. His eyes, though unspectacled, had nevertheless the misty look of one who either needs glasses or who rarely focuses on anything mundane. He was of average height but underweight, with black hair that needed cutting, a narrow chin, a pale skin and a troubled look.

He muttered, "Hello, Mr. Weill," and half-nodded in hangdog fashion in the direction of Belanger.

Weill said, heartily, "Sherman, my boy, you look fine. What's the matter? A dream is cooking only so-so at home? You're worried about it?—Sit down, sit down."

The dreamer did, sitting at the edge of the chair and holding his thighs stiffly together as though to be ready for instant obedience to a possible order to stand up again.

He said, "I've come to tell you, Mr. Weill, I'm quitting."

"Quitting?"

"I don't want to dream anymore, Mr. Weill."

Weill's old face looked older now than at any time during the day. "Why, Sherman?"

The dreamer's lips twisted. He blurted out, "Because I'm not *living*, Mr. Weill. Everything passes me by. It wasn't so bad at first. It was even relaxing. I'd dream evenings, weekends when I felt like it or any other time. And when I felt like it I wouldn't. But now, Mr. Weill, I'm an old pro. You tell me I'm one of the best in the business and the industry looks to me to think up new subtleties and new changes on the old reliables like the flying reveries, and the worm-turning skits."

Weill said, "And is anyone better than you, Sherman? Your little sequence on leading an orchestra is selling steadily after ten years."

"All right, Mr. Weill. I've done my part. It's gotten so I don't go out any more. I neglect my wife. My little girl doesn't know me. Last week we went to a dinner party—Sarah made me—and I don't remember a bit of it. Sarah says I was sitting on the couch all evening just staring at nothing and humming. She said everyone kept looking at me. She cried all night. I'm tired of things like that, Mr. Weill. I want to be a normal person and live in this world. I promised her I'd quit and I will, so it's goodby, Mr. Weill." Hillary stood up and held out his hand awkwardly.

Weill waved it gently away. "If you want to quit, Sherman, it's all right. But do an old man a favor and let me explain something to you."

"I'm not going to change my mind," said Hillary.

"I'm not going to try to make you. I just want to explain something. I'm an old man and even before you were born I was in this business, so I like to talk about it. Humor me, Sherman? Please?"

Hillary sat down. His teeth clamped down on his lower lip and he stared sullenly at his fingernails.

Weill said, "Do you know what a dreamer is, Sherman? Do you know what he means to ordinary people? Do you know what it is to be like me, like Frank Belanger, like your wife Sarah? To have crippled minds that can't imagine, that can't build up thoughts? People like myself, ordinary people, would like to escape just once in a while this life of ours. We can't. We need help.

"In olden times it was books, plays, movies, radio, television. They gave us make-believe, but that wasn't important. What *was* important was that for a little while our own imaginations were stimulated. We could think of handsome lovers and beautiful princesses. We could be attractive, witty, strong, capable—everything we weren't.

"But always the passing of the dream from dreamer to absorber was not perfect. It had to be translated into words in one way or another. The best dreamer in the world might not be able to get any of it into words. And the best writer in the world could put only the smallest part of his dreams into words. You understand?

"But now, with dream-recording, any man can dream. You, Sherman, and a handful of men like you supply those dreams directly and exactly. It's straight from your head

into ours, full strength. You dream for a hundred million people every time you dream. You dream a hundred million dreams at once. This is a great thing, my boy. You give all those people a glimpse of something they could not have by themselves."

Hillary mumbled, "I've done my share." He rose desperately to his feet. "I'm through. I don't care what you say. And if you want to sue me for breaking our contract, go ahead and sue. I don't care."

Weill stood up too. "Would I sue you?—Ruth," he spoke into the intercom, "bring in our copy of Mr. Hillary's contract."

He waited. So did Hillary and Belanger. Weill smiled faintly and his yellowed fingers drummed softly on his desk.

His secretary brought in the contract. Weill took it, showed its face to Hillary and said, "Sherman, my boy, unless you *want* to be with me, it's not right you should stay."

Then before Belanger could make more than the beginning of a horrified gesture to stop him, he tore the contract into four pieces and tossed them down the waste-chute. "That's all."

Hillary's hand shot out to seize Weill's. "Thanks, Mr. Weill," he said, earnestly, his voice husky. "You've always treated me very well, and I'm grateful. I'm sorry it had to be like this."

"It's all right, my boy. It's all right."

Half in tears, still muttering thanks, Sherman Hillary left.

"For the love of Pete, boss, why did you let him go?" demanded Belanger. "Don't you see the game? He'll be going straight to Luster-Think. They've bought him off."

Weill raised his hand. "You're wrong. You're quite wrong. I know the boy and this would not be his style. Besides," he added dryly, "Ruth is a good secretary and she knows what to bring me when I ask for a dreamer's contract. The real contract is still in the safe, believe me.

"Meanwhile, a fine day I've had. I had to argue with a father to give me a chance at new talent, with a government man to avoid censorship, with you to keep from

adopting fatal policies, and now with my best dreamer to keep him from leaving. The father I probably won out over. The government man and you, I don't know. Maybe yes, maybe no. But about Sherman Hillary, at least, there is no question. The dreamer will be back."

"How do you know?"

Weill smiled at Belanger and crinkled his cheeks into a network of fine lines. "Frank, my boy, you know how to edit dreamies so you think you know all the tools and machines of the trade. But let me tell you something. The most important tool in the dreamie business is the dreamer himself. He is the one you have to understand most of all, and I understand them.

"Listen. When I was a youngster—there were no dreamies then—I knew a fellow who wrote television scripts. He would complain to me bitterly that when someone met him for the first time and found out who he was, they would say: *Where do you get those crazy ideas?*

"They honestly didn't know. To them it was an impossibility to even think of one of them. So what could my friend say? He used to talk to me about it and tell me: 'Could I say, "I don't know"? When I go to bed I can't sleep for ideas dancing in my head. When I shave I cut myself; when I talk I lose track of what I'm saying; when I drive I take my life in my hands. And always because ideas, situations, dialogues are spinning and twisting in my mind. I can't tell you where I get my ideas. Can you tell me, maybe, your trick of *not* getting ideas, so I, too, can have a little peace?'

"You see, Frank, how it is. *You* can stop work here anytime. So can I. This is our job, not our life. But not Sherman Hillary. Wherever he goes, whatever he does, he'll dream. While he lives, he must think; while he thinks, he must dream. We don't hold him prisoner, our contract isn't an iron wall for him. His own skull is his prisoner. He'll be back. What can he do?"

Belanger shrugged. "If what you say is right, I'm sort of sorry for the guy."

Weill nodded sadly, "I'm sorry for all of them. Through the years, I've found out one thing. It's their business: making people happy. *Other* people."

THE PUBLIC HATING

Steve Allen

Stephen Patrick Valentine William Allen is the author of six books (most recently: *Letter to a Conservative*, 1965) and about 2,000 songs, among them "Gravy Waltz" (for which he won a Grammy Award), "This Could Be the Start of Something," and "Picnic." Born in New York City in 1921, he became a radio announcer in 1942, worked as comedian, disc jockey, scriptwriter, actor, musician, in radio, films, and television until (and after) starting his own TV show in 1950.

"The Public Hating" was selected for the 1st Annual from *Bluebook*, January, 1955, and was included in Allen's first short-story collection, *Fourteen for Tonight* (1955).

THE WEATHER WAS A LITTLE CLOUDY on that September 9, 1978, and here and there in the crowds that surged up the ramps into the stadium people were looking at the sky and then at their neighbors and squinting and saying, "Hope she doesn't rain."

On television the weatherman had forecast slight cloudiness but no showers. It was not cold. All over the neighborhood surrounding the stadium, people poured out of street-cars and busses and subways. In ant-like lines they crawled across streets, through turnstiles, up stairways, along ramps, through gates, down aisles.

Laughing and shoving restlessly, damp-palmed with excitement, they came shuffling into the great concrete bowl, some stopping to go to the restrooms, some buying popcorn, some taking free pamphlets from the uniformed attendants.

Everything was free this particular day. No tickets had been sold for the event. The public proclamations had

simply been made in the newspapers and on TV, and over 65,000 people had responded.

For weeks, of course, the papers had been suggesting that the event would take place. All during the trial, even as early as the selection of the jury, the columnists had slyly hinted at the inevitability of the outcome. But it had only been official since yesterday. The television networks had actually gotten a slight jump on the papers. At six o'clock the government had taken over all network facilities for a brief five-minute period during which the announcement was made.

"We have all followed with great interest," the Premier had said, looking calm and handsome in a gray double-breasted suit, "the course of the trial of Professor Ketteridge. Early this afternoon the jury returned a verdict of guilty. This verdict having been confirmed within the hour by the Supreme Court, in the interests of time-saving, the White House has decided to make the usual prompt official announcement. There will be a public hating tomorrow. The time: 2:30 P.M. The place: Yankee Stadium in New York City. Your assistance is earnestly requested. Those of you in the New York area will find. . . ."

The voice had gone on, filling in other details, and in the morning, the early editions of the newspapers included pictures captioned, "Bronx couple first in line," and "Students wait all night to view hating" and "Early birds."

By one-thirty in the afternoon there was not an empty seat in the stadium and people were beginning to fill up a few of the aisles. Special police began to block off the exits and word was sent down to the street that no more people could be admitted. Hawkers slipped through the crowd selling cold beer and hot-dogs.

Sitting just back of what would have been first base had the Yankees not been playing in Cleveland, Frederic Traub stared curiously at the platform in the middle of the field. It was about twice the size of a prize-fighting ring. In the middle of it there was a small raised section on which was placed a plain wooden kitchen chair.

To the left of the chair there were seating accommodations for a small group of dignitaries. Downstage, so to speak, there was a speaker's lectern and a battery of micro-

phones. The platform was hung with bunting and pennants.

The crowd was beginning to hum ominously.

At two minutes after two o'clock a small group of men filed out onto the field from a point just back of home plate. The crowd buzzed more loudly for a moment and then burst into applause. The men carefully climbed a few wooden steps, walked in single file across the platform, and seated themselves in the chairs set out for them. Traub turned around and was interested to observe high in the press box, the winking red lights of television cameras.

"Remarkable," said Traub softly to his companion.

"I suppose," said the man. "But effective."

"I guess that's right," said Traub. "Still, it all seems a little strange to me. We do things rather differently."

"That's what makes horse-racing," said his companion.

Traub listened for a moment to the voices around him. Surprisingly, no one seemed to be discussing the business at hand. Baseball, movies, the weather, gossip, personal small-talk, a thousand-and-one subjects were introduced. It was almost as if they were trying not to mention the hating.

His friend's voice broke in on Traub's reverie.

"Think you'll be okay when we get down to business? I've seen 'em keel over."

"I'll be all right," said Traub. Then he shook his head. "But I still can't believe it."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you know, the whole thing. How it started. How you found you could do it."

"Beats the hell out of me," said the other man. "I think it was that guy at Duke University first came up with the idea. The mind over matter thing has been around for a long time, of course. But this guy, he was the first one to prove scientifically that mind can control matter."

"Did it with dice, I believe," Traub said.

"Yeah, that's it. First he found some guys who could drop a dozen or so dice down a chute of some kind and actually control the direction they'd take. Then they discovered the secret—it was simple. The guys who could control the dice were simply the guys who *thought* they could.

"Then one time they got the idea of taking the dice into an auditorium and having about 2,000 people concentrate on forcing the dice one way or the other. That did it. It was the most natural thing in the world when you think of it. If one horse can pull a heavy load so far and so fast it figures that 10 horses can pull it a lot farther and a lot faster. They had those dice fallin' where they wanted 'em 80 percent of the time."

"When did they first substitute a living organism for the dice?" Traub asked.

"Damned if I know," said the man. "It was quite a few years ago and at first the government sort of clamped down on the thing. There was a little last-ditch fight from the churches, I think. But they finally realized you couldn't stop it."

"Is this an unusually large crowd?"

"Not for a political prisoner. You take a rapist or a murderer now, some of them don't pull more than maybe twenty, thirty thousand. The people just don't get stirred up enough."

The sun had come out from behind a cloud now and Traub watched silently as large map-shaped shadows moved majestically across the grass.

"She's warming up," someone said.

"That's right," a voice agreed. "Gonna be real nice."

Traub leaned forward and lowered his head as he retied the laces on his right shoe and in the next instant he was shocked to attention by a guttural roar from the crowd that vibrated the floor.

In distant right center-field, three men were walking toward the platform. Two were walking together, the third was slouched in front of them, head down, his gait unsteady.

Traub had thought he was going to be all right but now, looking at the tired figure being prodded toward second base, looking at the bare, bald head, he began to feel slightly sick.

It seemed to take forever before the two guards jostled the prisoner up the stairs and toward the small kitchen chair.

When he reached it and seated himself the crowd roared again. A tall, distinguished man stepped to the speaker's

lectern and cleared his throat, raising his right hand in an appeal for quiet. "All right," he said, "all right."

The mob slowly fell silent. Traub clasped his hands tightly together. He felt a little ashamed.

"All right," said the speaker. "Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the President of the United States I welcome you to another Public Hating. This particular affair," he said, "as you know is directed against the man who was yesterday judged guilty in United States District Court here in New York City—Professor Arthur Ketteridge."

At the mention of Ketteridge's name the crowd made a noise like an earthquake-rumble. Several pop-bottles were thrown, futilely, from the center-field bleachers.

"We will begin in just a moment," said the speaker, "but first I should like to introduce the Reverend Charles Fuller, of the Park Avenue Reborn Church, who will make the invocation."

A small man with glasses stepped forward, replaced the first speaker at the microphone, closed his eyes, and threw back his head.

"Our Heavenly Father," he said, "to whom we are indebted for all the blessings of this life, grant, we beseech Thee, that we act today in justice and in the spirit of truth. Grant, O Lord, we pray Thee, that what we are about to do here today will render us the humble servants of Thy divine will. For it is written *the wages of sin is death.* Search deep into this man's heart for the seed of repentance if there be such, and if there be not, plant it therein, O Lord, in Thy goodness and mercy."

There was a slight pause. The Reverend Fuller coughed and then said, "Amen."

The crowd, which had stood quietly during the prayer, now sat down and began to buzz again.

The first speaker rose. "All right," he said. "You know we all have a job to do. And you know why we have to do it."

"Yes!" screamed thousands of voices.

"Then let us get to the business at hand. At this time I would like to introduce to you a very great American who, to use the old phrase, needs no introduction. Former presi-

dent of Harvard University, current adviser to the Secretary of State, ladies and gentlemen, Dr. Howard S. Weltmer!"

A wave of applause vibrated the air.

Dr. Weltmer stepped forward, shook hands with the speaker, and adjusted the microphone. "Thank you," he said. "Now, we won't waste any more time here since what we are about to do will take every bit of our energy and concentration if it is to be successfully accomplished. I ask you all," he said, "to direct your unwavering attention toward the man seated in the chair to my left here, a man who in my opinion is the most despicable criminal of our time—Professor Arthur Ketteridge!"

The mob shrieked.

"I ask you," said Weltmer, "to rise. That's it, everybody stand up. Now, I want every one of you . . . I understand we have upwards of seventy thousand people here today . . . I want every single one of you to stare directly at this fiend in human form, Ketteridge. I want you to let him know by the wondrous power that lies in the strength of your emotional reservoirs, I want you to let him know that he is a criminal, that he is worse than a murderer, that he has committed treason, that he is not loved by anyone, anywhere in the universe, and that he is, rather, despised with a vigor equal in heat to the power of the sun itself!"

People around Traub were shaking their fists now. Their eyes were narrowed; their mouths turned down at the corners. A woman fainted.

"Come on," shouted Weltmer. "Let's feel it!"

Under the spell of the speaker Traub was suddenly horrified to find that his blood was racing, his heart pounding. He felt anger surging up in him. He could not believe he hated Ketteridge. But he could not deny he hated something.

"On the souls of your mothers," Weltmer was saying, "on the future of your children, out of your love for your country, I demand of you that you unleash your power to despise. I want you to become ferocious. I want you to become as the beasts of the jungle, as furious as they in the defense of their homes. Do you hate this man?"

"Yes!" roared the crowd.

"Fiend!" cried Weltmer, "Enemy of the people— Do you hear, Ketteridge?"

Traub watched in dry-mouthed fascination as the slumped figure in the chair straightened up convulsively and jerked at his collar. At this first indication that their power was reaching home the crowd roared to a new peak of excitement.

"We plead," said Weltmer, "with you people watching today on your television sets, to join with us in hating this wretch. All over America stand up, if you will, in your living rooms. Face the East. Face New York City, and let anger flood your hearts. Speak it out, let it flow!"

A man beside Traub sat down, turned aside, and vomited softly into a handkerchief. Traub picked up the binoculars the man had discarded for the moment and fastened them on Ketteridge's figure, twirling the focus-knob furiously. In a moment the man leaped into the foreground. Traub saw that his eyes were full of tears, that his body was wracked with sobs, that he was in obvious pain.

"He is not fit to live," Weltmer was shouting. "Turn your anger upon him. Channel it. Make it productive. Be not angry with your family, your friends, your fellow citizens, but let your anger pour out in a violent torrent on the head of this human devil," screamed Weltmer. "Come on! Let's do it! Let's get it over with!"

At that moment Traub was at last convinced of the enormity of Ketteridge's crime, and Weltmer said, "All right, that's it. Now let's get down to brass tacks. Let's concentrate on his right arm. Hate it, do you hear? Burn the flesh from the bone! You can do it! Come on! Burn him alive!"

Traub stared unblinking through the binoculars at Ketteridge's right arm as the prisoner leaped to his feet and ripped off his jacket, howling. With his left hand he gripped his right forearm and then Traub saw the flesh turning dark. First a deep red and then a livid purple. The fingers contracted and Ketteridge whirled on his small platform like a dervish, slapping his arm against his side.

"That's it," Weltmer called. "You're doing it. You're

doing it. Mind over matter! That's it. Burn this offending flesh. Be as the avenging angels of the Lord. Smite this devil! That's it!"

The flesh was turning darker now, across the shoulders, as Ketteridge tore his shirt off. Screaming, he broke away from his chair and leaped off the platform, landing on his knees on the grass.

"Oh, the power is wonderful," cried Weltmer. "You've got him. Now let's really turn it on. Come on!"

Ketteridge writhed on the grass and then rose and began running back and forth, directionless, like a bug on a griddle.

Traub could watch no longer. He put down the binoculars and staggered back up the aisle.

Outside the stadium he walked for 12 blocks before he hailed a cab.

YOU KNOW WILLIE

Theodore R. Cogswell

Theodore R. Cogswell is an Associate Professor of English at Keystone College in Pennsylvania. Primarily a poet and songwriter, he published thirty science-fantasy stories between 1952–1958, with only an occasional title since then; a collection, *The Wall Around the World,* was published in 1962.

Born in Ohio in 1918, Cogswell graduated from high school just in time to join the International Brigade in Spain; back home, he wandered his way through several colleges, with time out for the Pacific Theatre in World War II, and wound up teaching English at the University of Minnesota, where Gordon Dickson and Poul Anderson got him interested in writing science fantasy.

He also was the founder and editor of the unique and sorely missed authors' journal, the *Proceedings of the Institute of Twenty-first Century Studies.*

Two of his songs, "Radiation Blues" and "Blowup Blues", were reprinted in the 6th Annual. "You Know Willie" originally appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction,* May, 1957; it is reprinted here from the 3rd SF Annual.

IN THE OLD DAYS there wouldn't have been any fuss about Willie McCracken shooting a Negro, but these weren't the old days. The judge sat sweating, listening to the voice from the state capital that roared through the telephone receiver.

"But you can't hang no white man for shooting no nigger!"

"Who said anything about hanging?" said the voice impatiently. "I want it to look good, that's all. So don't make it any half hour job—take two weeks if you have to."

The judge obediently took two weeks. There was a long

parade of witnesses for the defense and an equally long one for the prosecution, and through it all the jury, having been duly instructed beforehand, sat gravely, happy for a respite from the hot sun and fields—and the cash money that was accruing to each of them at the rate of three dollars a day. A bright young man was down from the capital to oversee all major matters, and as a result, the trial of Willie McCracken was a model of juridical propriety.

The prosecution made as strong a case against Willie as it could without bringing in such prejudicial evidence as that the little garage the dead man had opened after he came back from Korea had been taking business away from the one Willie ran at an alarming rate, or that it was common knowledge that Willie was the Thrice High Warlock of the local chapter of The Knights of the Flaming Sword and in his official capacity had given the deceased one week to get out of town or else.

There were two important witnesses. One was very old and very black, the other wasn't quite as young as she used to be but she was white. The first could technically be classed as a witch—though there was another and more sonorous name for what she was in the forgotten tribal language she used on ritual occasions—but contrary to the ancient injunction, she had not only been permitted to live, but to flourish in a modest fashion. There were few in the courtroom who had not at one time or another made secret use of Aunt Hattie's services. And although most of the calls had been for relatively harmless love potions or protective amulets, there were enough who had called with darker things in mind to cause her to be treated with unusual respect.

Aunt Hattie was the town's oldest inhabitant—legend had it that she was already a grown woman when Lincoln larcenously freed the slaves—and the deceased had been her only living blood relative.

Having been duly sworn, she testified that the defendant, Willie McCracken, had come to her cabin just as she was getting supper, asked for the deceased, and then shot him between the eyes when he came to the door.

She was followed by Willie's wife, a plumpish little blonde in an over-tight dress who was obviously enjoying all the attention she was getting. She in turn swore that Willie had

been home in bed with her where he belonged at the time in question. From the expressions on the jurymen's faces, it was obvious that they were thinking that if he hadn't been, he was a darned fool.

There were eight Knights of the Flaming Sword sitting around the table in Willie's kitchen. Willie pulled a jug from the floor beside him, took a long swallow, and wiped his mouth nervously with the hairy back of his hand. He looked up at the battered alarm clock on the shelf over the sink and then lifted the jug again. When he set it down Pete Martin reached over and grabbed it.

"Buck up, Willie boy," he said as he shook the container to see how much was left in it. "Ain't nobody going to get at you with us here."

Willie shivered. "You ain't seen her squatting out under that cottonwood every night like I have." He reached out for the jug but Martin laughed and pulled it out of reach.

"You lay off that corn and you won't be seeing Aunt Hattie every time you turn around. The way you've been hitting the stuff since the trial it's a wonder you ain't picking snakes up off the table by now."

"I seen her, I tell you," said Willie sullenly. "Six nights running now I seen her plain as day just sitting out under that tree waiting for the moon to get full." He reached for the jug again but Martin pushed his hand away.

"You've had enough. Now you just sit there quiet like while I talk some sense. Aunt Hattie's dead and Jackson's dead and they're both safe six foot under. I don't blame you for getting your wind up after what she yelled in the courtroom afore she keeled over, but just remember that there ain't no nigger the Knights can't take care of, dead or alive. Now you go upstairs and get yourself a little shut-eye. You're plumb beat. I don't think you've had six hours good sleep since the finish of the trial. You don't notice Winnie Mae losing any rest, do you?"

Willie kneaded his bald scalp with thick fingers. "Couldn't sleep," he said hoarsely. "Not with her out there. She said he'd come back first full moon rise and every night it's been getting rounder and rounder."

"He comes back, we'll fix him for you, Willie," said Martin in a soothing voice. "Now you do like I said. Moon

won't be up for a good two hours yet. You go get a little sleep and we'll call you in plenty of time."

Willie hesitated and then got to his feet and lumbered up the stairs. He was so tired he staggered as he walked. When he got into the dark bedroom he pulled off his clothes and threw himself down on the brass bed beside Winnie Mae. He tried to keep awake but he couldn't. In a moment his heavy snores were blending with her light delicate ones.

The moonlight was strong and bright in the room when Willie woke. They hadn't called him! From the kitchen below he heard a rumble of voices and then drunken laughter. Slowly, as if hypnotized, he swung his fat legs over the side of the bed and stumbled to the window. He tried to keep from looking but he couldn't. She would be there, squatting beneath the old cottonwood, a shriveled little black mummy that waited . . . waited . . . waited . . .

Willie dug his knuckles suddenly into his eyes, rubbed hard, and then looked again. There was nothing! Nothing where the thick old trunk met the ground but a dusty clump of crab grass. He stood trembling, staring down at the refuse-littered yard as if it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. There was something healing in the calm flood of moonlight. The hard knot he had been carrying inside his head dissolved and he felt strong and young again. He wanted to shout, to caper around the room.

Winnie Mae mumbled in her sleep and he turned to look at her. Her thin cotton nightgown was bunched up under her arms and she lay, legs astraddle, her plump body gleaming whitely in the moonlight. She whimpered as she pulled herself up out of her slumber and then closed her arms around the heavy body that was pressing down on her.

"Remember me," he whispered, "I'm Willie. You know Willie."

She giggled and pulled him tighter against her. Her breath began to come faster and her fingers made little cat clawings on his back. As she squirmed under him her hands crept higher, over his shoulders, up his neck . . .

There was a sudden explosion under him and a caterwauling scream of sheer horror. Willie jerked back as her nails raked across his face, and then he felt a sudden stabbing agony as she jabbed up with her knee. He staggered

away from the bed, his hand cupped over his bleeding face.

His hands! Time slid to a nightmarish stop as his finger tips sent a message pulsing down through nerve endings that his bald scalp had somehow sprouted a thick mop of kinky hair. He jerked his hands down and held them cupped before him. The fresh blood was black in the moonlight, and not only the blood. He spun toward the cracked mirror and saw himself for the first time. The flabby body with its sagging belly was gone. In its place was that of a dark-skinned stranger . . . but not a stranger.

His fingers crept across his forehead looking for the small red bullet hole that was no longer there.

And then time started to rush forward again. Winnie Mae's screaming went on and on and there was a rushing of heavy feet up the stairs from the kitchen.

He tried to explain but there was a new softness to his speech that put the lie to his stumbling words. When the door burst open he stood for a moment, hands stretched out in supplication.

"No," he whimpered. "I'm Willie. You know Willie."

As they came slowly out of the shadows he broke. He took one slow step backward, and then two, and then when he felt the low sill press against his calves, turned and dove out the window onto the sloping roof. When he got to the ground he tried again to explain but somebody remembered his gun.

Willie as he had been would have been run to ground within the mile, but his new lithe body carried him effortlessly through the night. If it hadn't been for the dogs he might have got away.

Someone had a deck of cards and they all drew. Pete Martin was low man so he had to go back after the gasoline.

ONE ORDINARY DAY, WITH PEANUTS

Shirley Jackson

Shirley Jackson (1919–1965) wrote comparatively little outright fantasy; virtually everything she wrote, whether macabre suspense novel or domestic essay, was illuminated with a rare consciousness of the fantastic quality of reality (and/or the reality of the fantastic and incredible), a perception of truths one level farther in than those available to most of us.

Her most famous story was "The Lottery", first published in *The New Yorker* in 1948, and then in the 1949 collection of the same title. Among her other books were *Life Among the Savages, We Have Always Lived in the Castle, The Bird's Nest* and *The Magic of Shirley Jackson*. Most of her short stories appeared in the larger-circulation quality magazines—*Harper's, Story, Mademoiselle, American Mercury,* etc.—and in such national women's magazines as *Woman's Home Companion* and *McCalls*. Five short stories were published in *Fantasy & Science Fiction* between 1953 and 1958, including "One Ordinary Day, With Peanuts" (January, 1955), which is reprinted here from the 1st *SF Annual*.

MR. JOHN PHILIP JOHNSON shut his front door behind him and came down his front steps into the bright morning with a feeling that all was well with the world on this best of all days, and wasn't the sun warm and good, and didn't his shoes feel comfortable after the resoling, and he knew that he had undoubtedly chosen the precise very tie which belonged with the day and the sun and his comfortable feet, and, after all, wasn't the world just a wonderful place? In spite of the fact that he was a small man, and the tie was perhaps a shade vivid, Mr. Johnson irradiated this feeling of well-being as he came down the steps and onto the dirty sidewalk, and he smiled at people who passed

him, and some of them even smiled back. He stopped at the newsstand on the corner and bought his paper, saying "*Good* morning" with real conviction to the man who sold him the paper and the two or three other people who were lucky enough to be buying papers when Mr. Johnson skipped up. He remembered to fill his pockets with candy and peanuts, and then he set out to get himself uptown. He stopped in a flower shop and bought a carnation for his buttonhole, and stopped almost immediately afterward to give the carnation to a small child in a carriage, who looked at him dumbly, and then smiled, and Mr. Johnson smiled, and the child's mother looked at Mr. Johnson for a minute and then smiled too.

When he had gone several blocks uptown, Mr. Johnson cut across the avenue and went along a side street, chosen at random; he did not follow the same route every morning, but preferred to pursue his eventful way in wide detours, more like a puppy than a man intent upon business. It happened this morning that halfway down the block a moving van was parked, and the furniture from an upstairs apartment stood half on the sidewalk, half on the steps, while an amused group of people loitered, examining the scratches on the tables and the worn spots on the chairs, and a harassed woman, trying to watch a young child and the movers and the furniture all at the same time, gave the clear impression of endeavoring to shelter her private life from the people staring at her belongings. Mr. Johnson stopped, and for a moment joined the crowd, and then he came forward and, touching his hat civilly, said, "Perhaps I can keep an eye on your little boy for you?"

The woman turned and glared at him distrustfully, and Mr. Johnson added hastily, "We'll sit right here on the steps." He beckoned to the little boy, who hesitated and then responded agreeably to Mr. Johnson's genial smile. Mr. Johnson brought out a handful of peanuts from his pocket and sat on the steps with the boy, who at first refused the peanuts on the grounds that his mother did not allow him to accept food from strangers; Mr. Johnson said that probably his mother had not intended peanuts to be included, since elephants at the circus ate them, and the boy considered, and then agreed solemnly. They sat on

the steps cracking peanuts in a comradely fashion, and Mr. Johnson said, "So you're moving?"

"Yep," said the boy.

"Where you going?"

"Vermont."

"Nice place. Plenty of snow there. Maple sugar, too; you like maple sugar?"

"Sure."

"Plenty of maple sugar in Vermont. You going to live on a farm?"

"Going to live with Grandpa."

"Grandpa like peanuts?"

"Sure."

"Ought to take him some," said Mr. Johnson, reaching into his pocket. "Just you and Mommy going?"

"Yep."

"Tell you what," Mr. Johnson said. "You take some peanuts to eat on the train."

The boy's mother, after glancing at them frequently, had seemingly decided that Mr. Johnson was trustworthy, because she had devoted herself wholeheartedly to seeing that the movers did not—what movers rarely do, but every housewife believes they will—crack a leg from her good table, or set a kitchen chair down on a lamp. Most of the furniture was loaded by now, and she was deep in that nervous stage when she knew there was something she had forgotten to pack—hidden away in the back of a closet somewhere, or left at a neighbor's and forgotten, or on the clothesline—and was trying to remember under stress what it was.

"This all, lady?" the chief mover said, completing her dismay.

Uncertainly, she nodded.

"Want to go on the truck with the furniture, sonny?" the mover asked the boy, and laughed. The boy laughed too and said to Mr. Johnson, "I guess I'll have a good time at Vermont."

"Fine time," said Mr. Johnson, and stood up. "Have one more peanut before you go," he said to the boy.

The boy's mother said to Mr. Johnson, "Thank you so much; it was a great help to me."

"Nothing at all," said Mr. Johnson gallantly. "Where in Vermont are you going?"

The mother looked at the little boy accusingly, as though he had given away a secret of some importance, and said unwillingly, "Greenwich."

"Lovely town," said Mr. Johnson. He took out a card, and wrote a name on the back. "Very good friend of mine lives in Greenwich," he said. "Call on him for anything you need. His wife makes the best doughnuts in town," he added soberly to the little boy.

"Swell," said the little boy.

"Goodby," said Mr. Johnson.

He went on, stepping happily with his new-shod feet, feeling the warm sun on his back and on the top of his head. Halfway down the block he met a stray dog and fed him a peanut.

At the corner, where another wide avenue faced him, Mr. Johnson decided to go on uptown again. Moving with comparative laziness, he was passed on either side by people hurrying and frowning, and people brushed past him going the other way, clattering along to get somewhere quickly. Mr. Johnson stopped on every corner and waited patiently for the light to change, and he stepped out of the way of anyone who seemed to be in any particular hurry, but one young lady came too fast for him, and crashed wildly into him when he stooped to pat a kitten which had run out onto the sidewalk from an apartment house and was now unable to get back through the rushing feet.

"Excuse me," said the young lady, trying frantically to pick up Mr. Johnson and hurry on at the same time, "terribly sorry."

The kitten, regardless now of danger, raced back to its home; "Perfectly all right," said Mr. Johnson, adjusting himself carefully. "You seem to be in a hurry."

"Of course I'm in a hurry," said the young lady. "I'm late."

She was extremely cross and the frown between her eyes seemed well on its way to becoming permanent. She had obviously awakened late, because she had not spent any extra time in making herself look pretty, and her dress was plain and unadorned with collar or brooch, and her

lipstick was noticeably crooked. She tried to brush past Mr. Johnson, but, risking her suspicious displeasure, he took her arm and said, "Please wait."

"Look," she said ominously. "I ran into you and your lawyer can see my lawyer and I will gladly pay all damages and all inconveniences suffered therefrom but please this minute let me go because *I am late.*"

"Late for what?" said Mr. Johnson; he tried his winning smile on her but it did no more than keep her, he suspected, from knocking him down again.

"Late for work," she said between her teeth. "Late for my employment. I have a job and if I am late I lose exactly so much an hour and I cannot really afford what your pleasant conversation is costing me, be it *ever* so pleasant."

"I'll pay for it," said Mr. Johnson. Now these were magic words, not necessarily because they were true, or because she seriously expected Mr. Johnson to pay for anything, but because Mr. Johnson's flat statement, obviously innocent of irony, could not be, coming from Mr. Johnson, anything but the statement of a responsible and truthful and respectable man.

"What *do* you mean?" she asked.

"I said that since I am obviously responsible for your being late I shall certainly pay for it."

"Don't be silly," she said, and for the first time the frown disappeared. "*I* wouldn't expect you to pay for anything—a few minutes ago I was offering to pay *you.* Anyway," she added, almost smiling, "it *was* my fault."

"What happens if you don't go to work?"

She stared. "I don't get paid."

"Precisely," said Mr. Johnson.

"What do you mean, precisely? If I don't show up at the office exactly twenty minutes ago I lose a dollar and twenty cents an hour, or two cents a minute or . . ." She thought. ". . . Almost a dime for the time I've spent talking to you."

Mr. Johnson laughed, and finally she laughed, too. "You're late already," he pointed out. "Will you give me another four cents worth?"

"I don't understand why."

"You'll see," Mr. Johnson promised. He led her over to the side of the walk, next to the buildings, and said, "Stand here," and went out into the rush of people going both

ways. Selecting and considering, as one who must make a choice involving perhaps whole years of lives, he estimated the people going by. Once he almost moved, and then at the last minute thought better of it and drew back. Finally, from half a block away, he saw what he wanted, and moved out into the center of the traffic to intercept a young man, who was hurrying, and dressed as though he had awakened late, and frowning.

"Oof," said the young man, because Mr. Johnson had thought of no better way to intercept anyone than the one the young woman had unwittingly used upon him. "Where do you think you're going?" the young man demanded from the sidewalk.

"I want to speak to you," said Mr. Johnson ominously.

The young man got up nervously, dusting himself and eyeing Mr. Johnson. "What for?" he said. "What'd *I* do?"

"That's what bothers me most about people nowadays," Mr. Johnson complained broadly to the people passing. "No matter whether they've done anything or not, they always figure someone's after them. About what you're going to do," he told the young man.

"Listen," said the young man, trying to brush past him, "I'm late, and I don't have any time to listen. Here's a dime, now get going."

"Thank you," said Mr. Johnson, pocketing the dime. "Look," he said, "what happens if you stop running?"

"I'm late," said the young man, still trying to get past Mr. Johnson, who was unexpectedly clinging.

"How much do you make an hour?" Mr. Johnson demanded.

"A communist, are you?" said the young man. "Now will you please let me—"

"No," said Mr. Johnson insistently, "*how* much?"

"Dollar fifty," said the young man. "And *now* will you—"

"You like adventure?"

The young man stared, and, staring, found himself caught and held by Mr. Johnson's genial smile; he almost smiled back and then repressed it and made an effort to tear away. "I got to *hurry,*" he said.

"Mystery? Like surprises? Unusual and exciting events?"

"You selling something?"

"Sure," said Mr. Johnson. "You want to take a chance?"

The young man hesitated, looked longingly up the avenue toward what might have been his destination and then, when Mr. Johnson said, "I'll pay for it," with his own peculiar and convincing emphasis, turned and said, "Well, okay. But I got to *see* it first, what I'm buying."

Mr. Johnson, breathing hard, led the young man over to the side where the girl was standing; she had been watching with interest Mr. Johnson's capture of the young man and now, smiling timidly, she looked at Mr. Johnson as though prepared to be surprised at nothing.

Mr. Johnson reached into his pocket and took out his wallet. "Here," he said, and handed a bill to the girl. "This about equals your day's pay."

"But no," she said, surprised in spite of herself. "I mean, I *couldn't*."

"Please do not interrupt," Mr. Johnson told her. "And *here*," he said to the young man, "this will take care of *you*." The young man accepted the bill dazedly, but said, "Probably counterfeit" to the young woman out of the side of his mouth. "Now," Mr, Johnson went on, disregarding the young man, "what is your name, miss?"

"Kent," she said helplessly. "Mildred Kent."

"Fine," said Mr. Johnson. "And you, sir?"

"Arthur Adams," said the young man stiffly.

"Splendid," said Mr. Johnson. "Now, Miss Kent, I would like you to meet Mr. Adams. Mr. Adams, Miss Kent."

Miss Kent stared, wet her lips nervously, made a gesture as though she might run, and said, "How do you do?"

Mr. Adams straightened his shoulders, scowled at Mr. Johnson, made a gesture as though he might run, and said, "How do you do?"

"Now *this*," said Mr. Johnson, taking several bills from his wallet, "should be enough for the day for both of you. I would suggest, perhaps, Coney Island—although I personally am not fond of the place—or perhaps a nice lunch somewhere, and dancing, or a matinee, or even a movie, although take care to choose a really *good* one; there are *so* many bad movies these days. You might," he said, struck with an inspiration, "visit the Bronx Zoo, or the Plane-

tarium. Anywhere, as a matter of fact," he concluded, "that you would like to go. Have a nice time."

As he started to move away Arthur Adams, breaking from his dumbfounded stare, said, "But see here, mister, you *can't* do this. Why—how do you know—I mean, *we* don't even know—I mean, how do you know we won't just take the money and not do what you said?"

"You've taken the money," Mr. Johnson said. "You don't have to follow any of my suggestions. You may know something you prefer to do—perhaps a museum, or something."

"But suppose I just run away with it and leave her here?"

"I know you won't," said Mr. Johnson gently, "because you remembered to ask *me* that. Goodby," he added, and went on.

As he stepped up the street, conscious of the sun on his head and his good shoes, he heard from somewhere behind him the young man saying. "Look, you know you don't *have* to if you don't want to," and the girl saying, "But unless *you* don't want to . . ." Mr. Johnson smiled to himself and then thought that he had better hurry along; when he wanted to he could move very quickly, and before the young woman had gotten around to saying, "Well, *I* will if *you* will," Mr. Johnson was several blocks away and had already stopped twice, once to help a lady lift several large packages into a taxi and once to hand a peanut to a seagull. By this time he was in an area of large stores and many more people and he was buffeted constantly from either side by people hurrying and cross and late and sullen. Once he offered a peanut to a man who asked him for a dime, and once he offered a peanut to a bus driver who had stopped his bus at an intersection and had opened the window next to his seat and put out his head as though longing for fresh air and the comparative quiet of the traffic. The man wanting a dime took the peanut because Mr. Johnson had wrapped a dollar bill around it, but the bus driver took the peanut and asked ironically, "You want a transfer, Jack?"

On a busy corner Mr. Johnson encountered two young people—for one minute he thought they might be Mildred Kent and Arthur Adams—who were eagerly scanning a newspaper, their backs pressed against a storefront to avoid

the people passing, their heads bent together. Mr. Johnson, whose curiosity was insatiable, leaned onto the storefront next to them and peeked over the man's shoulder; they were scanning the "Apartments Vacant" columns.

Mr. Johnson remembered the street where the woman and her little boy were going to Vermont and he tapped the man on the shoulder and said amiably, "Try down on West Seventeen. About the middle of the block, people moved out this morning."

"Say, what do you—" said the man, and then, seeing Mr. Johnson clearly, "Well, thanks. Where did you say?"

"West Seventeen," said Mr. Johnson. "About the middle of the block." He smiled again and said, "Good luck."

"Thanks," said the man.

"Thanks," said the girl, as they moved off.

"Goodby," said Mr. Johnson.

He lunched alone in a pleasant restaurant, where the food was rich, and only Mr. Johnson's excellent digestion could encompass two of their whipped-cream-and-chocolate-and-rum-cake pastries for dessert. He had three cups of coffee, tipped the waiter largely, and went out into the street again into the wonderful sunlight, his shoes still comfortable and fresh on his feet. Outside he found a beggar staring into the windows of the restaurant he had left and, carefully looking through the money in his pocket, Mr. Johnson approached the beggar and pressed some coins and a couple of bills into his hand. "It's the price of the veal cutlet lunch plus tip," said Mr. Johnson. "Goodby."

After his lunch he rested; he walked into the nearest park and fed peanuts to the pigeons. It was late afternoon by the time he was ready to start back downtown, and he had refereed two checker games and watched a small boy and girl whose mother had fallen asleep and awakened with surprise and fear which turned to amusement when she saw Mr. Johnson. He had given away almost all of his candy, and had fed all the rest of his peanuts to the pigeons, and it was time to go home. Although the late afternoon sun was pleasant, and his shoes were still entirely comfortable, he decided to take a taxi downtown.

He had a difficult time catching a taxi, because he gave up the first three or four empty ones to people who seemed to need them more; finally, however, he stood alone on

the corner and—almost like netting a frisky fish—he hailed desperately until he succeeded in catching a cab which had been proceeding with haste uptown and seemed to draw in towards Mr. Johnson against its own will.

"Mister," the cab driver said as Mr. Johnson climbed in, "I figured you was an omen, like. I wasn't going to pick you up at all."

"Kind of you," said Mr. Johnson ambiguously.

"If I'd of let you go it would of cost me ten bucks," said the driver.

"Really?" said Mr. Johnson.

"Yeah," said the driver. "Guy just got out of the cab, he turned around and gave me ten bucks, said take this and bet it in a hurry on a horse named Vulcan, right away."

"Vulcan?" said Mr. Johnson, horrified. "A fire sign on a Wednesday?"

"What?" said the driver. "Anyway, I said to myself if I got no fare between here and there I'd bet the ten, but if anyone looked like they needed the cab I'd take it as a omen and I'd take the ten home to the wife."

"You were very right," said Mr. Johnson heartily. "This is Wednesday, you would have lost your money. Monday, yes, or even Saturday. But never never never a fire sign on a Wednesday. Sunday would have been good, now."

"Vulcan don't run on Sunday," said the driver.

"You wait till another day," said Mr. Johnson. "Down this street, please, driver. I'll get off on the next corner."

"He *told* me Vulcan, though," said the driver.

"I'll tell you," said Mr. Johnson, hesitating with the door of the cab half-open. "You take that ten dollars and I'll give you another ten dollars to go with it, and you go right ahead and bet that money on any Thursday on any horse that has a name indicating . . . let me see, Thursday . . . well, grain. Or any growing food."

"Grain?" said the driver. "You mean a horse named, like, Wheat or something?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Johnson. "Or, as a matter of fact, to make it even easier, any horse whose name includes the letters C, R, L. Perfectly simple."

"Tall Corn?" said the driver, a light in his eye. "You mean a horse named, like, Tall Corn?"

"Absolutely," said Mr. Johnson. "Here's your money."

"Tall Corn," said the driver. "Thank *you,* mister."

"Goodby," said Mr. Johnson.

He was on his own corner and went straight up to his apartment. He let himself in and called "Hello?" and Mrs. Johnson answered from the kitchen, "Hello, dear, aren't you early?"

"Took a taxi home," Mr. Johnson said. "I remembered the cheesecake, too. What's for dinner?"

Mrs. Johnson came out of the kitchen and kissed him; she was a comfortable woman, and smiling as Mr. Johnson smiled. "Hard day?" she asked.

"Not very," said Mr. Johnson, hanging his coat in the closet. "How about you?"

"So-so," she said. She stood in the kitchen doorway while he settled into his easy chair and took off his good shoes and took out the paper he had bought that morning. "Here and there," she said.

"I didn't do so badly," Mr. Johnson said. "Couple young people."

"Fine," she said. "I had a little nap this afternoon, took it easy most of the day. Went into a department store this morning and accused the woman next to me of shoplifting, and had the store detective pick her up. Sent three dogs to the pound—*you* know, the usual thing. Oh, and listen," she added, remembering.

"What?" asked Mr. Johnson.

"Well," she said, "I got onto a bus and asked the driver for a transfer, and when he helped someone else first I said that he was impertinent, and quarreled with him. And then I said why wasn't he in the army, and I said it loud enough for everyone to hear, and I took his number and I turned in a complaint. Probably got him fired."

"Fine," said Mr. Johnson. "But you do look tired. Want to change over tomorrow?"

"I *would* like to," she said. "I could do with a change."

"Right," said Mr. Johnson. "What's for dinner?"

"Veal cutlet."

"Had it for lunch," said Mr. Johnson.

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