$1.50

Good Neighbors and Other Strangers

Mystical science fiction tales by

EDGAR PANGBORN

"One of the... finest writers of fantasy alive today."
—*Newsday*

Good Neighbors And Other Strangers

Edgar Pangborn

COLLIER BOOKS
Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
New York

Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
866 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022
Collier-Macmillan Canada Ltd., Toronto, Ontario

Good Neighbors and Other Strangers is also published in a hardcover edition by Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 75-182023

First Collier Books Edition 1973

Printed in the United States of America

This one is for
BOB MILLS

Contents

Good Neighbors and Other Strangers

Good Neighbors

The ship was sighted a few times, briefly and without a good fix. It was spherical, the estimated diameter about twenty-seven miles, and was in orbit approximately 3,400 miles from the surface of the earth. No one observed the escape from it.

The ship itself occasioned some comment, but back there at the tattered end of the twentieth century, what was one visiting spaceship more or less? Others had appeared before, and gone away, discouraged or just not bothering. Three-dimensional T.V. was coming out of the experimental stage. Soon anyone could have "Dora the Doll" or the "Grandson of Tarzan" smack in his own living room. Besides, it was a hot summer.

The first knowledge of the escape came when the region of Seattle suffered an eclipse of the sun, which

was not an eclipse but a near shadow, which was not a shadow but a thing. The darkness drifted out of the northern Pacific. It generated thunder without lightning and without rain. When it had moved eastward and the hot sun reappeared, wind followed, a moderate gale. The coast was battered by sudden high waves, then hushed in a bewilderment of fog.

Before that appearance, radar had gone crazy for an hour.

The atmosphere buzzed with aircraft. They went up in readiness to shoot, but after the first sighting reports a few miles offshore, that order was vehemently canceled—someone in charge must have had a grain of sense. The thing was not a plane, rocket or missile. It was an animal.

If you shoot an animal that resembles an inflated gasbag with wings, and the wingspread happens to be something over four miles tip to tip, and the carcass drops on a city, that is not nice.

The Office of Continental Defense deplored the lack of precedent. But actually none was needed. You just don't drop four miles of dead or dying alien flesh on Seattle or any other part of a swarming homeland. You wait till it flies out over the ocean, if it will, or at least over somebody else's country.

It, or rather she, didn't go back over the Pacific, perhaps because of the prevailing westerlies. After the Seattle incident she climbed to a great altitude above the Rockies, apparently using an updraft with very little wing motion. There was no means of calculating her weight, mass, or buoyancy. Dead or injured, drift might have carried her anywhere within one or two hundred

miles. Then she seemed to be following the line of the Platte and the Missouri. By the end of the day she was circling interminably over the huge complex of St. Louis, hopelessly crying.

She had a head, drawn back most of the time into the bloated mass of the body but thrusting forward now and then on a short neck, not more than three hundred feet in length. When she did that the blunt turtlelike head could be observed, the gaping, toothless, suffering mouth from which the thunder came, and the soft-shining purple eyes that searched the ground but found nothing answering her need. The skin color was mud-brown with some dull iridescence and many peculiar marks resembling weals or blisters. Along the belly some observers saw half a mile of paired protuberances that looked like teats.

She was unquestionably the equivalent of a vertebrate. Two web-footed legs were drawn up close against the cigar-shaped body. The vast, rather narrow, inflated wings could not have been held or moved in flight without a strong internal skeleton and musculature. Theorists later argued she must have come from a planet with a high proportion of water surface, a planet possibly larger than Earth though of about the same mass and with a similar atmosphere. She could rise in Earth's air. And before each lament she was seen to breathe.

It was assumed that air sacs within her body had been inflated or partly inflated when she left the ship, perhaps with some gas lighter than nitrogen. Since it was inconceivable that a vertebrate organism could have survived entry into atmosphere from an orbit 3,400

miles up, it was necessary to believe that the ship had descended, unobserved and by unknown means, probably on Earth's night side. Later on the ship did descend as far as atmosphere, for a moment. . . .

St. Louis was partly evacuated. There is no reliable estimate of the loss of life and property from panic and accident on the jammed roads and rail lines. Fifteen hundred dead, 7,400 injured is the conservative figure.

After a night and a day she abandoned that area, flying heavily eastward. The droning and swooping gnats of aircraft plainly distressed her. At first she had only tried to avoid them, but now and then during her eastward flight from St. Louis she made short, desperate rushes against them, without skill or much sign of intelligence, screaming from a wide-open mouth that could have swallowed a four-engine bomber. Two aircraft were lost over Cincinnati, by collision with each other in trying to get out of her way. Pilots were then ordered to keep a distance of not less than ten miles until such time as she reached the Atlantic—if she did —when she could be safely shot down.

She studied Chicago for a day.

By that time Civil Defense was better prepared. About a million residents had already fled to open country before she came, and the loss of life was proportionately smaller. She moved on. We have no clue to the reason why great cities should have attracted her, though apparently they did. She was hungry perhaps, or seeking help, or merely drawn in animal curiosity by the endless motion in the cities and the strangeness. It has even been suggested that the life forms of her homeland—her masters—resembled humanity. She

moved eastward, and religious organizations united to pray that she would come down on one of the Lakes where she could be safely destroyed. She didn't. They may have looked too dirty.

She approached Pittsburgh, choked and screamed and flew high, and soared in weary circles over Buffalo for a day and a night. Some pilots who had followed the flight from the West Coast claimed that the lamentation of her voice was growing fainter and hoarser while she was drifting along the line of the Mohawk Valley. She turned south, following the Hudson at no great height. Sometimes she appeared to be gasping, the labored inhalations harsh and prolonged, a cloud in agony.

When she flew over Westchester, headquarters tripled the swarm of interceptors and observation planes. Squadrons from Connecticut and southern New Jersey deployed to form a monstrous funnel, the small end before her, the large end pointing out to open sea. Heavy bombers closed in above, laying a smoke screen at 10,000 feet to discourage her from rising. The ground shivered to the drone of jets and her crying.

Multitudes had abandoned the metropolitan area. Other multitudes trusted to the subways, to the narrow street canyons and to the strength of concrete and steel. Others climbed to high places and watched, trusting the laws of chance.

She passed over Manhattan in the evening, between 8:14 and 8:27 P.M., July 16, 1976, at an altitude of about 2,000 feet. She swerved away from the aircraft that blanketed Long Island and the Sound, swerved again as the southern group buzzed her instead of giv-

ing way. She made no attempt to rise into the sun-crimsoned terror of smoke.

The plan was intelligent. It should have worked, but for one fighter-pilot who jumped the gun. He said later that he himself couldn't understand what happened. It was court-martial testimony, but his reputation had been good. He was Bill Green—William Hammond Green—of New London, Connecticut, flying a one-man jet fighter, well aware of the strict orders not to attack until the target had moved at least ten miles east of Sandy Hook. He said he certainly had no previous intention to violate orders. It was something that just happened in his mind, a sort of mental sneeze.

His squadron was approaching Rockaway, the flying creature about three miles ahead of him and half a mile down. He was aware of saying out loud to nobody: "Well, she's too goddamn big." Then he was darting out of formation, diving on her, giving her one rocket-burst and reeling off to the south at 840 MPH.

He never did locate and rejoin his squadron, but he made it somehow back to his home field. He climbed out of the plane, they say, and fell flat on his face.

It seems likely that his shot missed the animal's head and tore through some part of her left wing. She spun to the left, rose perhaps a thousand feet, facing the city in her turn, side-slipped, recovered herself, and fought for altitude. She could not gain it. In the effort she collided with two of the following planes. One of them smashed into her right side behind the wing, the other flipped end over end across her back like a

swatted dragonfly. It dropped clear and made a mess on Bedloe's Island.

She too was falling in a long slant, silent now but still living. After the impact her body thrashed desolately on the wreckage between Lexington and Seventh Avenues, her right wing churning, then only trailing, in the East River, her left wing a crumpled slowly deflating mass concealing Times Square, Herald Square and the garment district. At the close of the struggle her neck extended, her turtle beak grasping the top of Radio City. She was still trying to pull herself up, as the buoyant gases hissed and bubbled away through her wounds. Radio City collapsed with her.

For a long while after the roar of descending rubble and her own roaring had ceased, there was no human noise except a melancholy thunder of the planes.

The apology came early next morning.

The spaceship was observed to descend to the outer limits of atmosphere, very briefly. A capsule was released, with a parachute timed to open at 40,000 feet and come down neatly in Scarsdale. Parachute, capsule, and timing device were of good workmanship.

The communication engraved on a plaque of metal (which still defies analysis) was a hasty job, the English slightly odd, with some evidence of an incomplete understanding of the situation. That the visitors themselves were aware of these deficiencies is indicated by the text of the message itself:

> Most sadly regret inexcusable escape of livestock. While petting same, one of our children monkied (sp?)

with airlock. Will not happen again. Regret also imperfect grasp of language learned through what you term Television etc. Animal not dangerous, but observe some accidental damage caused, therefore hasten to enclose reimbursement, having taken liberty of studying your highly ingenious methods of exchange. Hope same will be adequate, having estimated deplorable inconvenience to best of ability. Regret exceedingly impossibility of communicating further, as pressure of time and prior obligations forbids. Please accept heartfelt apologies and assurances of continuing esteem.

The reimbursement was in fact properly enclosed with the plaque, and may be seen by the public in the rotunda of the restoration of Radio City. Though technically counterfeit, it looks like perfectly good money, except that Mr. Lincoln is missing one of his wrinkles, and the words *five dollars* are upside down.

A Better Mousehole

So now Irma will be at me to do something about them blue bugs. I got to do something about Irma.

Dr. West is wise too, as good as said so when him and Judge Van Anda was in today for a couple beers. Pity Dr. West is not the doctoring type doctor but just has letters and stuff. Sort of explorer people say, account of his Independent Income, gone for months till the town's forgot him and then he turns up full of what the bull was done with.

I don't think the Judge knows about the blue bugs. If they bit him like they done me he'd never go to dreaming, not him up there, six feet five, looking back at what he figures the world used to be. Still if you was

old like him, you might want big dreams more than ever, about being young.

If you could *tell* them bugs, if you could name your own dream! No way, I guess. I take the dreams I can get.

Dr. West certainly knows something. I'd no sooner drawed them beers when he starts mentioning mice. I told him Look, I said, you do not see the Health Department climbing all over my back the way they would if I had mice. He asks me, so what is that hole in the floor below the liquor shelves? I had to make like hunting for it, and act surprised. Knothole, I says. Oh, knothole, he says, knothole the regal twin-cushioned back of my lap, how come a knothole in linoleum? So I had to say it could be mice. Judge Van Anda says Ha.

I went down the bar to pass the time with Lulu who doesn't get much business in the afternoon because the light is too strong. Lulu is like blonde this week. If only I could tell the bugs to put Lulu into a dream with me! The only time they done that she turned into Irma. I can't figure it.

What if Lulu got bit and had some dreams herself?

I suppose Irma thinks because I married her I can't do nothing without she comes clomping into it? If her ass is solid gold why don't she move to Fort Knox, get laid amongst the goldbricks?

I had not hardly started talking to Lulu when Dr. West goes to booming. Desolation, he says, do you think you know what desolation is? It's the sub-Arctic tundra, he says, and me alone in that borrowed Cessna that might've got its engine tuned three or four months

earlier, and no reason to be there except my itch to see more of the poor wonderful planet before they poison it or blow it up. Lulu, he says, what do you think? What do you say desolation is?

Oh, she says, maybe the Stadium, game over, crowd gone and you know, empty popcorn bags and match cards and spit.

You, Al? he says to me. What's desolation?

I said, oh, say, a dark night and nobody shows you where to go.

I believe Dr. West is sad in his heart in spite of that education which is over my head. It would be like him to take off in a borrowed plane for the flat side of nowhere. I like to watch him standing by Judge Van Anda who he is always telling siddown siddown and the Judge merely says Ha. I can feel sad too, without no Independent Income. I am forty-two and I have this ulcer.

The tundra, says Dr. West—a nothing of dun colors, rotting snow, and you wonder when the whole earth will look like that.

No! says Lulu about to cry. Don't talk thataway!

Never mind, chicken, he says, I was just bleating.

Suppose you took Irma to this here tundra and told her to walk home. Flies, she says last night, flies all over you and you drunk as a pig. God, I pretty near shut her up for good. But she just don't know no better. She don't have too much of a life with a busted-down hack like me that couldn't even last five rounds with Willie Donohue and him not in his best years.

Dr. West went on about borrowing that plane from a friend has got this lodge in the north woods, and

flying over the tundra till he saw like a blue spark down there. Landed and picked up the object, size and shape of a basketball he said, not really blue, more like daylight split and turned a million ways. It hummed when he held it in his ear. That's when he broke off to ask me is there a basement under this part of the bar.

He knows damn well it's got no basement. He was in town when I got this addition added on. Already a cellar under the main part, I didn't need another, got this part done with merely the footing and concrete under the lino. I mean if there is any excavation in forty miles Dr. West will be there watching. It's the people with an Independent Income or them with not any that get the excavations watched. Guys like me that work for a living, we are up that creek with a little bitty plastic spoon and no breeze. All's I said was Hell no, this here is an addition was added on, it's got no basement.

Unless somebody walled it off on you, says Judge Van Anda. You won't find a better way to dispose of a body, the Judge says, that's if you have time and materials and don't mind the labor. Well, the Judge is retired after forty years on what they call the Bench, and keeps saying with his experience he ought to write detective stories. Yes, sir, he says, if the walling off has been done right, proper pains taken, you can give the whole thing a very attractive finish. I guess he meant the wall. You never know, with the Judge. I must of said to him a hundred times Look, I've said, the surprising type things that have happened to me, you ought to put them into a book if you're going to write one. He just goes hrrm hrrm and Ha.

I hated him sounding off about bodies that way, account of Lulu's nerves. Before Dr. West begun his story Lulu was talking to me about that murder over to Lincolnsville, the one that done in his whole family with a kitchen knife, and the shooting down in Jonesburg a couple weeks ago. She was real nerved up. His whole family, and with a plain kitchen knife. When the cops come for him—Jesus, he was like asleep, it said. Lulu takes the news real personal, it's the woman of it.

Dr. West's little blue eyes—why, damn, they're near the same color as my bugs, like sky with the sun caught in it.

Maybe the bugs are something new to science that Dr. West has to keep top secret? Then this tundra story would be the educated crappola he's obliged to shovel over it? His eyes are bloodshot like mine have been getting the last few weeks. I been losing weight too and it ain't my ulcer. The blood the bugs take out couldn't make no such difference, and them so gentle I float off into the dreams almost as soon as they come settle on me.

I'd give anything to have another dream where Irma is like when we got married, not bony and mean but soft, brown hair with all them goldy lights, voice like country cream.

When Dr. West quit talking Lulu was crying. She says she feels sometimes like everything was on top of her, usually goes to the Ladies and comes back with a rebuilt mouth and a fresh bounce to her ass. Lulu could put her shoes in my trunk any time. She ain't had a real happy life.

Aw, who does? For young people it's always a maybe-tomorrow, for the rest it's where-did-everything-go? The Judge he should be happy looking acrost all them years of playing God and sticking people in jail? Dr. West never married, chases moonblink all over the world with his Independent Income, but once he told me what he honestly craved was hearth and home, nice woman to warm his slippers and his bed, only a devil in him couldn't ever let him rest. And I have this ulcer.

The Bible or somebody says if you build a better mousetrap they'll like put you on teevy. All's I got is a better mousehole. What do they give you for that?

Dr. West waited till Lulu come back from the Ladies to go on with his story. He wasn't telling it for her, though, spite of her coming to sit on the stool by him and give him a feel or two for friendship's sake. Not for the Judge neither. It was for me and that hole in the floor. I could of told him they never come out till I close the bar and dim the lights.

He said he smuggled the blue ball home, not a word to anyone. As a story it wasn't nothing, which is one reason I can't believe he was shitting us. He kept calling the thing a sphere. I always thought a sphere was some type musical instrument.

When he says home he means the ram-and-shackle mansion at the edge of town with backland running up Ragged Rock Hill and Johnny Blood rattling around in the mansion being a caretaker with one eye that used to be an actor and still lets go with some of this Shakespeare if anything startles him. He said he sent Johnny away for two months vacation to this sister in Maine who has been trying to make Johnny come to Jesus

anyhow thirty-four years, only when Johnny hears that special tone of voice he shuts the good eye and lets go with something from this Shakespeare. I wish I had the education to make with Shakespeare when Irma is at me about talking to Lulu or drinking up the profits as if I could do that with this ulcer unless I would drop dead, she never thinks of that, or why don't I at least try to earn enough we would spend winters in Florida if I had any zing.

Sent Johnny away, he says, and kept the sphere at room temperature. Dr. West is always talking thataway. A room don't run a temperature, or if he means hot like some special room what's so scientific if somebody monkeys with the thermostack or leaves the goddamn door open?

Winter in Florida for Christ's sake.

The blue thing hatched one night after he'd gone to bed—except he says it was not an egg but a figure of speech. He found the two halves in the morning not chipped like a hatched egg, just separated, like they'd been fitted originally so slick you couldn't find the joint. Nothing else disturbed, but a hole in the window screen that looked like it was melted through, the ends of copper wire fused so the hole looked like a grommet.

Judge Van Anda asked him did he keep the busted eggshell. Dr. West says, Now I did try to make it plain it was not an egg, nor do I know why I waste my experiences on you, like when I showed you that comb my mermaid gave me it could of been a paperclip all the impression it made. So it could, says the Judge kind of brisk, seeing they make such combs in Bridgeport you can buy them in any drugstore upwards of nineteen

cents plus tax. All right, says Dr. West, so if she did happen on it in the billows off Bridgeport, God damn it, she *gave* it to me, didn't she? Oh, don't get red-eyed about it, says Judge Van Anda.

I'm not, says Dr. West. Al's the one with bloodshot eyes, late hours likely. He was watching me real sharp. No sir, you too, says the Judge, you look in the mirror you'll see you're red-eyed like a weasel, I snow you not. Now if you could have brought home just one mermaid scale. And Dr. West says Do I have to tell you again they do not have scales? No more reason to have scales than a seal or a whale or any ocean-dwelling mammal. Ocean-dwelling mahooha, says Judge Van Anda.

And I suppose, says Dr. West, back there ninety-six years ago in the little red schoolhouse the only biology you ever learned was out in the bushes during recess. Which was a friendly type remark because the Judge could go hrrm hrrm reminding hisself how horny he wants you to think he used to be. All the same I quick took them another round of beers.

Lulu says You got out of that too easy, Doc. I remember she pushed her shoulders back showing she has got a pair. She could put her shoes in my trunk any time. She says Do you still have the eggshell or do you don't?

I do not, says Dr. West. I do not still possess the two halves of that vehicle.

Well, excuse me for living, says Lulu, but she wasn't mad. She likes everybody, you could call it a weakness.

And why don't you still have it, says the Judge, as if I didn't know?

Because, says Dr. West, I carried the halves outdoors to see them in the sun, was disturbed by the telephone, set them down in a thicket, answered the phone at which you bent my ear for half an hour about a detective story you plan to write any day now. When I got back the two halves were gone.

Naturally, says the Judge. Naturally.

Gone, says Dr. West, from a patch of soft earth in the thicket that showed no footprints but my own.

Naturally.

They left it at that. Ever since, I been thinking about it. Only fifteen minutes now till closing time or I would flip my lid.

Dr. West was not lying or he would have done like a mermaid story. That don't mean he told the whole truth. How could anybody ever tell that like they say in the law courts? Maybe the bugs bit him before they went off through the hole in the screen? One bite would be enough to show him what it does to you. Could we sort of share the bugs?

I would like that. Something's gentled me down lately. I got no jealousy about him and Lulu going off together like they done this afternoon after that naturally thing. I don't seem to have no angry feelings of no kind except about drowning Irma into the bathtub if it was practical. Aw, I guess I mean I might make that type *joke*, a man couldn't *do* no such thing. Besides it could be some way my fault Irma is like she is. How about that, Al, how about that?

Anyhow I'd sooner Lulu went off with Dr. West than with say this salesman type looks like a shaved pig and wants a beer.

Beer. Why can't they ask for something unusual just once so I would have to think about it and stop thinking so much?

Five minutes to closing.

It was last night Irma found me with my bugs and called them flies. I bet she believes that. It was the finest part of my dream—gone, clobbered, and here's Irma in her nightgown come down and turned on the light standing there all bones and temper saying Drunk as a pig, now I see where the profits go, all down your gut. Her that used to talk like a lady and had them goldy lights in her hair. Flies, she says, flies everywhere.

She don't know about the hole, my better mouse-hole, or she would of poured cleaning fluid down it and they would of come out and fixed her little red wagon. I would not like that to happen. It's funny how gentle I feel nowadays. I used to be what they call a ruffed diamond.

I guess Irma will have took her twenty-year grouch to bed by now. Oh no, it wasn't like that *all* of them years, not by no means—but my Jesus, I'm supposed to be some godalmighty Valentino Rockefeller or I'm no good? I'm good in them dreams. I been seven feet tall and bronzy, had this thing was ready whenever I said so.

There they go again talking about that thing in Jonesburg where this lady shot up a radio-teevy store account she claimed them noises spoiled her dreams. Look—things like that—it can't mean my bugs are—

I won't have a dream tonight, not till I can get a real talk alone with Dr. West. Well, speak of the—

* * *

It has come to be morning, hot and quiet outside in that golden street. I better try to think through what happened and what Dr. West said. That about inner space for instance.

When he come at closing time I seen he wanted talk, same as me. I told him stick around, I closed up, doused the lights in front and we carried a Jameson into the back room. He flung down a shot and said, I took Lulu up to my place, the Judge too. Johnny Blood'll be gone another couple weeks, but I suppose maybe the Judge'll be missed.

Missed? I says.

He says, Don't be like that, Al. The Judge is asleep and dreaming. Lulu is asleep and dreaming, and don't you go acting surprised on me, because I come back to talk to you. Beat-up crocks like you and me, Al, he says, we're into middle age, we can wait a mite longer for our dreams, seeing we've spent more'n half a lifetime doing not much else.

While I poured him another he said It was Lulu brought them back to me. I asked him how come.

She didn't do anything, he says, she's just overweight with a big blood pressure. They like that. They must need the blood, maybe to help them breed. Only a couple dozen came out of that sphere, but now they might have several colonies. I wasn't quite truthful, he says—I saw them come out, and a few of them flew around me with things in the fifth pair of limbs that looked like weapons. While I was holding still because of that, one of them bit me and I dreamed a wonderful journey to Alpha Centauri.

He's got eyes, that Dr. West. All the time my blue

bugs been around me I never noticed they was ten-legged.

Maybe, he says, they always give us the dreams merely to hold us quiet so they can drink. Maybe it's from loving kindness. Maybe they don't even know they're giving us dreams.

I asked if it was true what he told us about the halves of the shell disappearing. He said yes, and he said that afterward he went searching and grieving all over, till one night he caught a bluish gleam up on Ragged Rock Hill. He went to it, working his way through the trees with a flashlight to where he thought it had showed, and settled down to wait. Sure enough they came and gave him a dream. That's when he told me it breaks his heart too the way a man can't name his own.

They come for Lulu. All we did, he says, we turned off the lights and set by the open window. Coming for Lulu because she's right for them, I guess, they took care of the Judge and me. My dream was a short one, Al. I don't have much blood in me.

He put down another Jameson while I told him what I been going through, and that's when he stepped over to one of the other back-room booths to pick something off the floor. He's a noticing restless man. Just a buckle like a gold rosebud off a girl's shoe The back room gets lively Saturday nights, and I ain't been sweeping up too good, last couple-three weeks. Only light I turned on for us was the 25-watt in our booth with the pink shade. Irma chose them shades. They're real nice. You won't find no goddamn interior desecrator that's got taste like that. Dr. West he set there

playing with that gold rosebud and going slow on his Jameson while I talked. And I asked him Where do they come from?

Oh, he says, outer space, where else? He was turning the buckle in and out of the light, reflecting a glow into the drink itself, a kind of glory. And he says, Or else inner space.

I asked him did he think the bugs had anything to do with them killings. He just wiggled his shoulders.

That's when I said Look, couldn't my Irma have a dream? He give me no answer. I says Maybe it would change how she acts and feels about some things? That's all I said.

And he says maybe. We don't know, he says, we don't know much of anything. More we know, better we get at asking questions we can't answer. Then he poured himself another Jameson and afterwhile I went upstairs.

Irma wasn't asleep. When I touched her shoulder she says God give me patience and flounces clear acrost the bed. I says Irma honey, I ain't after you thataway, I just want you should come down talk something over with I and Doc West. Ain't that all I said? And she says West, that dirty old man, what for?

I says, Irma, this is special, you give me lip I'm big enough to make you. You get up and fling some clothes on and take that goddamn cold cream off of your face and come down. All's we want is have a couple drinks and talk about something.

Well, she says, aren't we the lord and master all of a sudden! You fuckin' right, I says, and get going. Only I didn't say that mean, did I? No, and then she just

wipes the guck off her face meek as anything, slippers on, bathrobe over her p-js and comes along. In the light of the upstairs hall I seen some of them goldy lights. I know I did.

Dr. West had dropped his head on his arms. Small he was, and always clean as a dry stick, I don't know why she would call him a dirty old man, got no bad habits except needs to get his ashes hauled like any man. He hadn't finished his Jameson. I thought he was having a dream but he looked up and said, I brought it on us, I brought it on the world. I and some other few billion, he said. I don't know what he meant.

Irma seen the bugs and she screamed. Only five-six of them, nothing scary. I put my arms around her to gentle her. Irma, I says, all they do is give you beautiful dreams. I want you should have some like I've had. Let 'em bite a little, they don't hurt.

But you screamed and tried to fight me off. You said I don't want to, I just want—I just want—

I didn't listen. So hellbent you should have dreams like mine, I didn't listen. You did jerk around so, and them p-js got twisted away from your little boobs, and I must of just hung on, too lamebrain dumb for anything else. Them things is like when you was a girl. Used to kid about what would the babies eat, didn't we? Only we couldn't have any, but that was all right, I never minded about that. So one bug lit there and I must of just held you—why, them bites don't hurt, I got a hundred onto me, they don't even itch.

And so you didn't scream again but that shock went through you and you said Oh, oh, oh, a kind of crying like what I used to hear in bed and you with a

voice like country cream. And I saw the bug fly away and I found your mouth and kissed you but you sagged away from me and you was dead.

I think Dr. West said Your little lady, she's asleep?

I carried you over to this lounge chair, I guess I been just sitting here. I don't know what to do. I remember Dr. West he come over and ,tood by though I wanted him to go away. I know I said something about maybe some people just couldn't have such dreams.

He says Maybe it's that or maybe she dreamed *more* than us, Al. Maybe this thing gave her too big a dream for her to stand. Dreaming's dangerous, he said, it's got a dark side. If the bugs shoot in something that makes the dreaming part of us blaze up, the way the rest of us can't take it—

And I told him I wasn't going to try to understand it no more. I said I ought to knowed you can't make another person to have a dream. It's not right, it's not right someway.

Dr. West said more, didn't he? I can't just bring it back. I think he said dreaming's not a sickness but it's like one partly. It made the world what it is, different from ancient days, it could unmake it.

I asked him not to notify no one, just go away and leave me be. People will figure the bar is closed, give us a bit of time before they start crowding in.

And there was something he said about how things might even get better with the bugs taking over, if that's what they meant to do. I told him I didn't care so much about the world, all's I ever wanted was to have a decent life with work I knowed how to do and a nice woman and maybe some kids. I guess that's when Dr.

West went away. He's just a lonesome little guy trying to figure it out. I oughtn't to said nothing that sounded mean.

See, it wasn't like I was trying to make you have *my* dream exactly.

You look like you was dreaming now. You look real sweet, I meant to tell you. I don't know why I couldn't ever tell you.

Longtooth

My word is good. How can I prove it? Born in Darkfield, wasn't I? Stayed away thirty more years after college, but when I returned I was still Ben Dane, one of the Darkfield Danes, Judge Marcus Dane's eldest. And they knew my word was good. My wife died and I sickened of all cities; then my bachelor brother Sam died too, who'd lived all his life here in Darkfield, running his one-man law office over in Lohman—our nearest metropolis, population 6,437. A fast coronary at fifty; I had loved him. Helen gone, then Sam—I wound up my unimportances and came home, inheriting Sam's housekeeper Adelaide Simmons, her grim stability and celestial cooking. Nostalgia for Maine is a serious matter, late in life: I had to yield. I expected a gradual drift into my childless old age

playing correspondence chess, translating a few of the classics. I thought I could take for granted the continued respect of my neighbors. I say my word is good.

I will remember again the middle of March a few years ago, the snow skimming out of an afternoon sky as dry as the bottom of an old aluminum pot. Harp Ryder's back road had been plowed since the last snowfall; I supposed Bolt-Bucket could make the mile and a half in to his farm and out again before we got caught. Harp had asked me to get him a book if I was making a trip to Boston, any goddamn book that told about Eskimos, and I had one for him, De Poncins' *Kabloona.* I saw the midget devils of white running crazy down a huge slope of wind, and recalled hearing at the Darkfield New's Bureau, otherwise Cleve's General Store, somebody mentioning a forecast of the worst blizzard in forty years. Joe Cleve, who won't permit a radio in the store because it pesters his ulcers, inquired of his Grand Inquisitor who dwells ten yards behind your right shoulder: "Why's it always got to be the worst in so-and-so many years, that going to help anybody?" The Bureau was still analyzing this difficult inquiry when I left, with my cigarettes and as much as I could remember of Adelaide's grocery list after leaving it on the dining table. It wasn't yet three when I turned in on Harp's back road, and a gust slammed at Bolt-Bucket like death with a shovel.

I tried to win momentum for the rise to the high ground, swerved to avoid an idiot rabbit and hit instead a patch of snow-hidden melt-and-freeze, skidding to a full stop from which nothing would extract us but a tow.

I was fifty-seven that year, my wind bad from too much smoking and my heart (I now know) no stronger than Sam's. I quit cursing—gradually, to avoid sudden actions—and tucked *Kabloona* under my parka. I would walk the remaining mile to Ryder's, stay just long enough to leave the book, say hello, and phone for a tow; then, since Harp never owned a car and never would, I could walk back and meet the truck.

If Leda Ryder knew how to drive, it didn't matter much after she married Harp. They farmed it, back in there, in almost the manner of Harp's ancestors in Jefferson's time. Harp did keep his two hundred laying hens by methods that were considered modern before the poor wretches got condemned to batteries, but his other enterprises came closer to antiquity. In his big kitchen garden he let one small patch of weeds fool themselves for an inch or two, so he'd have it to work at: they survived nowhere else. A few cows, a team, four acres for market crops, and a small dog Droopy, whose grandmother had made it somehow with a dachshund. Droopy's only menace in obese old age was a wheezing bark. The Ryders must have grown nearly all vital necessities except chewing tobacco and once in a while a new dress for Leda. Harp could snub the twentieth century, and I doubt if Leda was consulted about it in spite of his obsessive devotion for her. She was almost thirty years younger and yes, he should not have married her. Other side up just as scratchy: she should not have married him, but she did.

Harp was a dinosaur perhaps, but I grew up with him, he a year the younger. We swam, fished, helled around together. And when I returned to Darkfield

growing old, he was one of the few who acted glad to see me, so far as you can trust what you read in a face like a granite promontory. Maybe twice a week Harp Ryder smiled.

I pushed on up the ridge, and noticed a going-and-coming set of wide tire tracks already blurred with snow. That would be the egg truck I had passed a quarter-hour since on the main road. Whenever the west wind at my back lulled, I could swing around and enjoy one of my favorite prospects of birch and hemlock lowland. From Ryder's Ridge there's no sign of Darkfield two miles southwest except one church spire. On clear days you glimpse Bald Mountain and his two big brothers, more than twenty miles west of us.

The snow was thickening. It brought relief and pleasure to see the black shingles of Harp's barn and the roof of his Cape Codder. Foreshortened, so that it looked snug against the barn; actually house and barn were connected by a two-story shed fifteen feet wide and forty feet long—woodshed below, hen loft above. The Ryders' sunrise-facing bedroom window was set only three feet above the eaves of that shed roof. They truly went to bed with the chickens. I shouted, for Harp was about to close the big shed door. He held it for me. I ran, and the storm ran after me. The west wind was bouncing off the barn; eddies howled at us. The temperature had tumbled ten degrees since I left Darkfield. The thermometer by the shed door read fifteen degrees, and I knew I'd been a damn fool. As I helped Harp fight the shed door closed, I thought I heard Leda, crying.

A swift confused impression. The wind was explor-

ing new ranges of passion, the big door squawked, and Harp was asking: "Ca' break down?" I do still think I heard Leda wail. If so, it ended as we got the door latched and Harp drew a newly fitted two-by-four bar across it. I couldn't understand that: the old latch was surely proof against any wind short of a hurricane.

"Bolt-Bucket never breaks down. Ought to get one, Harp—lots of company. All she did was go in the ditch."

"You might see her again come spring." His hens were scratching overhead, not yet scared by the storm. Harp's eyes were small gray glitters of trouble. "Ben, you figure a man's getting old at fifty-six?"

"No." My bones (getting old) ached for the warmth of his kitchen-dining-living-everything room, not for sad philosophy. "Use your phone, okay?"

"If the wires ain't down," he said, not moving, a man beaten on by other storms. "Them loafers didn't cut none of the overhand branches all summer. I told 'em of course, I told 'em how it would be . . . I meant, Ben, old enough to get dumb fancies?" My face may have told him I thought he was brooding about himself with a young wife. He frowned, annoyed that I hadn't taken his meaning. "I meant, *seeing* things. Things that can't be so, but—"

"We can all do some of that at any age, Harp."

That remark was a stupid brush-off, a stone for bread, because I was cold, impatient, wanted in. Harp had always a tense one-way sensitivity. His face chilled. "Well, come in, warm up. Leda ain't feeling too good. Getting a cold or something."

When she came downstairs and made me welcome,

her eyes were reddened. I don't think the wind made that noise. Droopy waddled from her basket behind the stove to snuff my feet and give me my usual low passing mark.

Leda never had it easy there, young and passionate with scant mental resources. She was twenty-eight that year, looking tall because she carried her firm body handsomely. Some of the sullenness in her big mouth and lucid gray eyes was sexual challenge, some pure discontent. I liked Leda; her nature was not one for animosity or meanness. Before her marriage the Darkfield News Bureau used to declare with its customary scrupulous fairness that Leda had been covered by every goddamn thing in pants within thirty miles. For once the Bureau may have spoken a grain of truth in the malice, for Leda did have the smoldering power that draws men without word or gesture. After her abrupt marriage to Harp—Sam told me all this: I wasn't living in Darkfield then and hadn't met her—the garbage-gossip went hastily underground: enraging Harp Ryder was never healthy.

The phone wires weren't down, yet. While I waited for the garage to answer, Harp said, "Ben, I can't let you walk back in that. Stay over, huh?"

I didn't want to. It meant extra work and inconvenience for Leda, and I was ancient enough to crave my known safe burrow. But I felt Harp wanted me to stay for his own sake. I asked Jim Short at the garage to go ahead with Bolt-Bucket if I wasn't there to meet him. Jim roared: "Know what it's doing right now?"

"Little spit of snow, looks like."

"Jesus!" He covered the mouthpiece imperfectly. I

heard his enthusiastic voice ring through cold-iron echoes: "Hey, old Ben's got that thing into the ditch again! Ain't that something . . . ? Listen, Ben, I can't make no promises. Got both tow trucks out already. You better stop over and praise the Lord you got that far."

"Okay," I said. "It wasn't much of a ditch."

Leda fed us coffee. She kept glancing toward the landing at the foot of the stairs where a night-darkness already prevailed. A closed-in stairway slanted down at a never-used front door; beyond that landing was the other ground floor room—parlor, spare, guest room—where I would sleep. I don't know what Leda expected to encounter in that shadow. Once when a chunk of firewood made an odd noise in the range, her lips clamped shut on a scream.

The coffee warmed me. By that time the weather left no loophole for argument. Not yet 3:30, but west and north were lost in furious black. Through the hissing white flood I could just see the front of the barn forty feet away. "Nobody's going no place into that," Harp said. His little house shuddered, enforcing the words. "Led', you don't look too brisk. Get you some rest."

"I better see to the spare room for Ben."

Neither spoke with much tenderness, but it glowed openly in him when she turned her back. Then some other need bent his granite face out of its normal seams. His whole gaunt body leaning forward tried to help him talk. "You wouldn't figure me for a man'd go off his rocker?" he asked.

"Of course not. What's biting, Harp?"

"There's something in the woods, got no right to be there." To me that came as a letdown of relief: I would not have to listen to another's marriage problems. "I wish, b' Jesus Christ, it would hit somebody else once, so I could say what I know and not be laughed at all to hell. I *ain't* one for dumb fancies."

You walked on eggs with Harp. He might decide any minute that *I* was laughing. "Tell me," I said. "If anything's out there now it must feel a mite chilly."

"Ayah." He went to the north window, looking out where we knew the road lay under the white confusion. Harp's land sloped down on the other side of the road to the edge of mighty evergreen forest. Mount Katahdin stands more than fifty miles north and a little east of us. We live in a withering, shrinking world, but you could still set out from Harp's farm and, except for the occasional country road and the rivers—not many large ones—you could stay in deep forest all the way to the tundra, or Alaska. Harp said, "This kind of weather is when it comes."

He sank into his beat-up kitchen armchair and reached for *Kabloona.* He had barely glanced at the book while Leda was with us. "Funny name."

"Kabloona's an Eskimo word for white man."

"He done these pictures . . .? Be they good, Ben?"

"I like 'em. Photographs in the back."

"Oh." He turned the pages hastily for those, but studied only the ones that showed the strong Eskimo faces, and his interest faded. Whatever he wanted was not here. "These people, be they—civilized?"

"In their own way, sure."

"Ayah, this guy looks like he could find his way in the woods."

"Likely the one thing he couldn't do, Harp. They never see a tree unless they come south, and they hate to do that. Anything below the Arctic is too warm."

"That a fact . . . ? Well, it's a nice book. How much was it?" I'd found it second-hand; he paid me to the exact penny. "I'll be glad to read it." He never would. It would end up on the shelf in the parlor with the Bible, an old almanac, a Longfellow, until some day this place went up for auction and nobody remembered Harp's way of living.

"What's this all about, Harp?"

"Oh . . . I was hearing things in the woods, back last summer. I'd think, fox, then I'd know it wasn't. Make your hair stand right on end. Lost a cow, last August, from the north pasture acrost the rud. Section of board fence tore out. I mean, Ben, the two top boards was *pulled out from the nail holes.* No hammer marks."

"Bear?"

"Only track I found looked like bear except too small. You know a bear wouldn't *pull* it out, Ben."

"Cow slamming into it, panicked by something?"

He remained patient with me. "Ben, would I build a cow pasture fence nailing the crosspieces from the outside? Cow hit it with all her weight she might bust it, sure. And kill herself doing it, be blood and hair all over the split boards, and she'd be there, not a mile and a half away into the woods. Happened during a big thunderstorm. I figured it had to be somebody with a spite against me, maybe some son of a bitch wanting

the prop'ty, trying to scare me off that's lived here all my life and my family before me. But that don't make sense. I found the cow a week later, what was left. Way into the woods. The head and the bones. Hide tore up and flang around. Any *person* dressing off a beef, he'll cut whatever he wants and take off with it. He don't sit down and chaw the meat off the *bones*, b' Jesus Christ. He don't tear the thighbone out of the joint . . . All right, maybe bear. But no bear did that job on that fence and then driv old Nell a mile and a half into the woods to kill her. Nice little Jersey, clever's a kitten. Leda used to make over her, like she don't usually do with the stock . . . I've looked plenty in the woods since then, never turned up anything. Once and again I did smell something. Fishy, like bear-smell but—*different.*"

"But Harp, with snow on the ground—"

"Now you'll really call me crazy. When the weather is clear, I ain't once found his prints. I hear him then, at night, but I go out by daylight where I think the sound was, there's no trail. Just the usual snow tracks. I know. He lives in the trees and don't come down except when it's storming, I got to believe that? Because then he does come, Ben, when the weather's like now, like right now. And old Ned and Jerry out in the stable go wild, and sometimes we hear his noise under the window. I shine my flashlight through the glass—never catch sight of him. I go out with the ten-gauge if there's any light to see by, and there's prints around the house—holes filling up with snow. By morning there'll be maybe some marks left, and they'll lead off to the north woods, but under the trees you won't find it. So he gets up in the branches

and travels thataway? . . . Just once I have seen him Ben. Last October. I better tell you one other thing fast. A day or so after I found what was left of old Nell, I lost six roaster chickens. I made over a couple box stalls, maybe you remember, so the birds could be out on range and roost in the barn at night. Good doors, and I always locked 'em. Two in the morning, Ned and Jerry go crazy, I got out through the barn into the stable, and they was spooked, Ned trying to kick his way out. I got 'em quiet, looked all over the stable—loft, harness room, everywhere. Not a thing. Dead quiet night, no moon. It had to be something the horses smelled. I come back into the barn, and found one of the chicken-pen doors open—*tore* out from the lock. Chicken thief would bring along something to pry with—wouldn't he be a Christly idjut if he didn't . . .? Took six birds, six nice eight-pound roasters, and left the heads on the floor—bitten off."

"Harp—some lunatic. People *can* go insane that way. There are old stories—"

"Been trying to believe that. Would a man live the winter out there? Twenty below zero?"

"Maybe a cave—animal skins."

"I've boarded up the whole back of the barn. Done the same with the hen-loft windows—two-by-fours with four-inch spikes driv slantwise. They be twelve feet off the ground, and he ain't come for 'em, not yet. . . . So after that happened I sent for Sheriff Robart. Son of a bitch happens to live in Darkfield, you'd think he might've took an interest."

"Do any good?"

Harp laughed. He did that by holding my stare,

making no sound, moving no muscle except for a disturbance at the eye corners. A New England art; maybe it came over on the *Mayflower*. "Robart he come by, after a while. I showed him that door. I showed him them chicken heads. Told him how I'd been spending my nights out there on my ass, with the ten-gauge." Harp rose to unload tobacco juice into the range fire; he has a theory it purifies the air. "Ben, I might've showed him them chicken heads a shade close to his nose. By the time he got here, see, they wasn't all that fresh. He made out he'd look around and let me know. Mid-September. Ain't seen him since."

"Might've figured he wouldn't be welcome?"

"Why, he'd be welcome as shit on a tablecloth."

"You spoke of—seeing it, Harp?"

"Could call it seeing . . . All right. It was during them Indian summer days—remember? Like June except them pretty colors, smell of windfalls—God, I like that, I like October. I'd gone down to the slope acrost the rud where I mended my fence after losing old Nell. Just leaning there, guess I was tired. Late afternoon, sky pinking up. You know how the fence cuts acrost the slope to my east wood lot. I've let the bushes grow free—lot of elder, other stuff the birds come for. I was looking down toward that little break between the north woods and my wood lot, where a bit of old growed-up pasture shows through. Pretty spot. Painter fella come by a few years ago and done a picture of it, said the place looked like a coro, dunno what the hell that is, he didn't say."

I pushed at his brown study. "You saw it there?"

"No. Off to my right in them elder bushes. Fifty

feet from me, I guess. By God I didn't turn my head. I got it with the tail of my eye and turned the other way as if I meant to walk back to the rud. Made like busy with something in the grass, come wandering back to the fence some nearer. He stayed for me, a brownish patch in them bushes by the big yellow birch. Near the height of a man. No gun with me, not even a stick . . . Big shoulders, couldn't see his goddamn feet. He don't stand more'n five feet tall. His hands, if he's got real ones, hung out of my sight in a tangle of elder branches. He's got brown fur, Ben, reddy-brown fur all over him. His face too, his head, his big thick neck. There's a shine to fur in sunlight, you can't be mistook. So—I did look at him direct. Tried to act like I still didn't see him, but he knowed. He melted back and got the birch between him and me. Not a sound." And then Harp was listening for Leda upstairs. He went on softly: "Ayah, I ran back for a gun, and searched the woods, for all the good it did me. You'll want to know about his face. I ain't told Led' all this part. See, she's scared, I don't want to make it no worse, I just said it was some animal that snuck off before I could see it good. A big face, Ben. Head real human except it sticks out too much around the jaw. Not much nose—open spots in the fur. Ben, the—the *teeth!* I seen his mouth drop open and he pulled up one side of his lip to show me them stabbing things. I've seen as big as that on a full-growed bear. That's what I'll hear, I ever try to tell this. They'll say I seen a bear. Now I shot my first bear when I was sixteen and Pa took me over toward Jackman. I've got me one maybe every other year since

then. I know 'em, all their ways. But that's what I'll hear if I tell the story."

I am a frustrated naturalist, loaded with assorted facts. I know there aren't any monkeys or apes that could stand our winters except maybe the harmless Himalayan langur. No such beast as Harp described lived anywhere on the planet. It didn't help. Harp was honest; he was rational; he wanted reasonable explanation as much as I did. Harp wasn't the village atheist for nothing. I said, "I guess you will, Harp. People mostly won't take the—unusual."

"Maybe you'll hear him tonight, Ben."

Leda came downstairs, and heard part of that. "He's been telling you, Ben. What do you think?"

"I don't know what to think."

"Led', I thought, if I imitate that noise for him—"

"No!" She had brought some mending and she was about to sit down with it, but froze as if threatened by attack. "I couldn't stand it, Harp. And—it might bring them."

"Them?" Harp chuckled uneasily. "I don't guess I could do it that good he'd come for it."

"Don't *do* it, Harp!"

"All right, hon." Her eyes were closed, her head drooping back. "Don't get nerved up so."

I started wondering whether a man still seeming sane could dream up such a horror for the unconscious purpose of tormenting a woman too young for him, a woman he could never imagine he owned. If he told her a fox bark wasn't right for a fox, she'd believe him. I said, "We shouldn't talk about it if it upsets her."

He glanced at me like a man floating up from

under water. Leda said in a small, aching voice: "I wish to *God* we could move to Boston."

The granite face closed in defensiveness. "Led', we been over all that. Nothing is going to drive me off of my land. I got no time for the city at my age. What the Jesus would I do? Night watchman? Sweep out somebody's back room, b' Jesus Christ? Savings'd be gone in no time. We been all over it. We ain't moving nowhere."

"I could find work." For Harp of course that was the worst thing she could have said. She probably knew it from his stricken silence. She said clumsily, "I forgot something upstairs." She snatched up her mending and she was gone.

We talked no more of it the rest of the day. I followed through the milking and other chores, lending a hand where I could, and we made everything as secure as we could against storm and other enemies. The long-toothed furry thing was the spectral guest at dinner, but we cut him, on Leda's account, or so we pretended. Supper would have been awkward anyway. They weren't in the habit of putting up guests, and Leda was a rather deadly cook because she cared nothing about it. A Darkfield girl, I suppose she had the usual twentieth century mishmash of television dreams until some impulse or maybe false signs of pregnancy tricked her into marrying a man out of the nineteenth. We had venison treated like beef and overdone vegetables. I don't like venison even when it's treated right.

At six Harp turned on his battery radio and sat stone-faced through the day's bad news and the weather forecast—"a blizzard which may prove the worst in

forty-two years. Since 3:00 P.M., eighteen inches have fallen at Bangor, twenty-one at Boston. Precipitation is not expected to end until tomorrow. Winds will increase during the night with gusts up to seventy miles per hour." Harp shut it off, with finality. On other evenings I had spent there he let Leda play it after supper only kind of soft, so there had been a continuous muted bleat and blatter all evening. Tonight Harp meant to listen for other sounds. Leda washed the dishes, said an early good night, and fled upstairs.

Harp didn't talk, except as politeness obliged him to answer some blah of mine. We sat and listened to the snow and the lunatic wind. A hour of it was enough for me; I said I was beat and wanted to turn in early. Harp saw me to my bed in the parlor and placed a new chunk of rock maple in the pot-bellied stove. He produced a difficult granite smile, maybe using up his allowance for the week, and pulled out a bottle from a cabinet that had stood for many years below a parlor print—George Washington, I think, concluding a treaty with some offbeat sufferer from hepatitis who may have been General Cornwallis if the latter had two left feet. The bottle contained a brand of rye that Harp sincerely believed to be drinkable, having charred his gullet forty-odd years trying to prove it. While my throat healed Harp said, "Shouldn't've bothered you with all this crap, Ben. Hope it ain't going to spoil your sleep." He got me his spare flashlight, then let me be, and closed the door.

I heard him drop back into his kitchen armchair. Under too many covers, lamp out, I heard the cruel whisper of the snow. The stove muttered, a friend, mak-

ing me a cocoon of living heat in a waste of outer cold. Later I heard Leda at the head of the stairs, her voice timid, tired, and sweet with invitation: "You comin' up to bed, Harp?" The stairs creaked under him. Their door closed; presently she cried out in that desired pain that is brief release from trouble.

I remembered something Adelaide Simmons had told me about this house, where I had not gone upstairs since Harp and I were boys. Adelaide, one of the very few women in Darkfield who never spoke unkindly of Leda, said that the tiny west room across from Harp's and Leda's bedroom was fixed up for a nursery, and Harp wouldn't allow anything in there but baby furniture. Had been so since they were married seven years before.

Another hour dragged on, in my exasperations of sleeplessness.

Then I heard Longtooth.

The noise came from the west side, beyond the snow-hidden vegetable garden. When it snatched me from the edge of sleep, I tried to think it was a fox barking, the ringing, metallic shriek the little red beast can belch dragon-like from his throat. But wide awake, I knew it had been much deeper, chestier. Horned owl? —no. A sound that belonged to ancient times when men relied on chipped stone weapons and had full reason to fear the dark.

The cracks in the stove gave me firelight for groping back into my clothes. The wind had not calmed at all. I stumbled to the west window, buttoning up, and found it a white blank. Snow had drifted above the

lower sash. On tiptoe I could just see over it. A light appeared, dimly illuminating the snowfield beyond. That would be coming from a lamp in the Ryders' bedroom, shining through the nursery room and so out, weak and diffused, into the blizzard chaos.

Yaaarrhh!

Now it had drawn horribly near. From the north windows of the parlor I saw black nothing. Harp squeaked down to my door. "Wake, Ben?"

"Yes. Come look at the west window."

He had left no night light burning in the kitchen, and only a scant glow came down to the landing from the bedroom. He murmured behind me. "Ayah, snow's up some. Must be over three foot on the level by now."

Yaaarrhh!

The voice had shouted on the south side, the blinder side of the house, overlooked only by one kitchen window and a small one in the pantry where the hand pump stood. The view from the pantry window was mostly blocked by a great maple that overtopped the house. I heard the wind shrilling across the tree's winter bones.

"Ben, you want to git your boots on? Up to you—can't ask it. I might have to go out." Harp spoke in an undertone as if the beast might understand him through the tight walls.

"Of course." I got into my knee boots and caught up my parka as I followed him into the kitchen. A .30-caliber rifle and his heavy shotgun hung on deerhorn over the door to the woodshed. He found them in the dark.

What courage I possessed that night came from

being shamed into action, from fearing to show a poor face to an old friend in trouble. I went through the Normandy invasion. I have camped out alone, when I was younger and healthier, in our moose and bear country, and slept nicely. But that noise of Longtooth stole courage. It ached along the channel of the spine.

I had the spare flashlight, but knew Harp didn't want me to use it here. I could make out the furniture, and Harp reaching for the gun rack. He already had on his boots, fur cap, and mackinaw. "You take this'n," he said, and put the ten-gauge in my hands. "Both barrels loaded. Ain't my way to do that, ain't right, but since this thing started—"

Yaaarrhh!

"Where's he got to now?" Harp was by the south window. "Round this side?"

"I thought so . . . Where's Droopy?"

Harp chuckled thinly. "Poor little shit! She come upstairs at the first sound of him and went under the bed. I told Led' to stay upstairs. She'd want a light down here. Wouldn't make sense."

Then, apparently from the east side of the hen-loft and high, booming off some resonating surface: *Yaaarrhh!*

"He can't! Jesus, that's twelve foot off the ground!" But Harp plunged out into the shed, and I followed. "Keep your light on the floor, Ben." He ran up the narrow stairway. "Don't shine it on the birds, they'll act up."

So far the chickens, stupid and virtually blind in the dark, were making only a peevish tut-tutting of alarm. But something was clinging to the outside of the

barricaded east window, snarling, chattering teeth, pounding on the two-by-fours. With a fist?—it sounded like nothing else. Harp snapped, "Get your light on the window!" And he fired through the glass.

We heard no outcry. Any noise outside was covered by the storm and the squawks of the hens scandalized by the shot. The glass was dirty from their continual disturbance of the litter; I couldn't see through it. The bullet had drilled the pane without shattering it, and passed between the two-by-fours, but the beast could have dropped before he fired. "I got to go out there. You stay, Ben." Back in the kitchen he exchanged rifle for shotgun. "Might not have no chance to aim. You remember this piece, don't y'?—eight in the clip."

"I remember it."

"Good. Keep your ears open." Harp ran out through the door that gave on a small paved area by the woodshed. To get around under the east loft window he would have to push through the snow behind the barn, since he had blocked all the rear openings. He could have circled the house instead, but only by bucking the west wind and fighting deeper drifts. I saw his big shadow melt out of sight.

Leda's voice quavered down to me: "He—get it?"

"Don't know. He's gone to see. Sit tight . . ."

I heard that infernal bark once again before Harp returned, and again it sounded high off the ground; it must have come from the big maple. And then moments later—I was still trying to pierce the dark, watching for Harp—a vast smash of broken glass and wood, and the violent bang of the door upstairs. One small

wheezing shriek cut short, and one scream such as no human being should ever hear. I can still hear it.

I think I lost some seconds in shock. Then I was groping up the narrow stairway, clumsy with the rifle and flashlight. Wind roared at the opening of the kitchen door, and Harp was crowding past me, thrusting me aside. But I was close behind him when he flung the bedroom door open. The blast from the broken window that had slammed the door had also blown out the lamp. But our flashlights said at once that Leda was not there. Nothing was, nothing living.

Droopy lay in a mess of glass splinters and broken window sash, dead from a crushed neck—something had stamped on her. The bedspread had been pulled almost to the window—maybe Leda's hand had clenched on it. I saw blood on some of the glass fragments, and on the splintered sash, a patch of reddish fur.

Harp ran back downstairs. I lingered a few seconds. The arrow of fear was deep in me, but at the moment it made me numb. My light touched up an ugly photograph on the wall, Harp's mother at fifty or so, petrified and acid-faced before the camera, a puritan deity with shallow, haunted eyes. I remembered her.

Harp had kicked over the traces when his father died, and quit going to church. Mrs. Ryder "disowned" him. The farm was his; she left him with it and went to live with a widowed sister in Lohman, and died soon, unreconciled. Harp lived on as a bachelor, crank, recluse, until his strange marriage in his fifties. Now here was Ma still watchful, pucker-faced, unforgiving. In my

dullness of shock I thought: Oh, they probably always made love with the lights out.

But now Leda wasn't there.

I hurried after Harp, who had left the kitchen door to bang in the wind. I got out there with rifle and flashlight, and over across the road I saw his torch. No other light, just his small gleam and mine.

I knew as soon as I had forced myself beyond the corner of the house and into the fantastic embrace of the storm that I could never make it. The west wind ground needles into my face. The snow was up beyond the middle of my thighs. With weak lungs and maybe an imperfect heart, I could do nothing out here except die quickly to no purpose. In a moment Harp would be starting down the slope to the woods. His trail was already disappearing under my beam. I drove myself a little further, and an instant's lull in the storm allowed me to shout: "Harp! I can't follow!"

He heard. He cupped his mouth and yelled back: "Don't try! Git back to the house! Telephone!" I waved to acknowledge the message and struggled back.

I only just made it. Inside the kitchen doorway I fell flat, gun and flashlight clattering off somewhere, and there I stayed until I won back enough breath to keep myself living. My face and hands were ice-blocks, then fires. While I worked at the task of getting air into my body, one thought continued, an inner necessity: *There must be a rational cause. I do not abandon the rational cause.* At length I hauled myself up and stumbled to the telephone. The line was dead.

I found the flashlight and reeled upstairs with it. I

stepped past poor Droopy's body and over the broken glass to look through the window space. I could see that snow had been pushed off the shed roof near the bedroom window; the house sheltered that area from the full drive of the west wind, so some evidence remained. I guessed that whatever came must have jumped to the house roof from the maple, then down to the shed roof, and then hurled itself through the closed window without regard for it as an obstacle. Losing a little blood and a little fur.

I glanced around and could not find that fur now. Wind must have pushed it out of sight. I forced the door shut. Downstairs, I lit the table lamps in kitchen and parlor. Harp might need those beacons—if he came back. I refreshed the fires, and gave myself a dose of Harp's horrible whisky. It was nearly one in the morning. If he never came back?

It might be days before they could plow out the road. When the storm let up I could use Harp's snowshoes, maybe . . .

Harp came back, at 1:20, bent and staggering. He let me support him to the armchair. When he could speak he said, "No trail. No trail." He took the bottle from my hands and pulled on it. "Christ Jesus! What can I do? Ben . . . ? I got to go to the village, get help. If they got any help to give."

"Do you have an extra pair of showshoes?"

He stared toward me, battling confusion. "Hah? No, I ain't. Better you stay anyhow. I'll bring yours from your house if you want, if I can get there." He drank again and slammed in the cork with the heel of his hand. "I'll leave you the ten-gauge."

He got his snowshoes from a closet. I persuaded him to wait for coffee. Haste could accomplish nothing now; we could not say to each other that we knew Leda was dead. When he was ready to go, I stepped outside with him into the mad wind. "Anything you want me to do before you get back?" He tried to think about it.

"I guess not, Ben . . . God, ain't I *lived* right? No, that don't make sense. God? That's a laugh." He swung away. Two or three great strides and the storm took him.

That was about two o'clock. For four hours I was alone in the house. Warmth returned, with the bedroom door closed and fires working hard. I carried the kitchen lamp into the parlor, and then huddled in the nearly total dark of the kitchen with my back to the wall, watching all the windows, the ten-gauge near my hand, but I did not expect a return of the beast, and there was none.

The night grew quieter, perhaps because the house was so drifted in that snow muted the sounds. I was cut off from the battle, buried alive.

Harp would get back. The seasons would follow their natural way, and somehow we would learn what had happened to Leda. I supposed the beast would have to be something in the human pattern—mad, deformed, gone wild, but still human.

After a time I wondered why we had heard no excitement in the stable. I forced myself to take up gun and flashlight and go look. I groped through the woodshed, big with the jumping shadows of Harp's cordwood, and into the barn. The cows were peacefully drowsing. In the center alley I dared to send my weak

beam swooping and glimmering through the ghastly distances of the hayloft. Quiet, just quiet; natural rustling of mice. Then to the stable, where Ned whickered and let me rub his brown cheeks, and Jerry rolled a humorous eye. I suppose no smell had reached them to touch off panic, and perhaps they had heard the barking often enough so that it no longer disturbed them. I went back to my post, and the hours crawled along a ridge between the pits of terror and exhaustion. Maybe I slept.

No color of sunrise that day, but I felt paleness and change; even a blizzard will not hide the fact of dayshine. I breakfasted on bacon and eggs, fed the hens, forked down hay and carried water for the cows and horses. The one cow in milk, a jumpy Ayrshire, refused to concede that I meant to be useful. I'd done no milking since I was a boy, the knack was gone from my hands, and relief seemed less important to her than kicking over the pail; she was getting more amusement than discomfort out of it, so for the moment I let it go. I made myself busywork shoveling a clear space by the kitchen door. The wind was down, the snowfall persistent but almost peaceful. I pushed out beyond the house and learned that the stuff was up over my hips.

Out of that, as I turned back, came Harp in his long, snowshoe stride, and down the road three others. I recognized Sheriff Robart, overfed but powerful; and Bill Hastings, wry and ageless, a cousin of Harp's and one of his few friends; and last, Curt Davidson, perhaps a friend to Sheriff Robart but certainly not to Harp.

I'd known Curt as a thick-witted loudmouth when he was a kid; growing to man's years hadn't done much

for him. And when I saw him I thought, irrationally perhaps: Not good for our side. A kind of absurdity, and yet Harp and I were joined against the world simply because we had experienced together what others were going to call impossible, were going to interpret in harsh, even damnable ways; and no help for it.

I saw the white thin blur of the sun, the strength of it growing. Nowhere in all the white expanse had the wind and the new snow allowed us any mark of the visitation in the night.

The men reached my cleared space and shook off snow. I opened the woodshed. Harp gave me one hopeless glance of inquiry and I shook my head.

"Having a little trouble?" That was Robart, taking off his snowshoes.

Harp ignored him. "I got to look after the chores." I told him I'd done it except for that damn cow. "Oh, Bess, ayah, she's nervy, I'll see to her." He gave me my snowshoes that he had strapped to his back. "Adelaide, she wanted to know about your groceries. Said I figured they was in the ca'."

"Good as an icebox," says Robart, real friendly.

Curt had to have his pleasures too: "Ben, you sure you got hold of old Bess by the right end, where the tits was?" Curt giggles at his own jokes, so nobody else is obliged to. Bill Hastings spat in the snow.

"Okay if I go in?" Robart asked. It wasn't a simple inquiry: he was present officially and meant to have it known. Harp looked him up and down.

"Nobody stopping you. Didn't bring you here to stand around, I suppose."

"Harp," said Robart pleasantly enough, "don't give me a hard time. You come tell me certain things has happened, I got to look into it is all." But Harp was already striding down the woodshed to the barn entrance. The others came into the house with me, and I put on water for fresh coffee. "Must be your ca' down the rud a piece, Ben? Heard you kind of went into a ditch. All's you can see now is a hump in the snow. Deep freeze might be good for her, likely you've tried everything else." But I wasn't feeling comic, and never had been on those terms with Robart. I grunted, and his face shed mirth as one slips off a sweater. "Okay, what's the score? Harp's gone and told me a story I couldn't feed to the dogs, so what about it? Where's Mrs. Ryder?"

Davidson giggled again. It's a nasty little sound to come out of all that beef. I don't think Robart had much enthusiasm for him either, but it seems he had sworn in the fellow as a deputy before they set out. "Yes, sir," said Curt, "that was *really* a story, that was."

"Where's Mrs. Ryder?"

"Not here," I told him. "We think she's dead."

He glowered, rubbing cold out of his hands. "Seen that window. Looks like the frame is smashed."

"Yes, from the outside. When Harp gets back you'd better look. I closed the door on that room and haven't opened it. There'll be more snow, but you'll see about what we saw when we got up there."

"Let's look right now," said Curt.

Bill Hastings said, "Curt, ain't you a mite busy for a dep'ty? Mr. Dane said when Harp gets back." Bill and

I are friends; normally he wouldn't mister me. I think he was trying to give me some flavor of authority.

I acknowledged the alliance by asking: "You a deputy too, Bill?" Giving him an opportunity to spit in the stove, replace the lid gently, and reply: "Shit no."

Harp returned and carried the milk pail to the pantry. Then he was looking us over. "Bill, I got to try the woods again. You want to come along?"

"Sure, Harp. I didn't bring no gun."

"Take my ten-gauge."

"Curt here'll go along," said Robart. "Real good man on snowshoes. Interested in wild life."

Harp said, "That's funny, Robart. I guess that's the funniest thing I heard since Cutler's little girl fell under the tractor. You joining us too?"

"Fact is, Harp, I kind of pulled a muscle in my back coming up here. Not getting no younger neither. I believe I'll just look around here a little. Trust you got no objection? To me looking around a little?"

"Coffee's dripped," I said.

"Thing of it is, if I'd've thought you had any objection, I'd've been obliged to get me a warrant."

"Thanks, Ben." Harp gulped the coffee scalding. "Why, if looking around the house is the best you can do, Sher'f, I got no objection. Ben, I shouldn't be keeping you away from your affairs, but would you stay? Kind of keep him company? Not that I got much in the house, but still—you know—"

"I'll stay." I wished I could tell him to drop that manner; it only got him deeper in the mud.

Robart handed Davidson his gun belt and holster. "Better have it, Curt, so to be in style.'

Harp and Bill were outside getting on their snowshoes; I half heard some remark of Harp's about the sheriff's aching back. They took off. The snow had almost ceased. They passed out of sight down the slope to the north, and Curt went plowing after them. Behind me Robart said, "You'd think Harp believed it himself."

"That's how it's to be? You make us both liars before you've even done any looking?"

"I got to try to make sense of it is all." I followed him up to the bedroom. It was cruelly cold. He touched Droopy's stiff corpse with his foot. "Hard to figure a man killing his own dog."

"We get nowhere with that kind of idea."

"Ben, you got to see this thing like it looks to other people. And keep out of my hair."

"That's what scares me, Jack. Something unreasonable did happen, and Harp and I were the only ones to experience it—except Mrs. Ryder."

"You claim you saw this—animal?"

"I didn't say that. I heard her scream. When we got upstairs this room was the way you see it." I looked around, and again couldn't find that scrap of fur, but I spoke of it, and I give Robart credit for searching. He shook out the bedspread and blankets, examined the floor and the closet. He studied the window space, leaned out for a look at the house wall and the shed roof. His big feet avoided the broken glass, and he squatted for a long gaze at the pieces of window sash. Then he bore down on me, all policemen personified, a massive, rather intelligent, conventionally honest man with no patience for imagination, no time for any fact not already in the books. "Piece of fur, huh?" He made

it sound as if I'd described a Jabberwock with eyes of flame. "Okay, we're done up here." He motioned me downstairs—all policemen who'd ever faced a crowd's dangerous stupidity with their own.

As I retreated I said, "Hope you won't be too busy to have a chemist test the blood on that sash."

"We'll do that." He made move-along motions with his slab hands. "Going to be a pleasure to do that little thing for you and your friend."

Then he searched the entire house, shed, barn, and stable. I had never before watched anyone on police business; I had to admire his zeal. I got involved in the farce of holding the flashlight for him while he rooted in the cellar. In the shed I suggested that if he wanted to restack twenty-odd cords of wood he'd better wait till Harp could help him; he wasn't amused. He wasn't happy in the barn loft either. Shifting tons of hay to find a hypothetical corpse was not a one-man job. I knew he was capable of returning with a crew and machinery to do exactly that. And by his lights it was what he ought to do. Then we were back in the kitchen, Robart giving himself a manicure with his jackknife, and I down to my last cigarette, almost the last of my endurance.

Robart was not unsubtle. I answered his questions as temperately as I could—even, for instance: "Wasn't you a mite sweet on Leda yourself?" I didn't answer any of them with flat silence; to do that right you need an accompanying act like spitting in the stove, and I'm not a chewer. From the north window he said: "Comin' back. It figures." They had been out a little over an hour.

Harp stood by the stove with me to warm his hands. He spoke as if alone with me: "No trail, Ben." What followed came in an undertone: "Ben, you told me about a friend of yours, scientist or something, professor—"

"Professor Malcolm?" I remembered mentioning him to Harp a long while before; I was astonished at his recalling it. Johnny Malcolm is a professor of biology who has avoided too much specialization. Not a really close friend. Harp was watching me out of a granite despair as if he had asked me to appeal to some higher court. I thought of another acquaintance in Boston too, whom I might consult—Dr. Kahn, a psychiatrist who had once seen my wife Helen through a difficult time . . .

"Harp," said Robart, "I got to ask you a couple, three things. I sent word to Dick Hammond to get that goddamn plow of his into this road as quick as he can. Believe he'll try. Whiles we wait on him, we might 's well talk. You know I don't like to get tough."

"Talk away," said Harp, "only Ben here he's got to get home without waiting on no Dick Hammond."

"That a fact, Ben?"

"Yes. I'll keep in touch."

"Do that," said Robart, dismissing me. As I left he was beginning a fresh manicure, and Harp waited rigidly for the ordeal to continue. I felt morbidly that I was abandoning him.

Still—corpus delicti—nothing much more would happen until Leda Ryder was found. Then if her body were found dead by violence, with no acceptable evidence of Longtooth's existence—well, what then?

I don't think Robart would have let me go if he'd known my first act would be to call Short's brother Mike and ask him to drive me in to Lohman where I could get a bus for Boston.

Johnny Malcolm said, "I can see this is distressing you, and you wouldn't lie to me. But, Ben, as biology it won't do. Ain't no such animile. You know that."

He wasn't being stuffy. We were having dinner at a quiet restaurant, and I had of course enjoyed the roast duckling too much. Johnny is a rock-ribbed beanpole who can eat like a walking famine with no regrets. "Suppose," I said, "just for argument and because it's not biologically inconceivable, that there's a basis for the Yeti legend."

"Not inconceivable. I'll give you that. So long as any poorly known corners of the world are left—the Himalayan uplands, jungles, tropic swamps, the tundra —legends will persist and some of them will have little gleams of truth. You know what I think about moon flights and all that?" He smiled; privately I was hearing Leda scream. "One of our strongest reasons for them, and for the bigger flights we'll make if we don't kill civilization first, is a hunt for new legends. We've used up our best ones, and that's dangerous."

"Why don't we look at the countries inside us?" But Johnny wasn't listening much.

"Men can't stand it not to have closed doors and a chance to push at them. Oh, about your Yeti—he might exist. Shaggy anthropoid able to endure severe cold, so rare and clever the explorers haven't tripped over him yet. Wouldn't have to be a carnivore to have

big ugly canines—look at the baboons. But if he was active in a Himalayan winter, he'd have to be able to use meat, I think. Mind you, I don't believe any of this, but you can have it as a biological not-impossible. How'd he get to Maine?"

"Strayed? Tibet—Mongolia—Arctic ice."

"Maybe." Johnny had begun to enjoy the hypothesis as something to play with during dinner. Soon he was helping along the brute's passage across the continents, and having fun till I grumbled something about alternatives, extraterrestrials. He wouldn't buy that, and got cross. Still hearing Leda scream, I assured him I wasn't watching for little green men.

"Ben, how much do you know about this—Harp?"

"We grew up along different lines, but he's a friend. Dinosaur, if you like, but a friend."

"Hardshell Maine bachelor picks up dizzy young wife—"

"She's not dizzy. Wasn't. Sexy, but not dizzy."

"All right. Bachelor stewing in his own juices for years. Sure he didn't get up on that roof himself?"

"Nuts. Unless all my senses were more paralyzed than I think, there wasn't time."

"Unless they were more paralyzed than you think."

"Come off it! I'm not senile yet . . . What's he supposed to have done with her? Tossed her into the snow?"

"Mph," said Johnny, and finished his coffee. "All right. Some human freak with abnormal strength and the endurance to fossick around in a Maine blizzard stealing women. I liked the Yeti better. You say you suggested a madman to Ryder yourself. Pity if you had

to come all the way here just so I could repeat your own guesswork. To make amends, want to take in a bawdy movie?"

"Love it."

The following day Dr. Kahn made time to see me at the end of the afternoon, so polite and patient that I felt certain I was keeping him from his dinner. He seemed undecided whether to be concerned with the traumas of Harp Ryder's history or those of mine. Mine were already somewhat known to him. "I wish you had time to talk all this out to me. You've given me a nice summary of what the physical events appear to have been, but—"

"Doctor," I said, "it *happened.* I heard the animal. The window *was* smashed—ask the sheriff. Leda Ryder did scream, and when Harp and I got up there together, the dog had been killed and Leda was gone."

"And yet, if it was all as clear as that, I wonder why you thought of consulting me at all, Ben. I wasn't there. I'm just a headshrinker."

"I wanted . . . Is there any way a delusion could take hold of Harp *and* me, disturb our senses in the same way? Oh, just saying it makes it ridiculous."

Dr. Kahn smiled. "Let's say, difficult."

"Is it possible Harp could have killed her, thrown her out through the window of the *west* bedroom—the snow must have drifted six feet or higher on that side—and then my mind distorted my time sense? So I might've stood there in the dark kitchen all the time it went on, a matter of minutes instead of seconds? Then he jumped down by the shed roof, came back into the

house the normal way while I was stumbling upstairs? Oh, hell."

Dr. Kahn had drawn a diagram of the house from my description, and peered at it with placid interest. "Benign" was a word Helen had used for him. He said, "Such a distortion of the time sense would be unusual . . . Are you feeling guilty about anything?"

"About standing there and doing nothing? I can't seriously believe it was more than a few seconds. Anyway that would make Harp a monster out of a detective story. He's not that. How could he count on me to freeze in panic? Absurd. I'd've heard the struggle, steps, the window of the west room going up. Could he have killed her and I known all about it at the time, even witnessed it, and then suffered amnesia for that one event?"

He still looked so patient I wished I hadn't come. "I won't say any trick of the mind is impossible, but I might call that one highly improbable. Academically, however, considering your emotional involvement—"

"I'm not emotionally involved!" I yelled that. He smiled, looking much more interested. I laughed at myself. That was better than poking him in the eye. "I'm upset, Doctor, because the whole thing goes against reason. If you start out knowing nobody's going to believe you, it's all messed up before you open your mouth."

He nodded kindly. He's a good joe. I think he'd stopped listening for what I didn't say long enough to hear a little of what I did say. "You're not unstable, Ben. Don't worry about amnesia. The explanation, perhaps some human intruder, will turn out to be within

the human norm. The norm of possibility does include such things as lycanthropic delusions, maniacal behavior, and so on Your police up there will carry on a good search for the poor woman. They won't overlook that snowdrift. Don't underestimate them, and don't worry about your own mind, Ben."

"Ever seen our Maine woods?"

"No, I go away to the Cape."

"Try it some time. Take a patch of it, say about fifty miles by fifty, that's twenty-five hundred square miles. Drop some eager policemen into it, tell 'em to hunt for something they never saw before and don't want to see, that doesn't want to be found."

"But if your beast is human, human beings leave traces. Bodies aren't easy to hide, Ben."

"In those woods? A body taken by a carnivorous animal? Why not?" Well, our minds didn't touch. I thanked him for his patience and got up. "The maniac responsible," I said. "But whatever we call him, Doctor, he was *there*."

Mike Short picked me up at the Lohman bus station, and told me something of a ferment in Darkfield. I shouldn't have been surprised. "They're all scared, Mr. Dane. They want to hurt somebody." Mike is Jim Short's younger brother. He scrapes up a living with his taxi service and occasional odd jobs at the garage. There's a droop in his shaggy ringlets, and I believe thirty is staring him in the face. "Like old Harp he wants to tell it like it happened and nobody buys. That's sad, man. You been away what, three days? The fuzz was pissed off. You better connect with Mister

Sheriff Robart like soon. He climbed all over my ass just for driving you to the bus that day, like I should've known you shouldn't."

"I'll pacify him. They haven't found Mrs. Ryder?"

Mike spat out the car window, which was rolled down for the mild air. "Old Harp he never got such a job of snow-shoveling done in all his days. By the c'munity, for free. No, they won't find her." In that there was plenty of I-want-to-be-asked, and something more, a hint of the mythology of Mike's generation.

"So what's your opinion, Mike?"

He maneuvered a fresh cigarette against the stub of the last and drove on through tiresome silence. The road was winding between ridged mountains of plowed, rotting snow. I had the window down on my side too for the genial afternoon sun, and imagined a tang of spring. At last Mike said, "You prob'ly don't go along . . . Jim got your ca' out, by the way. It's at your place . . . Well, you'll hear 'em talking it all to pieces. Some claim Harp's telling the truth. Some say he killed her himself. They don't say how he made her disappear. Ain't heard any talk against you, Mr. Dane, nothing that counts. The sheriff's peeved, but that's just on account you took off without asking." His vague, large eyes watched the melting landscape, the ambiguous messages of spring. "Well, I think, like, a demon took her, Mr. Dane. She was one of his own, see? You got to remember, I knew that chick. Okay, you can say it ain't scientific, only there is a science to these things, I read a book about it. You can laugh if you want."

I wasn't laughing. It wasn't my first glimpse of the contemporary medievalism and won't be my last if I

survive another year or two. I wasn't laughing, and I said nothing. Mike sat smoking, expertly driving his twentieth century artifact while I suppose his thoughts were in the seventeenth, sniffing after the wonders of the invisible world, and I recalled what Johnny Malcolm had said about the need for legends. Mike and I had no more talk.

Adelaide Simmons was dourly glad to see me. From her I learned that the sheriff and state police had swarmed all over Harp's place and the surrounding countryside, and were still at it. Result, zero. Harp had repeatedly told our story and was refusing to tell it any more. "Does the chores and sets there drinking," she said, "or staring off. Was up to see him yesterday, Mr. Dane—felt I should. Couple days they didn't let him alone a minute, maybe now they've eased off some. He asked me real sharp, was you back yet. Well, I redd up his place, made some bread, least I could do."

When I told her I was going there, she prepared a basket, while I sat in the kitchen and listened. "Some say she busted that window herself, jumped down and run off in the snow, out of her mind. Any sense in that?"

"Nope."

"And some claim she deserted him. Earlier. Which'd make you a liar. And they say whichever way it was, Harp's made up this crazy story because he can't stand the truth." Her clever hands slapped sandwiches into shape. "They claim Harp got you to go along with it, they don't say how."

"Hypnotized me, likely. Adelaide, it all happened the way Harp told it. I heard the thing too. If Harp is ready for the squirrels, so am I."

She stared hard, and sighed. She likes to talk, but her mill often shuts off suddenly, because of a quality of hers which I find good as well as rare: I mean that when she has no more to say she doesn't go on talking.

I got up to Ryder's Ridge about suppertime. Bill Hastings was there. The road was plowed slick between the snow ridges, and I wondered how much of the litter of tracks and crumpled paper and spent cigarette packages had been left by sight-seers. Ground frost had not yet yielded to the mud season, which would soon make normal driving impossible for a few weeks. Bill let me in, with the look people wear for serious illness. But Harp heaved himself out of that armchair, not sick in body at least. "Ben, I heard him last night. Late."

"What direction?"

"North."

"You hear it, Bill?" I set down the basket.

My pint-size friend shook his head. "Wasn't here." I couldn't guess how much Bill accepted of the tale.

Harp said, "What's the basket?—oh. Obliged. Adelaide's a nice woman." But his mind was remote. "It was north, Ben, a long way, but I think I know about where it would be. I wouldn't've heard it except the night was so still, like everything had quieted for me. You know, they been a-deviling me night and day. Robart, state cops, mess of smart little buggers from the papers. I couldn't sleep, I stepped outside like I was called. Why, he might've been the other side of the stars, the sky so full of 'em and nothing stirring. Cold . . You went to Boston, Ben?"

"Yes. Waste of time. They want it to be something human, anyhow something that fits the books."

Whittling, Bill said neutrally, "Always a man for the books yourself, wasn't you, Ben?"

I had to agree. Harp asked, "Hadn't no ideas?"

"Just gave me back my own thoughts in their language. We have to find it, Harp. Of course some wouldn't take it for true even if you had photographs."

Harp said, "Photographs be goddamned."

"I guess you got to go," said Bill Hastings. "We been talking about it, Ben. Maybe I'd feel the same if it was me . . . I better be on my way or supper'll be cold and the old woman raising hell-fire." He tossed his stick back in the woodbox.

"Bill," said Harp, "you won't mind feeding the stock couple, three days?"

"I don't mind. Be up tomorrow."

"Do the same for you some time. I wouldn't want it mentioned anyplace."

"Harp, you know me better'n that. See you, Ben."

"Snow's going fast," said Harp when Bill had driven off. "Be in the woods a long time yet, though."

"You wouldn't start this late."

He was at the window, his lean bulk shutting off much light from the time-seasoned kitchen where most of his indoor life had been passed. "Morning, early. Tonight I got to listen "

"Be needing sleep, I'd think."

"I don't always get what I need," said Harp.

"I'll bring my snowshoes. About six? And my carbine—I'm best with a gun I know."

He stared at me a while. "All right, Ben. You un-

derstand, though, you might have to come back alone. I ain't coming back till I get him, Ben. Not this time."

At sunup I found him with Ned and Jerry in the stable. He had lived eight or ten years with that team. He gave Ned's neck a final pat as he turned to me and took up our conversation as if night had not intervened. "Not till I get him. Ben, I don't want you drug into this ag'inst your inclination."

"Did you hear it again last night?"

"I heard it. North."

The sun was at the point of rising when we left on our snowshoes, like morning ghosts ourselves. Harp strode ahead down the slope to the woods without haste, perhaps with some reluctance. Near the trees he halted, gazing to his right where a red blaze was burning the edge of the sky curtain; I scolded myself for thinking that he was saying good-bye to the sun.

The snow was crusted, sometimes slippery even for our web feet. We entered the woods along a tangle of tracks, including the fat tire marks of a snow scooter. "Guy from Lohman," said Harp. "Hired the goddamn thing out to the state cops and hisself with it. Goes pootin' around all over hell, fit to scare everything inside eight, ten miles." He cut himself a fresh plug to last the morning. "I b'lieve the thing is a mite further off than that. They'll be messing around again today." His fingers dug into my arm. "See how it is, don't y'? They ain't looking for what we are. Looking for a dead body to hang onto my neck. And if they was to find her the way I found—the way I found—"

"Harp, you needn't borrow trouble."

"I know how they think," he said. "Was I to walk down the road beyond Darkfield, they'd pick me up. They ain't got me in shackles because they got no—no body, Ben. Nobody needs to tell me about the law. They got to have a body. Only reason they didn't leave a man here overnight, they figure I can't go nowhere. They think a man couldn't travel in three, four foot of snow . . . Ben, I mean to find that thing and shoot it down . . . We better slant off thisaway."

He set out at a wide angle from those tracks, and we soon had them out of sight. On the firm crust our snowshoes left no mark. After a while we heard a grumble of motors far back, on the road. Harp chuckled viciously. "Bright and early like yesterday." He stared back the way we had come. "They'll never pick up our trail without dogs. That son of a bitch Robart did talk about borrying a hound somewhere, to sniff Leda's clothes. More likely give 'em a sniff of mine, now."

We had already come so far that I didn't know the way back. Harp would know it. He could never be lost in any woods, but I have no mental compass such as his. So I followed him blindly, not trying to memorize the route. It was a region of uniform old growth, mostly hemlock, no recent lumbering, few landmarks. The monotony wore down native patience to a numbness, and our snowshoes left no more impression than our thoughts.

An hour passed, or more, after that sound of motors faded. Now and then I heard the wind move peacefully overhead. Few bird calls, for most of our

singers had not yet returned. "Been in this part before, Harp?"

"Not with snow on the ground, not lately." His voice was hushed and careful. "Summers. About a mile now, and the trees thin out some. Stretch of slash where they was taking out pine four, five years back and left everything a Christly pile of shit like they always do."

No, Harp wouldn't get lost here, but I was well lost, tired, sorry I had come. Would he turn back if I collapsed? I didn't think he could, now, for any reason. My pack with blanket roll and provisions had become infernal. He had said we ought to have enough for three or four days. Only a few years earlier I had carried heavier camping loads than this without trouble, but now I was blown, a stitch beginning in my side. My wristwatch said only nine o'clock.

The trees thinned out as he had promised, and here the land rose in a long slope to the north. I looked up across a tract of eight or ten acres where the devastation of stupid lumbering might be healed if the hurt region could be let alone for sixty years. The deep snow, blinding out here where only scrub growth interfered with the sunlight, covered the worst of the wreckage. "Good place for wild ras'berries," Harp said quietly. "Been time for 'em to grow back. Guess it was nearer seven years ago when they cut here and left this mess. Last summer I couldn't hardly find their logging road. Off to the left—"

He stopped, pointing with a slow arm to a blurred gray line that wandered up from the left to disappear over the rise of ground. The nearest part of that gray

curve must have been four hundred feet away, and to my eyes it might have been a shadow cast by an irregularity of the snow surface; Harp knew better. Something had passed there, heavy enough to break the crust. "You want to rest a mite, Ben? Once over that rise I might not want to stop again."

I let myself down on the butt of an old log that lay tilted toward us, cut because it had happened to be in the way, left to rot because they happened to be taking pine. "Can you really make anything out of that?"

"Not enough," said Harp. "But it could be him." He did not sit by me but stood relaxed with his load, snowshoes spaced so he could spit between them. "About half a mile over that rise," he said, "there's a kind of gorge. Must've been a good brook, former times, still a stream along the bottom in summer. Tangle of elders and stuff. Couple, three caves in the bank at one spot. I guess it's three summers since I been there. Gloomy goddamn place. There was foxes into one of them caves. Natural caves, I b'lieve. I didn't go too near, not then."

I sat in the warming light, wondering whether there was any way I could talk to Harp about the beast—if it existed, if we weren't merely a pair of aging men with disordered minds. Any way to tell him the creature was important to the world outside our dim little village? That it ought somehow to be kept alive, not just shot down and shoveled aside? How could I say this to a man without science, who had lost his wife and also the trust of his fellow men?

Take away that trust and you take away the world.

Could I ask him to shoot it in the legs, get it back

alive? Why, to my own self, irrationally, that appeared wrong, horrible, as well as beyond our powers. Better if he shot to kill. Or if I did. So in the end I said nothing, but shrugged my pack into place and told him I was ready to go on.

With the crust uncertain under that stronger sunshine, we picked our way slowly up the rise, and when we came at length to that line of tracks, Harp said matter-of-factly, "Now you've seen his mark. It's him."

Sun and overnight freezing had worked on the trail. Harp estimated it had been made early the day before. But wherever the weight of Longtooth had broken through, the shape of his foot showed clearly down there in its pocket of snow, a foot the size of a man's but broader, shorter. The prints were spaced for the stride of a short-legged person. The arch of the foot was low, but the beast was not actually flatfooted. Beast or man. I said, "This is a man's print, Harp. Isn't it?"

He spoke without heat. "No. You're forgetting, Ben. I seen him."

"Anyhow there's only one."

He said slowly, "Only one set of tracks."

"What d' you mean?"

Harp shrugged. "It's heavy. He could've been carrying something. Keep your voice down. That crust yesterday, it would've held me without no web feet, but he went through, and he ain't as big as me." Harp checked his rifle and released the safety. "Half a mile to them caves. B'lieve that's where he is, Ben. Don't talk unless you got to, and take it slow."

I followed him. We topped the rise, encountering

more of that lumberman's desolation on the other side. The trail crossed it, directly approaching a wall of undamaged trees that marked the limit of the cutting. Here forest took over once more, and where it began, Longtooth's trail ended. "Now you seen how it goes," Harp said. "Any place where he can travel above ground he does. He don't scramble up the trunks, seems like. Look here—he must've got aholt of that branch and swung hisself up. Knocked off some snow, but the wind knocks off so much too you can't tell nothing. See, Ben, he—he figures it out. He knows about trails. He'll have come down out of these trees far enough from where we are now so there ain't no chance of us seeing the place from here. Could be anywhere in a half-circle, and draw it as big as you please."

"Thinking like a man."

"But he ain't a man," said Harp. "There's things he don't know. How a man feels, acts. I'm going on to them caves." From necessity, I followed him . . .

I ought to end this quickly. Prematurely I am an old man, incapacitated by the effects of a stroke and a damaged heart. I keep improving a little—sensible diet, no smoking, Adelaide's care. I expect several years of tolerable health on the way downhill. But I find, as Harp did, that it is even more crippling to lose the trust of others. I will write here once more, and not again, that my word is good.

It was noon when we reached the gorge. In that place some melancholy part of night must always remain. Down the center of the ravine between tangles of alder, water murmured under ice and rotting snow,

which here and there had fallen in to reveal the dark brilliance. Harp did not enter the gorge itself but moved slowly through tree-cover along the left edge, eyes flickering for danger. I tried to imitate his caution. We went a hundred yards or more in that inching advance, maybe two hundred. I heard only the occasional wind of spring.

He turned to look at me, with a sickly triumph, a grimace of disgust and of justification, too. He touched his nose and then I got it also, a rankness from down ahead of us, a musky foulness with an ammoniacal tang and some smell of decay. Then on the other side of the gorge, off in the woods but not far, I heard Longtooth.

A bark, not loud. Throaty, like talk.

Harp suppressed an answering growl. He moved on until he could point down to a black cave-mouth on the opposite side. The breeze blew the stench across to us. Harp whispered, "See, he's got like a path. Jumps down to that flat rock, then to the cave. We'll see him in a minute." Yes, there were sounds in the brush. "You keep back." His left palm lightly stroked the underside of his rifle barrel.

So intent was he on the opening where Longtooth would appear, I may have been first to see the other who came then to the cave mouth and stared up at us with animal eyes. Longtooth had called again, a rather gentle sound. The woman wrapped in filthy hides may have been drawn by that call or by the noise of our approach.

Then Harp saw her.

He knew her. In spite of the tangled hair, scratched

face, dirt, and the shapeless deer-pelt she clutched around herself against the cold, I am sure he knew her. I don't think she knew him, or me. An inner blindness, a look of a beast wholly centered on its own needs. I think human memories had drained away. She knew Longtooth was coming. I think she wanted his warmth and protection, but there were no words in the whimper she made before Harp's bullet took her between the eyes.

Longtooth shoved through the bushes. He dropped the rabbit he was carrying and jumped down to that flat rock snarling, glancing sidelong at the dead woman who was still twitching. If he understood the fact of death, he had no time for it. I saw the massive overdevelopment of thigh and leg muscles, their springy motions of preparation. The distance from the flat rock to the place where Harp stood must have been fifteen feet. One spear of sunlight touched him in that blue-green shade, touched his thick red fur and his fearful face.

Harp could have shot him. Twenty seconds for it, maybe more. But he flung his rifle aside and drew out his hunting knife, his own long tooth, and had it waiting when the enemy jumped.

So could I have shot him. No one needs to tell me I ought to have done so.

Longtooth launched himself, clawed fingers out, fangs exposed. I felt the meeting as if the impact had struck my own flesh. They tumbled roaring into the gorge, and I was cold, detached, an instrument for watching.

It ended soon. The heavy brownish teeth clenched in at the base of Harp's neck. He made no more motion

except the thrust that sent his blade into Longtooth's left side. Then they were quiet in that embrace, quiet all three. I heard the water flowing under the ice.

I remember a roaring in my ears, and I was moving with slow care, one difficult step after another, along the lip of the gorge and through mighty corridors of white and green. With my hard-won detachment I supposed this might be the region where I had recently followed poor Harp Ryder to some destination or other, but not (I thought) one of those we talked about when we were boys. A band of iron had closed around my forehead, and breathing was an enterprise needing great effort and caution, in order not to worsen the indecent pain that clung as another band around my diaphragm. I leaned against a tree for thirty seconds or thirty minutes, I don't know where. I knew I mustn't take off my pack in spite of the pain, because it carried provisions for three days. I said once: "Ben, you are lost."

I had my carbine, a golden bough, staff of life, and I recall the shrewd management and planning that enabled me to send three shots into the air. Twice.

It seems I did not want to die, and so hung on the cliff-edge of death with a mad stubbornness. They tell me it could not have been the second day that I fired the second burst, the one that was heard and answered —because, they say, a man can't suffer the kind of attack I was having and then survive a whole night of exposure. They say that when a search party reached me from Wyndham Village (eighteen miles from Darkfield), I made some garbled speech and fell flat on my face.

I woke immobilized, without power of speech or any motion except for a little life in my left hand, and for a long time memory was only a jarring of irrelevancies. When that cleared I still couldn't talk for another long deadly while. I recall someone saying with exasperated admiration that with cerebral hemorrhage on top of coronary infarction, I had no damn right to be alive; this was the first sound that gave me any pleasure. I remember recognizing Adelaide and being unable to thank her for her presence. None of this matters to the story, except the fact that for months I had no bridge of communication with the world; and yet I loved the world and did not want to leave it.

One can always ask: What will happen next?

Some time in what they said was June my memory was (I think) clear. I scrawled a little, with the nurse supporting the deadened part of my arm. But in response to what I wrote, the doctor, the nurses, Sheriff Robart, even Adelaide Simmons and Bill Hastings, looked—sympathetic. I was not believed. I am not believed now, in the most important part of what I wish I might say: that there are things in our world that we do not understand, and that this ignorance ought to generate humility. People find this obvious, bromidic—oh, they always have!—and therefore they do not listen, retaining the pride of their ignorance intact.

Remnants of the three bodies were found in late August, small thanks to my efforts, for I had no notion what compass direction we took after the cut-over area, and there are so many such areas of desolation I couldn't tell them where to look. Forest scavengers, including a pack of dogs, had found the bodies first.

Water had moved them too, for the last of the big snow melted suddenly, and for a couple of days at least there must have been a small river raging through that gorge. The head of what they are calling the "lunatic" got rolled downstream, bashed against rocks, partly buried in silt. Dogs had chewed and scattered what they speak of as "the man's fur coat."

It will remain a lunatic in a fur coat, for they won't have it any other way. So far as I know, no scientist ever got a look at the wreckage, unless you glorify the coroner by that title. I believe he was a good vet before he got the job. When my speech was more or less regained, I was already through trying to talk about it. A statement of mine was read at the inquest—that was before I could talk or leave the hospital. At this ceremony society officially decided that Harper Harrison Ryder, of this township, shot to death his wife Leda and an individual, male, of unknown identity, while himself temporarily of unsound mind, and died of knife injuries received in a struggle with the said individual of unknown, and so forth.

I don't talk about it because that only makes people more sorry for me, to think a man's mind should fail so, and he not yet sixty.

I cannot even ask them: "What is truth?" They would only look more saddened, and I suppose shocked, and perhaps find reasons for not coming to see me again.

They are kind. They will do anything for me, except think about it.

Maxwell's Monkey

A shadow maybe. But now and then it went off to do something or get something, and came back into some slightly different position looking like a damn fool.

Maxwell saw it first on waking after a binge. During the evening's riot he had insulted his two dearest friends—the husband saw him home anyhow—and knocked over a baby-carriage. It had no baby in it, but Maxwell reflected it might have had, and wept. Then he was trying to pick a policeman's pocket and lamentably failing. He heard his friend explain: "Always does that, Officer. It don't mean a thing." But why would anyone go to the trouble of picking a policeman's pocket unless he meant something by it? And in the hurting morning light, the monkey sat on the foot of his bed.

He threw a pillow.

The pillow went through, unreasonably slowed down. You don't expect an object passing through a ghost to lose momentum. Maxwell said: "You are a semi-hallucinatory precipitation of gaseous particles, or a thing from outer space. Under either interpretation, your invasion of my domicile constitutes a tort." Maxwell was the most junior partner in the law firm of Bindle, Bindle, Bindle and Maxwell. "Get down off my bed."

The monkey did so, tossed the pillow up on the covers, and resumed its earlier position.

"I see," said Maxwell. "You understand speech, you manipulate material objects although they don't necessarily manipulate you, and you prefer the letter to the spirit. Please get me an aspirin."

The monkey just sat there. It was black, tailless, the size of an Airedale, male. So far as Maxwell could tell it was young and healthy like himself, but probably not hung over.

Maxwell reeled to the bathroom. The monkey paralleled his movements, just out of reach—not that Maxwell felt much desire to grab. Maxwell washed down two aspirins. "Want one?" The monkey nodded, caught the tablet, and waited for Maxwell to get out of the bathroom and give him room. Maxwell removed the key and stood aside; the monkey entered; Maxwell sighed and locked him in.

The monkey returned through the keyhole and settled back into its normal shape, rumpled, irritated, and larger than before. "So you *were* hung over," said Maxwell, getting dressed. The monkey ignored that, im-

itating Maxwell's motions with the shirt. Since it had no clothes of its own and showed no inclination to steal Maxwell's, this appeared an empty ritual—shadow work.

For breakfast, Maxwell tossed the monkey some actual burned toast, but wasn't about to pour any extra coffee until the brute got a cup for himself and set it down within Maxwell's reach, looking miserable. Maxwell washed up, the monkey making theoretical motions at a safe distance from the tangible sink. Phony-casual, Maxwell asked: "By the way, how would you have proceeded if that bathroom door had had no keyhole? Or, say, a Yale lock?"

The monkey replied only by looking grave, which was the way he looked anyhow.

Maxwell could not avoid going to the office. As the most junior partner, he was expected to sweat out a serious quantity of dogwork to justify his existence in what the most senior Bindle described (often) as a situation of substantial trust. He told the monkey: "I am now about to go downstairs, out, and five stations uptown on the subway. I then walk from Lexington to Third and uptown two more blocks: elevator from main to ninth floor. Any comment? . . . No comment."

He stepped out, quickly closing the apartment door, which had a Yale lock.

A block from the subway entrance the monkey caught up with him.

It had enlarged again, being now as tall as Maxwell, and was rubbing its left hip as if it might be a bit lame, and glowering.

It was one of those lush and tender mornings in May when New Yorkers find it a genuine pleasure to inhale grit. Those who passed Maxwell and his associate paid the monkey no more attention than they would have given to any offbeat shadow. Faint frowns, puzzled glances. One elderly lady opened her mouth but didn't speak. Politeness, Maxwell supposed. Nobody likes to stop a stranger and say: "Excuse me, sir, you may not have noticed—your shadow is looking more simian than you do this morning."

Or perhaps the monkey knew some extra-terrestrial means of cooperating with Maxwell's wish for obscurity. Decent of him to use it, if so. Descending the subway steps, Maxwell said over his shoulder: "Sorry about all those doors."

Understandably, the monkey went unnoticed in the subway crowds. At the moment of Maxwell's apology it had returned to the size of a child, and quit glowering.

At the office Maxwell hung up his hat in his own small room, leaving the door open for his usual early morning contemplation of the back of Sheila Walker's neck.

Miss Walker at twenty-nine was losing hope, but the back of her neck was exquisite.

She did not lack other prettiness of a spaniel-eyed, wistful sort. Though a competent receptionist and secretary to all four partners, she was developing a tendency to flutter and squeak. She recognized it herself with honest dismay. She also found herself clutching her mousy hair at demoralizing sounds, such as the long angry bray of H. K. Bindle clearing his throat for

speech. This uproar was no worse than T. J. Bindle's sneeze, and F. W. Bindle, while dictating, scratched his left trouser-leg with dull sonority; so Miss Walker sometimes clutched her hair at all three. Pretty, Shelia at times became beautiful, when nobody was looking at her and she was looking at the back of Maxwell's neck. The back of Maxwell's neck was not exquisite; occasionally not even very clean.

When she noticed Maxwell's monkey following him into the office that morning she felt that to speak of it would be not only tactless but—well, difficult. She said: "Good morning, Max!" and smiled spaniel-eyed, slamming the typewriter carriage back and savoring the baritone boom of his "Yo, Sheila!" She too had gone through a bad time since waking—had indeed thought of talking things over with a well-heeled friend of hers who was just about halfway through her third psychoanalyst.

After Maxwell settled in his office, with the door open, she continued tearing away at a brief in the suit of one Jasper Baring against his grand-nephew Judson Baer for defamation of character. The said Judson Baer was alleged to have asserted loudly in a public place, to wit a bar, before six persons bearing witness, that the said Jasper Baring was not fit to carry guts to a bear. Her exquisite neck grew warmer and warmer up over the ears, and she got things all snarled up.

When she could bear it no longer, Sheila flung down her eraser and bravely stepped into Maxwell's office to ask him—flat-out, quickly, before her courage faded—how you spell "eligible." "I keep thinking it's

two *e*s, somewhere, but it never comes out looking right!"

"Mm, well, what's the context?" Maxwell asked—not intelligently, mostly in order to keep her in the office while he made up his mind about something.

"Well, it's what this old Jasper said about Jud—no, Judson about Jasper—wait, I'll get it, Max."

As she fluttered back to her desk, Maxwell was forced to abandon his last doubt. He was not even slightly hung over, and there were two monkeys in the room. His own, and the one standing in the doorway behind Sheila making desperate motions with imaginary papers.

Maxwell's monkey seemed to be more or less off duty, perhaps because Maxwell's desk chair stood close to the wall, which cramps the style of any shadow. Maxwell's monkey was in fact deeply interested in the other one. They were about the same size—quite a nice match, in a way.

"Here it is," said Sheila, fluttering back. "You see, H. K. felt we should have like a legal translation of what this old Judson said about—wait—'being then and there at the site known as'—no, it's further on—here: 'defendant having then and there uttered expressions including the direct statement that plaintiff was not qualified or eligible to initiate or promote or perform the conveyance or transport of eviscerated material, to wit entrails'—oh, *look* how I spelled evis—oh—oh, damn!"

"You poor kid," said Maxwell, and made it around

his desk fairly fast, heedless of the flying pages of legal size.

The first kiss, intended partly as a consolation job, bounced off her nose. The second, even more complexly motivated, was amateur in execution but far more advanced in concept.

The monkeys too appeared to feel that at least one crisis in their own relations had been met and passed.

During those five or ten minutes—this anyhow was the none too clear impression of both Shelia and Maxwell—three persons passed the office door: F. W. Bindle, who seemed to note the embrace with mixed feelings, some of them green; F. W.'s father, T. J. Bindle, who leered in a manner that could hardly be interpreted to mean anything but "Nice work Max!" and the most senior H. K. Bindle, who always noted everything that happened, but never said anything unless it could be expressed in sentences of not less than two hundred and fifty words.

A crisis passed usually means another one approached. A week after his monkey's first appearance Maxwell came to see me, not so much distressed as puzzled, not so much puzzled as angry. It took time and bourbon before he could work off those feelings of hostility and resentment which they say we should work off, no kidding.

He told his story coherently. As he talked and drank and brooded, his shadow was more disturbed than he was, but I could not reach any firm conclusion about it.

It has been suggested that they possess some means

—possibly a ray, though I don't buy that—of unsettling the observer's vision at its source. I did feel inclined to fault my own visual perception, when Maxwell's shadow strolled off to the bathroom and Maxwell just sat there.

"We've checked out one thing for sure," he said. "It won't let you do anything you yourself think is wrong. I mean, it'll *let* you all right, but it gets bigger and meaner and uglier till a man can't stand it. But it goes by what *you* think, not by any other standards. Take cussing. I can't see anything wrong about a bit of normal cussing, so when I do it my monkey doesn't give a damn. But Sheila's got a thing about cussing, her own that is. Last time she let go with a little 'hell' or something—and with every provocation, mind you—a couple of other words came along for the ride, and her monkey—my God, I don't care to see that again! Sheila nearly passed out cold."

"You say there's been this—gradual growth?"

"All week long. If only you damn science-fiction writers would just—"

"Let's stay with the subject. Approximately how large is your shad—your monkey, right this moment?"

"Can't you see?"

"Not clearly, I admit. (Cheers.)"

"That's evident. (What? Oh, cheers.) Why, he's about two gorillas' worth and uglier than dammit."

"And Sheila's?"

"Size of her maternal grandmother, approximately."

"Her maternal grandmother was—"

"Is. Stout. About medium-large grizzly size."

"And you feel that your conduct this week—"

"We've been good as gold. If you confounded science-fiction writers would—"

"Max, now hear this: we didn't invent outer space. It has been there all the time, and bugs me as much as you. Please stick to the subject."

"Sure, sure, that's how a man talks when he doesn't happen to have a monkey. Oh, well, we drove out across the river the other night and parked, and I admit my feelings ran away with me. Sheila's too I guess. But she said no, and—well, see, the monks had gone outside. No room for 'em on the back seat any more, they've grown so. And they were hulking around out there in the dark, and there's this sudden God-awful pounding on the top of the car as though some lunatic—"

"By which monkey was the pounding?"

"Sheila's. I stuck my head out and saw her. Eyes glow in the dark, damned if they don't. Coming home they rode outside on the roof, and we could see their feet stuck down through the rear windows, I suppose to keep the wind from blowing them away. If only it could!"

"The pounding occurred when Sheila said no?"

"About that time. You see? No pleasing them."

"In relation to Sheila what did you then do, Counselor?"

"Nothing but nothing, you crumb. She said no. If you damned science—"

"And you claim your own monkey is two gorillas' worth and growing all the time. Max, short of rubbing

your two stupid noses in it, how could they make it any plainer?"

He made a show of thinking that over a long while, but the truth is that Maxwell is anything but stupid. He said at last: "See what you mean of course. But she still says no and she means it."

I said (and I think well enough of the remark so that I have it in a notebook and may use it again some time): "Max, of the many ways of persuading a woman to change her mind, sitting on your butt thinking sad thoughts is not one."

He left soon after that. I noticed how long it took his shadow to follow him after he slammed the door. He called me four hours later, at two in the morning, sounding peaceful and friendly.

All he had to say was: "They did too."

Now that we all have them, things aren't going too badly—maybe even a little better than they used to, as a matter of fact. It probably shows the human race can get along with anything, if it has to. Almost anything.

Mine for instance is occupying the large armchair across the room from my typewriter, finishing up something or other (with *my* ball-point) and naturally I haven't a God-damn notion what he's produced.

The Ponsonby Case

At 5:18 A.M., Tuesday, August 18, 1959, while patrolling that section of Central Park which includes the zoological exhibit, and being then in the area between the south animal building and the pool containing sea lions, I received a call for assistance from Elihu Jackson, who is employed by the city as a night attendant at the said Zoo.

Mr. Jackson ran out of the building which houses the elephant, hippopotamuses, and some other fauna, and addressed me as follows: "Hey, officer! There's a maniac in with the bull, and he's naked as a snake."

Being aware that in circus and related parlance the term "bull" is frequently used to refer to an elephant, whether of the male or the female sex, I proceeded immediately to the elephant house, and observed within

the enclosure a moderately large male of the Asiatic species, and what appeared to be a human individual approximately 45 years of age, height 5′ 2″, weight about 180 pounds. Subject individual was seated in, and partly covered by, a pile of hay in a corner of the enclosure. Mr. Jackson at this time provided the information that he had heard the elephant mumbling in a way that meant he (the elephant) didn't feel good.

When I entered the building the elephant was located partly inside the enclosure and partly outside in the yard. The head, or front, section of the animal was the section within the enclosure, and he (the animal) was shaking it.

I inquired of subject individual on the hay what he was doing in there. He replied: "Nothing." He added, if I correctly understood him, that it was anyway better than the hippopotamus. I then directed Mr. Jackson to open the service door and let the man out. Mr. Jackson replied: "He's mean, that bull is."

Considering Mr. Jackson's reply not only unresponsive but lacking in humanity, I pointed out that the door opening on the runway between the enclosure and the central aisle of the building was too small to admit the passage of an elephant and could therefore be opened with impunity.

Mr. Jackson replied (verbatim): "Not on your fanny—soon as I do he'll charge on account he don't feel good. When they shake their head thataway, means he don't feel good."

I immediately directed Mr. Jackson to give me the key to the padlock on the service door and then go outside the building and create a diversion.

He said: "Do what?"

I said: "Make a noise."

He said: "Oh."

After some further conversation omitted here as not relevant, Mr. Jackson gave the key to me, went outside the building, and made a noise, which as I had hoped induced the animal to retire. In retiring from the enclosure, however, the animal did not back out, but first came all the way in, made a circle of the area, and on his way out, while passing subject individual seated on and within the hay, tapped subject individual's shoulder with his trunk.

Beyond smiling in a manner suggestive of nervousness, subject individual made no response. The animal then, as before indicated, reversed his position in the doorway: that is to say, the head, or front, section was placed outside the building, presumably with reference to the diversion created by Mr. Jackson.

I then lowered myself into the runway, opened the service door, and requested subject individual to come out through that. He did so, at which time I observed that he was wearing, in addition to a pair of shell-rim glasses, a pair of bedroom slippers of the color which I understand is known as baby-blue.

Interrogation, by Nussbaum, I. J., Shield No. 28E31416:

Q: Your name, please?

A: Hector Ponsonby.

Q: Middle initial?

A: M. For McWhirter.

Q: Age?

A: Forty-six.

Q: Residence?

A: Worcester, Massachusetts.

Q: And your occupation?

A: I travel in woolen underwear.

Q: But you are not at the moment doing so?

A: No.

Mr. Ponsonby then explained, with a command of language which was excellent and coherent, but somewhat too detailed and voluminous for inclusions in this report, that he had intended, by his last answer, to convey the information that he was by occupation a salesman for the firm of Brigham & Bottomley, textile manufacturers of Worcester, Massachusetts, and was in New York in pursuance of his normal commercial activities when the wind blew the door shut. The interrogation continued as follows:

Q: Would you be willing to explain what occasioned your presence in the elephant's hay with no clothes on?

A: Gladly, if someone will lend me a pair of pants. And by the way, is the dog gone?

Interpolation, by Elihu Jackson, who had by then returned: We don't allow no dogs in the Zoo.

Ponsonby: Damn it, you allowed that one.

Second interpolation: There ain't no dogs allowed in this here Zoo.

Interrogation continued, by Nussbaum: Do you feel all right?

A: I feel better.

I then directed Mr. Jackson to procure from his locker or from general supply whatever might be available in the way of temporary clothing adaptable to a

man of Mr. H. McW. Ponsonby's height and weight. I further instructed Mr. Jackson that if while thus engaged he should encounter other persons (which I considered unlikely in view of the earliness of the hour) he should make no mention of the incident in the elephant house, out of respect for Mr. Ponsonby's status not only as a citizen but as an out-of-town visitor.

I also made it clear to Mr. Jackson (wherein perhaps I exceeded by authority) that if any damage to the clothing or inconvenience to himself resulted from his action, adequate compensation would probably be allowed by the city, in consideration of his service to the public peace.

While Mr. Jackson was absent, I received from Mr. Ponsonby a preliminary account (later verified in every important particular by such investigation as I felt called upon to make) which I enter here, the same being somewhat simplified from Mr. Ponsonby's original and to some extent overemotional terms. I would emphasize that this account is not offered in lieu of a formal statement by Hector McW. Ponsonby, the said Ponsonby having stated that he will hold himself available to provide such statement if higher authority so directs.

At approximately 10:55 P.M., August 17, 1959, Hector McW. Ponsonby, being then in occupancy of a suite at the Watkins Hotel, 96A East 68th Street, this city, was in the act of taking a bath. Hearing a knock at the door, he put on the pair of blue slippers previously mentioned in this report, and a bathrobe which he states was of a color matching the slippers, the two items having been purchased together by his wife, Isa-

bel Stuart Ponsonby, of Worcester, Massachusetts, on the occasion of their twentieth wedding anniversary.

He then opened the door of his suite and was requested to sign for and receive a small parcel, by an individual whom I have not been able to trace but who was probably a legitimate employee of one of the metropolitan messenger services. Supposing the parcel had been sent by his wife, Mr. Ponsonby did sign for and take possession of same.

Q: You were expecting such a parcel?

A: Not exactly, but she often has to.

Q: Would you enlarge on that?

A: Every damn time I go to New York I *always* forget something.

Shortly after the messenger had departed, Mr. Ponsonby, who suffers from myopia, mild, uncomplicated, and who had neglected to put on his glasses before opening the door, discovered that the parcel was addressed, not to him, but to a certain Mr. Hercule M. Ponsovic, who (as I ascertained in subsequent investigation) was registered at the same hotel, and still is, being a professional tea-taster of retiring habits.

Immediately upon discovering the error, Mr. Ponsonby called after the messenger and ran a short distance down the corridor, around the corner of which the said messenger had by that time disappeared. Having advanced in this direction some twenty feet, Mr. Ponsonby distinctly heard the closing of two doors: (1) the door of the elevator; (2) the door of his own suite.

Having verified the closing of his own door—undoubtedly by the wind, then blowing vigorously in advance of a summer thunder-shower—Mr. Ponsonby at-

tempted to open it with the only tool in the pocket of his bathrobe—namely, a small comb. This (unsuccessful) exercise is, I suggest, clear evidence of a lack of any criminal background.

Two persons had come up in the elevator that took away the messenger and were now advancing down the corridor on Mr. Ponsonby, who at that moment had broken the comb and had thereupon voiced certain expressions verging on the vernacular, which he regrets. He feels they may have been a contributory factor in causing the lady to scream.

These persons (I later ascertained) were Colonel Eustace Bangs, a British visitor late of Her Majesty's Fusilier Guards (it sounded like that), aged 61, and his wife Cordelia, aged 60. Mr. Ponsonby's reconstruction of the ensuing conversation is at least in part corroborated by my later interrogation of Colonel Bangs. It appears to have gone approximately as follows:

Mrs. Bangs: Eustace, do something!

Colonel Bangs: Well, here now, what's all this, old man? Family hotel, you know, can't run around half naked in a family hotel, you know.

Ponsonby: I got locked out.

Mrs. Bangs: Eustace, the man is a sex maniac. Probably has some helpless child in there.

Colonel Bangs: Well now, my dear, mustn't go off half-cocked, you know, might be some explanation, what?

Mrs. Bangs: You have only to read one of these dreadful American newspapers. And look at his eye.

Ponsonby: Damn it, lady, there's nothing wrong with my eye!

Colonel Bangs. Now now, my wife's present, you know, can't have cursing and swearing, you know. Now, you—

Mrs. Bangs: Be careful, Eustace! He may be armed.

Mr. Ponsonby, believing himself in imminent danger of physical contact with a Colonel six feet two inches high, then flung the small parcel, which he had retained throughout his efforts to open the door, in such a manner as to have it impinge on the frontal bone of Colonel Bangs.

This precipitate action caused no damage whatever to Colonel Bangs, but considerable damage to the parcel, which burst and scattered an indeterminate amount of a dry, black substance all over Colonel and Mrs. Bangs. I have since determined that the substance was Ceylon tea of a rare type and a very high quality which had been sent to Mr. Hercule M. Ponsovic by a friend, as a token of personal esteem. Mr. Ponsonby did not do this, he states, for the purpose of proving there was nothing wrong with his eye; he did it, he maintains, because he had to.

From the interrogation of Colonel Eustace Bangs, conducted August 19, 1959:

Q., by Nussbaum: You were aware, Colonel, at the moment of impact, that you had suffered no lasting physical disability of a traumatic nature?

A: Well, yes, you know, dash it, you know, but you can't have people throwing tea all over people.

Mr. Ponsonby then ran, discovering too late that the direction in which he ran was a dead end. Turning,

he observed Colonel Bangs advancing on him with both arms out, like (he says) a mine sweeper.

(A minor discrepancy in Mr. Ponsonby's account should be noted here, but I do not regard it as a reflection on his credibility. For completeness, however: inquiry at the British consulate has established that Colonel Bangs has at no time had any connection whatsoever with Her Majesty's Navy.)

Compelled to run in the other direction, Mr. Ponsonby ducked to leeward of the starboard arm, which, as he passed, secured a grip on the blue bathrobe and completely removed it, owing partly to the fact that he (Mr. Ponsonby) shot out of the thing (his expression) like a squeezed appleseed. Mr. Ponsonby then proceeded down the corridor. He asserts he has no recollection of observing a door marked "service stairs." He merely passed through it.

At this point in my interrogation of Mr. Ponsonby I noted that the elephant had returned indoors, and instead of shaking his head was now nodding it. I inquired of Mr. Ponsonby whether in his opinion this indicated that he (the animal) was feeling good. Mr. Ponsonby said he did not know. I inquired also concerning the approximate weight of the parcel he had thrown at the Colonel. Mr. Ponsonby estimated it at six ounces.

I then briefly discussed with Mr. Ponsonby the experience which the metropolitan police have had with the phenomenon of recidivism in the criminal element, and against this background I inquired whether he, Mr. Ponsonby, felt that he would be at all likely, should the circumstances recur, to again throw anything like a six-

ounce parcel at a retired British Colonel. With every evidence of the utmost sincerity, Mr. Ponsonby replied, no, he would not, not if he saw him first. I then requested him to continue his account.

Mr. Ponsonby considers that his speed in the descent of the service stairs was between seven and seven and a half miles per hour at the moment when he collided with the slowly moving and lighter bulk of a waiter employed by the Watkins Hotel, whom I have identified as Mr. Stanley Moszczenski, age 53. Since the service elevator was in use, Mr. Moszczenski had chosen to use the stairs in order to convey to Mr. Salvatore Rizzo, on the second floor, a room-service tray containing spaghetti Milanese, Parmesan cheese, hot pepper, and the like. From my later investigation:

Q., by Nussbaum: Mr. Rizzo, do you confirm the statement by Mr. Moszczenski, so far as you understand it?

A: I don't speak Polish.

Q: But you comprehend the general drift?

A: All I know, I never get the spaghett'. Was midnight supper, very hungry. I never get.

Mr. Ponsonby was naturally unaware of Mr. Rizzo's position in the matter, during the period he remained seated with Mr. Moszczenski at the foot of the service stairs. He does not recollect saying anything to Mr. Moszczenski except: "For God's sake give me your pants!"

The response of Mr. Moszczenski, being in Polish, is not a matter of record, but Mr. Ponsonby believed at the time that Mr. Moszczenski had, as he phrases it, blood in his eye.

As a result of subsequent inquiry I have been able to set Mr. Ponsonby's mind partly at rest on this question. It was not blood but tomato sauce. Nevertheless, Mr. Ponsonby felt himself somewhat to blame, and since two new doorways were now available, he chose the one nearer to him.

At his impact it opened on a stairway leading to the furnace room, where he noted a number of dark spaces, the most inviting being a large coal bin. Mr. Ponsonby gave me to understand that he did not burrow under the coal, since it was summer and the bin was nearly empty. He entered it, he states, simply because it was enclosed on four sides and appeared to offer him a chance to consider his delicate situation. He was, in fact, doing precisely that when a voice over his head remarked: "Hey, you!"

Mr. Ponsonby then observed, hung over the coal bin, a face with pendant gray mustaches. He describes the face as "bilious," which I attribute to Mr. Ponsonby's troubled state of mind, since this is neither a just nor a tolerant description of Mr. Clyde Somerville, boiler-man, unmarried, age 65. Mr. Ponsonby reconstructs their conversation as follows:

"What you doing down there?"

"I am not doing anything."

"Then what's the idea?"

"The wind blew the door shut."

"What door?"

"My door."

"Why'n't you open it?"

"Comb wouldn't fit."

"What comb?"

"The one I blasted, God bust it!"

"You don't want to talk like that if you're going to go messing around in people's coal bins without no clothes on."

"May I borrow your pants?"

"Matter with your own?"

"I told you, I left them behind."

"No, you didn't."

"You can see I did, can't you?"

"Mean you didn't tell me. Had, wouldn't of asked. Why?"

"Why what?"

"Whyja leave 'em behind and go messing around in people's coal bins?"

"The wind blew the door shut."

"All right, don't get excited. You want some pants I'll get you some pants. All's I want to know is why you got to go messing around in people's coal bins without no clothes on."

Mr. Ponsonby then heard the clamor of a search party coming down the stairs, and he said: "Please!"

"Huh?"

"Please, if I could have the pants now and explain later?"

"Explain what?"

"Why the wind blew the door shut."

"Account it's blowing up a storm outside is why."

The search party, according to Mr. Ponsonby's recollection, numbered between eighteen and twenty-four persons, all talking simultaneously. It included Mr. Moszczenski, roughly three bellboys, a house detective with a gun, and Colonel Eustace Bangs. Mr. Ponsonby

asserts that when he emerged from the coal bin fearing immediate encirclement, one bellboy remarked: "Gawd, I do mean pink!"

(My investigation has established beyond a shadow of doubt that Mr. Ponsonby is not and never has been a member of the Communist Party.)

At this phase in my interrogation Mr. Elihu Jackson returned to the elephant house with a park attendant's uniform which he said was the best he could do. Mr. Ponsonby, apparently under stress of strong emotion, then made some rather incoherent statement to the effect that until now he had never really loved policemen, and while he was putting on the garments the elephant went outside.

Mr. Ponsonby resumed his account, explaining that the greater part of his attention had been directed toward the house detective with the gun, which Mr. Ponsonby thought to be of .45-caliber. Mr. Jackson interjected the information that if you could believe all you read in them Westerns a .45 can really kill you deader than a dormouse (Mr. Jackson's expression). Mr. Ponsonby concurred. Nevertheless, it appears that he faced the entire group, including the house detective, long enough to remark either: "Why don't you all drop dead?" or "I wish you would all drop dead."

Although Mr. Ponsonby is inclined to think the second version is correct, the first seems to me more likely, because the second is a mere static expression of a wish, while the first embodies the dynamics of a forward-looking proposition appropriate to a man who, through force of circumstances, had become a man of

action. It is a difficult point in semantics and perhaps should not be given undue weight.

Then, as a man of action, Mr. Ponsonby ran for an iron grille door at the far end of the furnace room and closed it behind him in such a manner as to cause an abrasion to the nose of Mr. Clement Gahagan, house detective, age 42.

In the statement (attached) which Mr. Gahagan later gave me, he makes it clear that to him the most serious aspect of the episode was the fact that his gun—a .32, not a .45—went off, owing, he feels, to the unforeseen abrasion and not to any absence of control on his part. In informal conversation Mr. Gahagan told me—in good faith, I am sure—that he wouldn't be after shooting the little guy and him naked as a bug.

The bullet, it appears, struck the iron grille, ricocheted, passed through the left branch of Mr. Clyde Somerville's mustache, and lodged in a coal bin from which it was later extracted by Jacques LaFourche, age 13, son of the head chef of the Watkins Hotel. My interrogation of Master LaFourche was in part as follows:

Q., by Nussbaum: So you dug her out, Jackie?

A: Well, sure. Can I keep it, Mister? It didn't hit nobody. Can I keep it, huh, can I?

Q: Well, sure.

Since the grille door gave on the outdoors, Mr. Ponsonby went there. The short stairway from the grille led to a side alley closed at one end—the inner end. The open end faced 68th Street. Mr. Ponsonby is quite clear that at the instant of his emergence from the furnace room, the wind was rising strongly but the rain

had not begun to fall. It did fall, however, almost immediately after he heard the grille door reopened and recognized the voice of Colonel Eustace Bangs.

Having checked with the Weather Bureau with reference to the time of commencement of the thundershower of August 17, 1959, I am able to pinpoint the time as 11:21, when Mr. Ponsonby came out on 68th Street and shot toward Central Park like (he says) a homing dove.

I have experienced some difficulty in securing reliable witnesses for the time between Mr. Ponsonby's emergence on 68th Street and his disappearance in the park. The rain was then falling heavily, the entire incident was characterized by extremely rapid motion and observation under those conditions must be somewhat discounted.

It seems to be established, however, that in the course of his passage to the park Mr. Ponsonby knocked over one liberal journalist, one Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, and one plumber. The journalist refers to a pink blur, the Justice declined to testify, and the plumber is doubtful, since there is a possibility that he was flattened not by Mr. Ponsonby but by the twelve or fourteen persons who, in spite of the rain, were then engaged in hot pursuit.

Mr. Ponsonby himself is convinced that at least some policemen were included in that section of the electorate which followed him as he moved rapidly westward. I am doubtful of this; the matter could probably be illuminated by reference to higher authority, but I have not done so. I did, however, make it clear to Mr. Ponsonby that the members of the metropolitan

police force are not, as he suggested, selected for matched voices, and that when seven or eight of them yell, "Hey, you!" at the same time, the result is not harmony in the musical sense.

I was able to secure one quite reliable witness to Mr. Ponsonby's crossing of Fifth Avenue, namely a taxi driver, Wilkins Krumbhaar, whose vehicle had suffered damage to the right headlight when the same came in contact with a mailbox, because Mr. Krumbhaar was obliged to swerve off the Avenue to avoid collision with an unidentified flying object. It was impossible to trace his two passengers, but Mr. Krumbhaar distinctly recalls a conversation that took place between them shortly after the abrasion of his right headlight:

"Baby, did you see what I thought I saw?"

"I think so, but if the cabbie saw what you thought I think you saw you could ask him."

"Driver, did you see what she thinks I thought I saw?"

"Listen, brother. If I hadn't of saw what you wanted to know if I saw what you thought she saw, would I of already clumb the curb?"

Mr. Ponsonby remembers leaping over a couple on the grass without attracting their attention, but apart from that his recollection of his passage into the park is not overprecise. He recalls tearing through a tunnel, and up a hill and down a hill, and into a thicket where he crouched, he thinks, about ten minutes, while a distant baying died away in the south. He felt, however, no deep security.

He was then pursued by a Peke.

I have been unable to locate this animal, or to identify it except as to breed. Mr. Ponsonby is quite clear that it was a Pekinese, of uncertain age, trailing a leash, having presumably lost contact with its owner and strayed. Mr. Ponsonby thinks, but is not certain, that it was a female.

At any rate, upon sighting Mr. Ponsonby in the thicket the animal displayed no hesitation, but charged him at once, obliging him to run, he estimates, rather more than a quarter of a mile. The rain having not yet ceased, Mr. Ponsonby was uncertain of his direction, but it was firmly fixed in his mind, whether correctly or not, that the animal intended to rob him of his slippers.

It is to Mr. Ponsonby's credit, not only as a man of action but as a citizen with a highly developed sense of the decencies, that he retained these slippers, and still had them when he was engaged in climbing some vertical iron bars which, he felt at the time, were unusually high. Having reached the top of them, and observing an elephant on the other side, Mr. Ponsonby felt he could go no further.

It must be emphasized that the entry of this Pekinese into the zoo area was not, in any degree whatsoever, the fault of Elihu Jackson, the night attendant referred to earlier. It is my considered opinion that if the owner of a Pekinese is so neglectful as to lose such an animal and allow it to roam at large, the exclusion of it from an unfenced area such as the one under discussion would require the constant activity of so much additional personnel that the city government could not justifiably recommend it in the budget.

The elephant then proceeded to lift Mr. Ponsonby with his trunk and set him gently down within the enclosure. Mr. Ponsonby recalls saying: "Nice elephant."

Mr. Ponsonby then walked without undue haste into the indoor section of the elephant's domain, hoping to find some way out of it and into a sanctuary where he might eventually encounter some member of his own species who would not say, "Hey, you!"

Since the service door was padlocked and Mr. Ponsonby was unable to squeeze through the bars, he finally sat down on the hay. The elephant, he says, came inside from time to time, apparently to reassure himself that Mr. Ponsonby was making out all right.

Having completed his account to me, Mr. Ponsonby was still much troubled with regard to possible charges that might be placed against him, particularly the charge of indecent exposure. So far as my limited authority allowed, I attempted to assure him that any such charge, if raised at all, could probably be dismissed by reference to the commonly accepted legal principle that the law does not concern itself with trifles, or, as I should prefer to state it to my superiors, *de minimis non curat lex.*

(Signed)
Irving J. Nussbaum
Shield No. 28E31416

Pickup for Olympus

This was Ab Thompson—you might have seen him if you were around there in the 1960s: thin nose, scant chin, hair sandy to gray, pop eyes, and a warm depth of passion for anything with wheels. If it had pistons, wheels, some kind of driving shaft, Ab could love it. When the old half-ton bumbled into his filling station, the four cylinders of his lonesome heart pounded to the spark; the best of many voices within him said tenderly: *Listen how she perks!* The bearded driver leaning from the cab had to ask him twice: "Is this the right road for Olympus?"

A genuine 1937 Chevvy, sweet as the day she was hatched. Oh—little things here and there, of course. Ab pulled himself together. "Never heard of it. You're aimed for N'York—might be beyond there some-

wheres." The muddy hood stirred his longing; when this thunder-buggy was made, streamlining wasn't much more than the beginning of a notion. "Water? Check the oil, sir?"

"Yes, both. Got enough gas, I think." The driver's voice was fatigued, perhaps from the June heat. Ab Thompson raised the hood and explored. Rugged, rugged . . . "They don't make 'em like this nowadays."

"I guess not." In the back of the truck a drowsy-eyed woman in a loose gown of white linen scratched the head of a leopard and kept watch of half a dozen shy little goats.

Ab marveled: it was like the dollar Ingersoll his pop used to brag about—and oh, dear Lord, how long ago was that? Before what they called the Second World War?—Ab couldn't just remember. Naturally this old girl was beat up—beat up bad, and almost thirty years old. But she ticked away. She perked. Needed a new fan belt. Leak in the top of the radiator—dump in some ginger, maybe she'd seal herself up. And the valves . . . He showed the driver the spot of dirty oil on the measuring rod. "She'll take a quart, maybe two."

"All right," said the bearded man. The woman murmured reprovingly to the leopard and tied a short rope to the grass collar on his neck. When the oil was in, the driver said apologetically: "Seems very noisy."

"That's your valves, Mister. I could tighten 'em some. You got one loose tappet, I dunno—I could tighten 'er some only not too much on account if I make her too tight you don't get the power is all."

"Well—" the driver scratched the thick curls tum-

bling over the horns on his forehead. "Well, suppose you—"

"She ain't had a real valve job in quite some time, am I right, Mister? I ain't equipped for a valve job is the hell of it. But I could look her over, give you an idea, won't cost you nothing, glad to do it. Understand, that there ticking don't hurt nothing, it's just your tappet, but them valves—" Ab spat in embarrassment.

"Yes, look her over. I'd be much obliged."

"Kind of like a good watch, Mister—got to keep her cleaned up."

"Yes. Look her over, give me an idea."

Ab sighed in happiness. "Okay. Twenty minutes, say . . ."

You could pound the daylights out of them, he thought—they'd still perk. Bet she could take a ten-percent grade in high, even now. Actually the valves weren't bad, he saw—sighing over the leaf-gauge, wishing in a brief sorrow like the touch of wings that somehow, somewhere, it might be possible to set up the right kind of shop. Suppose you could stretch the money as far as hiring an assistant—then maybe an addition on the south side, with room for a lift—nuts: no use dreaming. . . . The valves weren't bad—bit of maladjustment, natural after neglect. She'd perk. They never made them like this nowadays—

The woman in white was exercising the leopard on the rope, in the open space around the gas tanks; a goat bleated peevishly.

Not that there was anything wrong with the new cars, Ab thought—especially the take-off jobs that

needed only a twenty-foot clearance to sprout wings and leave the highway: those might be hell-fired cute when they got a few more bugs ironed out. And you couldn't deny the new ground models were slick and pretty: fifty miles to the gallon if you didn't average more than a hundred per. But you take this old baby—"Mister," said Ab Thompson, "you got compression, I do mean. Shouldn't have no trouble on the hills."

"That's true. I have no trouble in the hills."

"Starter ain't too good. Might've had some damage, I dunno."

"I meant to ask about that. The trouble is here in the cab."

"Huh? Nothin' there but the button you step on."

"I know. My foot keeps catching on it." Ab opened the right-hand door; the button looked good enough. "I thought, if you could build it out a little—?" The driver showed Ab the cloven bottom of his hoof. "This slot here—you see, the button catches in it."

"Oh, hell, instant plastic'll fix that." Ab trotted to his shack, delighted. Nice to have the right stuff on hand for once. He returned with a gadget like a grease-gun. "This here is something new in the trade. Hardens on contact with air, I do mean hardens. Stick to anything—got to handle it careful till it's dry. Comes out in a spray, like." He played the plastic delicately on the starter button, building it out away from the gas pedal. "Now try that, sir."

"Oh, fine. Just what I had in mind. Well, the valves—"

"Ain't too bad. But I would recommend you stop

some place where they got the equipment. Might go on a long time, or—well, she might kind of start complaining, I dunno. It oughta be done."

"I'll see to it. Much obliged." The woman and the leopard climbed back in the truck. "What do I owe you?"

Ab massaged his neck. "Three bucks . . . Thank you, sir. Come again!" The little truck rolled away. "Jesus, I do mean! Thirty years old and she still perks, just as sweet as you-be-damn."

Darius

According to (Miss) Cassandra Higginson, a housemaid of proven intelligence, the cat Darius was drunk.

Her employer Mrs. Follansbee is thought to have dissented from this view. She is alleged to have said to Mr. Follansbee: "Llewellyn, that cat will have to be altered." Some moments later, since a squirm behind the newspaper indicated that Mrs. Follansbee's husband was still alive, she is believed to have added: "Llewellyn . . ."

The later celebrated Mr. Follansbee is described by Miss Higginson as a small man with a sort of you-know pushed-around look. Other testimony mentions tufts of ash-colored hair, and pince-nez.

Miss Higginson asserts that the black and white cat

Darius had just come singing from the garage. She saw him lurch into Mr. Follansbee's lap (the word "lurch" is taken directly from her deposition) and she claims to have seen Mr. Follansbee shelter him with the editorial page of the *New York Times.* She recalls that Mr. Follansbee said: "Now, Darius." Miss Higginson declares further that she had never considered Mr. Follansbee the sort of man who would deliberately allow a cat access to spirituous liquors. It was therefore her view that the cat's manifest alcoholic condition was in some manner the result of his (Darius's) own efforts.

Miss Higginson also states that one hour later Mrs. Follansbee again said: "Llewellyn—" At this point (or juncture) Mr. Follansbee put away the newspaper and walked out of the house, in the company of Darius. This took place at or about half past eleven (2330 hours), October 31, 1976. Except for the unsatisfactory evidence of certain persons who were at that time small boys, Mr. Follansbee is not known to have been seen since that time.

These boys, seven in number, are thought to have followed Mr. Follansbee and the cat Darius for a distance of three-quarters of a mile to the town limits. Their accounts, taken separately, tally in most important particulars. Darius, they assert, was walking beside Mr. Follansbee, and both advanced at a rather rapid pace; they do not mention a "lurch." The boys were celebrating Halloween. After receiving a nickel apiece from Mr. Follansbee (a total expenditure on his part of $0.35) they ceased advising him and Darius to go soak it. They followed him at a wider distance, however, as far as the town line, mainly, they depose, because they

believed him to be as nutty as a fruitcake and wished to see what the hell he would do next. What he did (they say) was to climb (with Darius) to the top of a small barren knoll somewhat off the highway beyond the town line, and at that point the boys lost sight of him.

The knoll is not there now. Testimony of Abelard Peabody, builder and contractor, establishes the fact that it was at the time in question.

At 11:59 (2359 hours), October 31, 1976, lightning is known to have struck the top of this knoll, although it was not raining, and a certain quantity of sparks was observed, variously described as green, yellow, purple and "real queer-looking." Some object is thought to have floated briefly around the summit, identified by Maisie Schmaltz (profession unlisted) of 60 Maiden Lane as something like a sort of a gray something, only black.

Further research establishes that at 11:59 (2359 hours), October 31, 1976, a secretary at the United States delegation to the United Nations telephoned to an under-secretary of the Soviet delegation to inquire: "Did you hear anything?" The Soviet under-secretary is thought to have replied: "Nyet—well, nyet exactly." The United States secretary may (or may not) have then said: "Oh, crud!" The conversation is alleged to have proceeded no further.

It is incontrovertible that the cat Darius came home—alone. He was seen returning by two policemen at 1:24 A.M. (0124 hours), November 1, 1976, by a milkman, Konstantin Skourieczenkiewicz, at 2:10 A.M. (0210 hours) of the same night, and by Mr. Francis X

O'Leary's English bulldog Butch at an hour not precisely determined. Darius was admitted to the Follansbee home by the maid (Miss) Cassandra Higginson at 2:41 A.M. (0241 hours) November 1, 1976. She has testified that he was still singing at this time in a dark and uneducated way, and that he was alone.

Questioned regarding the continued masculinity or sexual integrity of the cat Darius, Miss Higginson deposed that goodness, she didn't look. Questioned further, and the possible importance of this point being made clear to her with great difficulty, Miss Higginson states that he anyway acted as mean as usual.

The disappearance of Mr. Follansbee has since been analyzed in the public press with a lack of restraint which has now and then been deplored. The local police department acted at the time with commendable energy and correctness, but found no fingerprints on the knoll. The knoll was removed June 26, 1978, at the insistence of nearby residents, after a photograph of it had appeared in a metropolitan daily (not the *New York Times*) with a large-bosomed lovely in a G-string superimposed, and a caption: *Is this what Follansbee found up there?!!??!*

Mrs. Follansbee has repeatedly told representatives of press, radio and television that she does not intend to have her husband declared legally dead when the legally required time has elapsed. She has stated also, in an interview published exclusively by *Film Dreams* and six other magazines of national circulation, that she has forgiven him. In the same interview she also expressed the opinion that no one could understand who had not been through it.

Darius is thought to have remained in the home of Mrs. Follansbee, and was seen on several occasions, though not recently. It has proved impossible to determine the precise date of his last public appearance, but it is known to have taken place at some time during the spring of 1980.

The maid (Miss) Cassandra Higginson was dismissed (with a good character) on the morning of October 31, 1979 and entered a nunnery immediately after a very brief newspaper interview which occurred en route. In this interview, her discussion of the period between the return of the cat Darius (November 1, 1976) and her own departure from the Follansbee domicile, is condensed to the point of what may be described as uncommunicative brevity. She, in fact, confined herself to the assertion that some people could just as well mind their own dratted business.

Only one additional item has come to light with regard to the Follansbee household—apart, that is, from the commonly known fact that Mrs. Follansbee, although ceasing to entertain at home, has continued her activity in several clubs and progressive movements, and is universally conceded to have shown a very brave and sensible attitude. This additional item is based on admittedly unreliable testimony and is included here only for the sake of completeness.

A certain Simeon Stagg, a dealer in hardware, called at the Follansbee home at or about 10:45 P.M. (2245 hours), June 27, 1978, under the unaccountable impression that the house was occupied by some individual (impossible to locate) named Herman Podsnap who owed him (Stagg) twelve bucks for a hunk of soil-

pipe. On inquiry Stagg freely admitted that he might have had one or two alcoholic beverages. Sworn, Stagg deposed that he looked through the living room window when he was on the point of pushing the buzzer, and saw a lady (presumed to have been Mrs. Follansbee) "knitting sitting on the divan."

Q: What?

A: Knitting there sitting.

Q: She sat on the divan, and while thus seated was knitting?

A: Ain't that what I said for Christ's sake?

He deposed further that he saw the face of another person reading a newspaper in an armchair, and he says that the face of this person was black and white, about the size of a grapefruit, with a sort of you-know pushed-around look.

Wogglebeast

Molly trotted the two blocks from the supermarket with a roasting chicken for Sunday. Her round blue eyes were tranced with planning. Paper skirts on the drumsticks, toothpick legs for the olives; the raw carrots Danny liked could be cut in funny shapes. Then cold cuts for Sunday supper, and the bones could be boiled up for soup on Sunday evening while they looked at the T.V. or had a game of checkers.

Molly McManus enjoyed the rest of the Friday. She polished the living room floor of the little house and put up two pairs of fresh curtains. Thanks to her planning ahead, she had time for a nice visit with Mrs. Perlman next door who was going to have still another baby. She remembered to quit humming when Danny got home because it sometimes got on his nerves—a

foreman in an explosive plant cannot have nerves. But she continued humming inside. At dinner she had a pickle-animal. That's easy—you take a pickled onion for the head, slices of gherkin for the body, and the usual legs made out of toothpicks. Danny chuckled and admired it. Molly went to bed happy, folded up in gratitude against his weary bulk, and slept a while in peace.

He was tired, but over the weekend he could rest. Molly worried about his weight. He had no bay window, but there was a hint of it. Bags were showing under his mild gray eyes, and the eyes would redden if he forgot to put on his reading glasses. His step had grown heavy so gradually, one almost forgot how light on his feet he used to be. It seemed to Molly they ought to give him an office job. She woke for an hour or so in the night, thinking about that, watching the rosy reflection of a traffic light glow, die and glow again on the bedroom ceiling. He'd earned an office job. He ought to go straight up there and *tell* them.

And she was oppressed also that night by a special familiar loneliness in her arms. She counted to eight a dozen times or so, synchronizing it with Danny's peaceful snoring, and murmured a prayer which had become little more than a wistful habit. She was forty-one; to have a child at this date would *need* a miracle.

Sunday was good, as planned. Rest had cleared away most of Danny's fatigue—in fact on Saturday he'd taken out his stamp collection and got her to admiring it, which happened only on his best days. Then at Sunday dinnertime, glorious juices rushed out of the chicken at the poke of Danny's carving knife, and the

whole apartment wallowed in the golden-brown smell. Stuffed and sleepy-faced, Danny let out a hole in his belt, and Molly pretended not to notice—she was not slim herself. The afternoon darkened with February snow that would make driving unpleasant, so instead of taking off for the movies they worked on a crossword puzzle until Danny fell asleep trying to think of a Norse god. By evening they were ready for cold cuts. Molly McManus sat up after Danny got tired of watching T.V. and went to bed, to boil out the chicken bones and mend one of his shirts. In spite of the way everything encouraged you to do it, Molly hated wasting things. It seemed a little wicked as well as silly. . . .

It crouched on the kitchen table where it had fallen, or jumped, from the strainer full of other bones. Its thin arms reached toward Molly McManus as if in a bow or a supplication, and it looked like a Wogglebeast. "Why, the poor thing!" said Molly, and as she held out her finger toward its narrow friendly head it seemed to her that the Wogglebeast sat back on its sort-of legs and shook itself slightly—anyway there was a spatter of soup drops on the table top that didn't necessarily come from the strainer.

She hated to disturb it. She dumped the other bones in the garbage and put away the soup, but let the kitchen table alone. She was always up before Danny to get his breakfast, and it wasn't as if they had cockroaches or ants. She slipped into bed thinking some about the Wogglebeast but more about Danny.

In her drowsiness she had left a few other things untidied; her sewing basket, for instance, sitting with its lid off beside the genuine antique rocker in the kitchen.

It had come from the old country with her grandmother, a basket of sweet-scented woven grass, the dry gold of it soft with age. When she got up early Monday morning she found the Wogglebeast nestled in this basket, and started to take it out, but although it didn't draw back, it seemed to her that it shook—not its head exactly.

She placed the basket in the back of the silver drawer, leaving the drawer open a crack for air, until Danny had gone to work. Not that he would be unfriendly or unkind at all, but on work-day mornings he could not be quite with her; he never ignored her, but he had to be somehow arranging his thoughts and feelings for the trials and responsibilities of the day. She could see it happening, and help only by letting him alone. And also he was allergic to a number of things, cats and dogs for instance. And if she mentioned the Wogglebeast he might feel he had to do something about it. So—so anyway evening would be time enough.

During the day she made room at the back of the bottom bureau drawer for the Wogglebeast's basket. It was convenient; she could trot up to the bedroom from time to time to see if the little fellow needed anything. She offered it bread crumbs, cornmeal, a few other things, but evidently it didn't need to eat, which was perhaps only natural. The bureau drawer remained open until she heard Danny drive into the garage, and as she was closing it she resolved to tell him. It really wasn't right or fair not to.

But there had been a near-disaster at the plant. One of Danny's own crew had been careless, inexcusably

careless—the man had to be fired. The whole episode was still oppressing Danny McManus like the brushing of black wings, and it was no time to be telling him about anything unusual.

Tuesday night some of the same trouble hung about him. He was grumbling that it was his own fault for not having trained the offender better.

Wednesday he was just tired out, falling asleep in his armchair, face collapsed above the drooped newspaper, defenseless and—well, not young.

By Thursday night Molly was beginning to feel a certain weight of guilt. If she spoke of the Wogglebeast Danny would rightly wonder why she hadn't done so sooner. Besides, it was acting very cooperative, the decent thing, always snug and quiet in the basket a bit before Danny was due home, although that Thursday it had been following her all over the house.

She thought Friday that it would have liked to go with her to the supermarket. But clearly the Wogglebeast itself knew that this couldn't be. It wasn't begging at all, just wistful, and when she got home it was waiting cheerfully in the kitchen and wagging—not its tail, exactly . . .

That afternoon she felt too lazy for the usual housework, and nearly drowsed off in the antique rocker, thinking a good deal about her grandmother, and how the old soul used to go on and on sometimes about the old country, talking high but soft like a small wind in the chimney, the way her dry laughter now and then would be the sparks of a comfortable burning log. Until—oh, maybe drowsing for sure—Molly heard her own self saying a few foolish things to the Wogglebeast

that was resting in her arms: "It's not as if I ever thought you was a wishing thing exactly, only thinking to myself I am and talking like it might be to myself, but it's best we won't tell Danny at all, you wouldn't know the things he'd do. Too bad we haven't a child, too bad he won't be squaring off and *telling* them to give him office work the way he's earned it and could have it at the drop of a word—but it's only you can't help your mind running on it sometimes, and all . . ."

That night Danny desired her, like a young man but not heedless, and in the good quiet afterward Molly got up her courage to say a few little things about asking for office work, and though he wouldn't say yes or no he was peaceful and thoughtful about it, not annoyed at all. Once or twice, in the heavy darkness after Danny had fallen asleep, she heard in the bureau drawer a tiny sigh not quite a grunt, very much like the noise a cat will make after turning around three times and settling down in a basket.

It wasn't until Easter Week that Danny found the Wogglebeast. He was already out of sorts, late for work, hunting a missing sock and getting mad instead of putting on another pair, and flinging himself in bull-necked impatience at all the bureau drawers, one foot in an untied shoe and the other bare entirely with all his toes angry. The Wogglebeast had been trying to hide under a brassiere. "Oh, that," Molly said—"oh, that, the little thing looked so much like a something, and wouldn't I be the one to go on playing with dolls at my age, see, the little legs he has and all?" The Wogglebeast never moved while Danny held it up; she was certain of that.

He put it back in the drawer. Not a word. He took another pair of socks. No word, no smile. He could be like that, and often it meant nothing except that he was puzzled. After he had gone Molly just made it to the bathroom, dizzy and sick.

Good and sick, but why? Surely his finding the Wogglebeast hadn't upset her that much. Something wrong with breakfast?—of course not. Unbelieving, merely touching the idea like a dab of cloud that was certain to float away, Molly counted days. How foolish can you get? And yet several times that day she studied her familiar round not-so-pretty face in the mirror, and something in her insisted that it *was* rather pretty. Softer anyhow, and brighter. A different look.

Two days later she walked to the doctor's office, almost furtively, as if she hadn't as good a right as anybody to a rabbit test and all that.

The test said yes.

The doctor said other things beside yes, having known her fifteen years. It puzzled her that behind his professional cheerfulness he was obviously not pleased. When she called it a miracle the best he could offer was a one-sided smile and another string of cautions and good advice. It didn't matter. The choirs sang; her thoughts ran up and down a swaying bridge of rainbows all day long.

It was after the doctor's telephone call saying the test was positive and delivering the first batch of those cautions, that she found the Wogglebeast had emptied her sewing basket, and collected treasures of its own there: an empty spool, a bit of tinfoil, an eraser worked loose from the end of a pencil—nothing of course that

anybody else was going to want or that Danny would miss. Molly didn't mind at all, especially when she noticed how it was watching her with the jokesharing gleam in—well, not its eyes exactly . . .

Danny was not told of the miracle until they were in bed, their faces in darkness. By then Molly was enough used to the idea so that she could quiet his anxiety a little and help him into a precarious but genuine happiness. It occurred to her as she was drifting into sleep, himself holding her as if she were spun glass, that it was going to be simpler now to arrange about Danny's relations with the Wogglebeast. You have to humor a pregnant woman and allow her all sorts of quirks.

She told Dorothy Perlman the next day—on the phone, and casually she thought, but Mrs. Perlman came over immediately under full sail, pouring forth advice, suggestions, consolation, sustaining anecdotes, offering a massive shoulder to cry on and restless until it was used. Her first had scared Nathan all to pieces, she said, and even scared her a little, but when the time came it simply popped. Like *that.*

Molly McManus liked people. She was on the silly edge of telling Dorothy about the Wogglebeast, but some hint of a gray disturbance over there in the bureau drawer behind Dorothy's back, like the lifting of a worried—oh, not head exactly—made Molly feel that it might not be just the best idea.

It's not that there's anything *wrong* with a Wogglebeast. Just all that pesky explaining you'd have to do.

It happened that Danny was so obsessed with the miracle he had no mind for anything else. Molly fell

into the habit of leaving the bottom drawer more widely open. The Wogglebeast clearly enjoyed that, but took no unreasonable advantages of it. It did sometimes slip out of its basket when Danny was home, but carefully, and only if he happened to be in another room—well, once, on Sunday afternoon when Molly supposed Danny was taking a nap, she did hear the abrupt thump of his feet on the bedroom floor, and the beginning of an exclamation: "B' Je—" but nothing else happened. Maybe she imagined it.

One evening in August, shortly before their two weeks' vacation in Atlantic City, Danny talked with her more searchingly than he usually did. He wanted a reassurance that she was happy—not in the future with the baby and all, but in the here and now. "Why, Danny, I am, you know I am. I bet you went to bother the doctor again today."

"Oh, for the sake of argument I did. Everything is fine, he says, and what else would he say if you went to him running a mortal fever with two busted legs?"

Molly herself knew that nothing could possibly go wrong—miracles don't. But it takes more than aspirin to get a husband through these things; from the bureau drawer came now and then a tiny sigh.

That night she woke in the small hours and noticed the Wogglebeast hesitant and forlorn on the bedroom rug. Danny was sound asleep. She held away a corner of the bedcovers so it could climb up if it wanted to, and as she went back to sleep she felt against her shoulder the dry wiggle of—not its legs, exactly.

And the next day Danny came home announcing that, as he put it himself, he was letting them kick him

upstairs from foreman to supervisor. Not office work exactly, he explained to Molly's excited questions, but something like it. "And so glory be to God you won't be messing around so much with the nasty stuff all day long?"

"It'll be like that," he said rather carefully. "I told them, I said, I've been foreman a long time, and now I must be thinking about the heir of The McManus and so forth."

The Wogglebeast was well-behaved at Atlantic City. Molly had been uneasy about its smothery journey in a suitcase, but it took no harm. She had a little trouble in her mind about the hotel chambermaid, but solved it by admiring a very large handbag in a shop window, which Danny immediately bought for her; it had a compartment where the Wogglebeast was perfectly happy, and even made a sort of game out of covering itself with facial tissues and what not.

They stayed apart from the crowds, and watched the sea and the long changes of the sky. On other vacations they had often gone about with friends, in a round of parties and picnics and nonsense. She had no wish for that this time, and Danny found it natural.

One day on the beach she said, hardly heeding the way her talk was going: "I wish you'd known my grandmother, Danny. She died when I was twelve, you know, and it was like the milkweed down drying up to a little whiteness and blowing away. O the stories she used to tell, and me with my mouth open and a wind going through my wits if I had any! She told once how they came and carried her away, the Little People she meant, and you had to believe her, the way she had of

telling it, how she fell asleep in a meadow on Midsummer's Night, and she eleven years old, and they came for her, and didn't they set her to ride on a milk-white pony and it went straight underground with her into their dwelling? The hollow at the foot of an oak it was, and there they fed her cakes and honey and made things out of sticks and leaves that would walk and speak and play the violin. And then I'd ask her, 'Grandmother, didn't you bring some of them home, the stick things that walked and made music?' She'd always say, 'I did and all, Molly, but you'll remember this was seventy-eighty-ninety years ago, they'd be dust now, and anyhow they couldn't come away with me from the old country . . .' "

Snow was falling again when Molly's pains began, rather too soon. In between them, when Danny was telephoning to the hospital, Molly petted the Wogglebeast and tried to explain how it must be quiet a few days in its basket and not worry about anything, anything at all. It was always difficult to decide just how much it understood; but it did seem to be smiling, not with its mouth exactly . . .

When Molly came out of the anesthetic, one of the nurses was saying like a litany: "You're doing just fine, Mrs. McManus, just fine." Well, sure, she knew she was. Daniel was the beginning of a world. She looked with tolerant affection on the busy doctor and nurses, a little sorry for them because they had nothing as wonderful as she did.

So far as the doctor and nurses were aware, the baby was ten yards away in another room, where another doctor had given up trying to make it live. So far

as they could see, there was no reason why Mrs. McManus should hold her left arm curved like that. No reason why, torn and fading as she was, she should look so extravagantly happy. When the internal hemorrhage passed the point of no return they were still trying.

Danny happened on the sewing basket a while after he came home, and sagged on the bed poking vaguely at it, wondering with some part of his numb mind what had happened to the old dry chicken bone she had fancied so much. It didn't matter. There was nothing in the basket now but some kind of gray powder, and bits of miscellaneous trash—a spool, a scrap of tinfoil, never mind all that. There had always been something about Molly to make you think of a little girl playing with dolls.

The strangest part of it was that you went on living. He sat drooping, considering this, the sewing-basket forgotten in his hands, watching the snow gently fall.

Angel's Egg

LETTER OF RECORD, BLAINE TO MC CARRAN, DATED AUGUST 10, 1951

Mr. Cleveland McCarran
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

In compliance with your request I enclose herewith a transcript of the pertinent sections of the journal of Dr. David Bannerman, deceased. The original document is being held at this office until proper disposition can be determined.

Our investigation has shown no connection between Dr. Bannerman and any organization, subversive or otherwise. So far as we can learn, he was exactly what he seemed, an inoffensive summer resident, re-

tired, with a small independent income—a recluse to some extent, but well spoken of by local tradesmen and other neighbors. A connection between Dr. Bannerman and the type of activity that concerns your department would seem most unlikely.

The following information is summarized from the earlier parts of Dr. Bannerman's journal, and tallies with the results of our own limited inquiry. He was born in 1898 at Springfield, Massachusetts, attended public school there, and was graduated from Harvard College in 1922, his studies having been interrupted by two years' military service. He was wounded in action in the Argonne, receiving a spinal injury. He earned a doctorate in biology in 1926. Delayed aftereffects of his war injury necessitated hospitalization, 1927–28. From 1929 to 1948 he taught elementary sciences in a private school in Boston He published two textbooks in introductory biology, 1929 and 1937. In 1948 he retired from teaching: a pension and a modest income from textbook royalties evidently made this possible. Aside from the spinal deformity, which caused him to walk with a stoop, his health is said to have been fair. Autopsy findings suggested that the spinal condition must have given him considerable pain; he is not known to have mentioned this to anyone, not even to his physician, Dr. Lester Morse. There is no evidence whatever of drug addiction or alcoholism.

At one point early in his journal Dr. Bannerman describes himself as "a naturalist of the puttering type —I would rather sit on a log than write monographs: it pays off better." Dr. Morse, and others who knew Dr.

Bannerman personally, tell me that this conveys a hint of his personality.

I am not qualified to comment on the material of this journal, except to say I have no evidence to support (or to contradict) Dr. Bannerman's statements. The journal has been studied only by my immediate superiors, by Dr. Morse, and by myself. I take it for granted you will hold the matter in strictest confidence.

With the journal I am also enclosing a statement by Dr. Morse, written at my request for our records and for your information. You will note that he says, with some qualifications, that "death was not inconsistent with an embolism." He has signed a death certificate on that basis. You will recall from my letter of August 5 that it was Dr. Morse who discovered Dr. Bannerman's body. Because he was a close personal friend of the deceased, Dr. Morse did not feel able to perform the autopsy himself. It was done by a Dr. Stephen Clyde of this city, and was virtually negative as regards cause of death, neither confirming nor contradicting Dr. Morse's original tentative diagnosis. If you wish to read the autopsy report in full I shall be glad to forward a copy.

Dr. Morse tells me that so far as he knows, Dr. Bannerman had no near relatives. He never married. For the last twelve summers he occupied a small cottage on a back road about twenty-five miles from this city, and had few visitors. The neighbor, Steele, mentioned in the journal is a farmer, age 68, of good character, who tells me he "never got really acquainted with Dr. Bannerman."

At this office we feel that unless new information

comes to light, further active investigation is hardly justified.

Respectfully yours,
Garrison Blaine
Capt., State Police
Augusta, Me.

Enc: Extract from Journal of David Bannerman, dec'd.
Statement by Lester Morse, M.D.

LIBRARIAN'S NOTE: The following document, originally attached as an unofficial "rider" to the foregoing letter, was donated to this institution in 1994 through the courtesy of Mrs. Helen McCarran, widow of the martyred first President of the World Federation. Other personal and state papers of President McCarran, many of them dating from the early period when he was employed by the FBI, are accessible to public view at the Institute of World History, Copenhagen.

PERSONAL NOTE, BLAINE TO MC CARRAN, DATED AUGUST 10, 1951

Dear Cleve:
Guess I didn't make it clear in my other letter that that bastard Clyde was responsible for my having to drag you into this. He is something to handle with tongs. Happened thusly: when he came in to heave the autopsy report at me, he was already having pups just because it was so completely negative (he does have certain types of honesty) and he caught sight of a page or two of

the journal on my desk. Doc Morse was with me at the time. I fear we both got upstage with him (Clyde has that effect, and we were both in a state of mind anyway), so right away the old drip thinks he smells something subversive. Belongs to the atomize-'em-*now-wow-wow* school of thought—nuf sed? He went into a grand whuff-whuff about referring to higher authority, and I knew that meant your hive, so I wanted to get ahead of the letter I knew he'd write. I suppose his literary effort couldn't be just sort of quietly transferred to File 13, otherwise known as the appropriate receptacle?

He can say what he likes about my character, if any, but even I never supposed he'd take a sideswipe at his professional colleague. Doc Morse is the best of the best and would not dream of suppressing any evidence important to us, as you say Clyde's letter hints. What Doc did do was to tell Clyde, pleasantly, in the privacy of my office, to go take a flying this-and-that at the moon. I only wish I'd thought of the expression myself. So Clyde rushes off to tell teacher. See what I mean about the tongs? However (knock on wood) I don't think Clyde saw enough of the journal to get any notion of what it's all about.

As for that journal, damn it, Cleve, I don't know. If you have any ideas I want them, of course. I'm afraid I believe in angels, myself. But when I think of the effect on local opinion if the story ever gets out—brother! Here was this old Bannerman living alone with a female angel and they wuzn't even common-law married. Aw, gee. . . . And the flood of phone calls from other crackpots anxious to explain it all to me. Experts in the care and feeding of angels. Methods of angel-

proofing. Angels right outside the window a minute ago. Make Angels a Profitable Enterprise in Your Spare Time!!!

When do I see you? You said you might have a week clear in October. If we could get together maybe we could make sense where there is none. I hear the cider promises to be good this year. Try and make it. My best to Ginny and the other young fry, and Helen of course.

Respeckfully yourn,
Garry

P.S. If you do see any angels down your way, and they aren't willing to wait for a Republican Administration, by all means have them investigated by the Senate—then we'll *know* we're all nuts.

G.

EXTRACT FROM JOURNAL OF DAVID BANNERMAN, JUNE 1–JULY 29, 1951

June 1

It must have been at least three weeks ago when we had that flying saucer flurry. Observers the other side of Katahdin saw it come down this side; observers this side saw it come down the other. Size anywhere from six inches to sixty feet in diameter (or was it cigar-shaped?) and speed whatever you please. Seem to recall the witnesses agreed on a rosy-pink light. There was the inevitable gobbledegookery of official explanation designed to leave everyone impressed, soothed, and disappointed. I paid scant attention to the excitement and

less to the explanations—naturally, I thought it was just a flying saucer. But now Camilla has hatched out an angel.

It would have to be Camilla. Perhaps I haven't mentioned my hens enough. In the last day or two it has dawned on me that this journal may be of importance to other eyes than mine, not merely a lonely man's plaything to blunt the edge of mortality: an angel in the house makes a difference. I had better show consideration for possible readers.

I have eight hens, all yearlings except Camilla: this is her third spring. I boarded her two winters at my neighbor Steele's farm when I closed this shack and shuffled my chilly bones off to Florida, because even as a pullet she had a manner which overbore me. I could never have eaten Camilla: if she had looked at the ax with that same expression of rancid disapproval (and she would), I should have felt I was beheading a favorite aunt. Her only concession to sentiment is the annual rush of maternity to the brain—normal, for a case-hardened White Plymouth Rock.

This year she stole a nest successfully in a tangle of blackberry. By the time I located it, I estimated I was about two weeks too late. I had to outwit her by watching from a window—she is far too acute to be openly trailed from feeding ground to nest. When I had bled and pruned my way to her hideout she was sitting on nine eggs and hating my guts. They could not be fertile, since I keep no rooster, and I was about to rob her when I saw the ninth egg was nothing of hers. It was a deep blue and transparent, with flecks of inner light that made me think of the first stars in a clear evening.

It was the same size as Camilla's own. There was an embryo, but I could make nothing of it. I returned the egg to Camilla's bare and fevered breastbone and went back to the house for a long, cool drink.

That was ten days ago. I know I ought to have kept a record; I examined the blue egg every day, watching how some nameless life grew within it. The angel has been out of the shell three days now. This is the first time I have felt equal to facing pen and ink.

I have been experiencing a sort of mental lassitude unfamiliar to me. Wrong word: not so much lassitude as a preoccupation, with no sure clue to what it is that preoccupies me. By reputation I am a scientist of sorts. Right now I have no impulse to look for data; I want to sit quiet and let truth come to a relaxed mind if it will. Could be merely a part of growing older, but I doubt that. The broken pieces of the wonderful blue shell are on my desk. I have been peering at them—into them—for the last ten minutes or more. Can't call it study: my thought wanders into their blue, learning nothing I can retain in words. It does not convey much to say I have gone into a vision of open sky—and of peace, if such a thing there be.

The angel chipped the shell deftly in two parts. This was evidently done with the aid of small horny outgrowths on her elbows; these growths were sloughed off on the second day. I wish I had seen her break the shell, but when I visited the blackberry tangle three days ago she was already out. She poked her exquisite head through Camilla's neck feathers, smiled sleepily, and snuggled back into darkness to finish drying off. So what could I do, more than save the broken shell and

wriggle my clumsy self out of there? I had removed Camilla's own eggs the day before—Camilla was only moderately annoyed. I was nervous about disposing of them, even though they were obviously Camilla's, but no harm was done. I cracked each one to be sure. Very frankly rotten eggs and nothing more.

In the evening of that day I thought of rats and weasels, as I should have done earlier. I prepared a box in the kitchen and brought the two in, the angel quiet in my closed hand. They are there now. I think they are comfortable.

Three days after hatching, the angel is the length of my forefinger, say three inches tall, with about the relative proportions of a six-year-old girl. Except for head, hands, and probably the soles of her feet, she is clothed in down the color of ivory; what can be seen of her skin is a glowing pink—I do mean glowing, like the inside of certain sea shells. Just above the small of her back are two stubs which I take to be infantile wings. They do not suggest an extra pair of specialized forelimbs. I think they are wholly differentiated organs; perhaps they will be like the wings of an insect. Somehow, I never thought of angels buzzing. Maybe she won't. I know very little about angels. At present the stubs are covered with some dull tissue, no doubt a protective sheath to be discarded when the membranes (if they are membranes) are ready to grow. Between the stubs is a not very prominent ridge—special musculature, I suppose. Otherwise her shape is quite human, even to a pair of minuscule mammalian buttons just visible under the down; how that can make sense in an egg-laying organism is beyond my compre-

hension. (Just for the record, so is a Corot landscape; so is Schubert's *Unfinished*; so is the flight of a hummingbird, or the other-world of frost on a window pane.) The down on her head has grown visibly in three days and is of different quality from the body down—later it may resemble human hair, as a diamond resembles a chunk of granite. . . .

A curious thing has happened. I went to Camilla's box after writing that. Judy* was already lying in front of it, unexcited. The angel's head was out from under the feathers, and I thought—with more verbal distinctness than such thoughts commonly take, "So here I am, a naturalist of middle years and cold sober, observing a three-inch oviparous mammal with down and wings." The thing is—she giggled. Now, it might have been only amusement at my appearance, which to her must be enormously gross and comic. But another thought formed unspoken: "I am no longer lonely." And her face (hardly bigger than a dime) immediately changed from laughter to a brooding and friendly thoughtfulness.

Judy and Camilla are old friends. Judy seems untroubled by the angel. I have no worries about leaving them alone together. I must sleep.

June 3

I made no entry last night. The angel was talking to me, and when that was finished I drowsed off imme-

* Dr. Bannerman's dog, mentioned often earlier in the journal. A nine-year-old English setter. According to an entry of May 15, 1951, she was then beginning to go blind.

—Blaine.

diately on a cot that I have moved into the kitchen so as to be near them.

I had never been strongly impressed by the evidence for extrasensory perception. It is fortunate my mind was able to accept the novelty, since to the angel it is clearly a matter of course. Her tiny mouth is most expressive but moves only for that reason and for eating—not for speech. Probably she could speak to her own kind if she wished, but I dare say the sound would be outside the range of my hearing as well as of my understanding.

Last night after I brought the cot in and was about to finish my puttering bachelor supper, she climbed to the edge of the box and pointed, first at herself and then at the top of the kitchen table. Afraid to let my vast hand take hold of her, I held it out flat and she sat in my palm. Camilla was inclined to fuss, but the angel looked over her shoulder and Camilla subsided, watchful but no longer alarmed.

The table top is porcelain, and the angel shivered. I folded a towel and spread a silk handkerchief on top of that; the angel sat on this arrangement with apparent comfort, near my face. I was not even bewildered. Possibly she had already instructed me to blank out my mind. At any rate, I did so, without conscious effort to that end.

She reached me first with visual imagery. How can I make it plain that this had nothing in common with my sleeping dreams? There was no weight of symbolism from my littered past; no discoverable connection with any of yesterday's commonplace; indeed, no actual involvement of my personality at all. I saw. I was moving

vision, though without eyes or other flesh. And while my mind saw, it also knew where my flesh was, slumped at the kitchen table. If anyone had entered the kitchen, if there had been a noise of alarm out in the henhouse, I should have known it.

There was a valley such as I have not seen (and never will) on Earth. I have seen many beautiful places on this planet—some of them were even tranquil. Once I took a slow steamer to New Zealand and had the Pacific as a plaything for many days. I can hardly say how I knew this was not Earth. The grass of the valley was an earthly green; a river below me was a blue and silver thread under familiar-seeming sunlight; there were trees much like pine and maple, and maybe that is what they were. But it was not Earth. I was aware of mountains heaped to strange heights on either side of the valley—snow, rose, amber, gold. Perhaps the amber tint was unlike any mountain color I have noticed in this world at midday.

Or I may have known it was not Earth simply because her mind—dwelling within some unimaginable brain smaller than the tip of my little finger—told me so.

I watched two inhabitants of that world come flying, to rest in the field of sunny grass where my bodiless vision had brought me. Adult forms, such as my angel would surely be when she had her growth, except that both of these were male and one of them was dark-skinned. The latter was also old, with a thousand-wrinkled face, knowing and full of tranquility; the other was flushed and lively with youth; both were beautiful. The down of the brown-skinned old one was reddish-tawny;

the other's was ivory with hints of orange. Their wings were true membranes, with more variety of subtle iridescence than I have seen even in the wings of a dragonfly; I could not say that any color was dominant, for each motion brought a ripple of change. These two sat at their ease on the grass. I realized that they were talking to each other, though their lips did not move in speech more than once or twice. They would nod, smile, now and then illustrate something with twinkling hands.

A huge rabbit lolloped past them. I knew (thanks to my own angel's efforts, I supposed) that this animal was of the same size of our common wild ones. Later, a blue-green snake three times the size of the angels came flowing through the grass; the old one reached out to stroke its head carelessly, and I think he did it without interrupting whatever he was saying.

Another creature came, in leisured leaps. He was monstrous, yet I felt no alarm in the angels or in myself. Imagine a being built somewhat like a kangaroo up to the head, about eight feet tall, and katydid-green. Really, the thick balancing tail and enormous legs were the only kangaroolike features about him: the body above the massive thighs was not dwarfed but thick and square; the arms and hands were quite humanoid: the head was round, manlike except for its face—there was only a single nostril and his mouth was set in the vertical; the eyes were large and mild. I received an impression of high intelligence and natural gentleness. In one of his manlike hands two tools so familiar and ordinary that I knew my body by the kitchen table had laughed in startled recognition. But, after all, a garden

spade and rake are basic. Once invented—I expect we did it ourselves in the Neolithic Age—there is little reason why they should change much down the millennia.

This farmer halted by the angels, and the three conversed a while. The big head nodded agreeably. I believe the young angel made a joke; certainly the convulsions in the huge green face made me think of laughter. Then this amiable monster turned up the grass in a patch a few yards square, broke the sod and raked the surface smooth, just as any competent gardener might do—except that he moved with the relaxed smoothness of a being whose strength far exceeds the requirements of his task. . . .

I was back in my kitchen with everyday eyes. My angel was exploring the table. I had a loaf of bread there and a dish of strawberries and cream. She was trying a bread crumb; seemed to like it fairly well. I offered the strawberries; she broke off one of the seeds and nibbled it but didn't care so much for the pulp. I held up the great spoon with sugary cream; she steadied it with both hands to try some. I think she liked it. It had been most stupid of me not to realize that she would be hungry. I brought wine from the cupboard; she watched inquiringly, so I put a couple of drops on the handle of a spoon. This really pleased her: she chuckled and patted her tiny stomach, though I'm afraid it wasn't awfully good sherry. I brought some crumbs of cake, but she indicated that she was full, came close to my face, and motioned me to lower my head.

She reached up until she could press both hands

against my forehead—I felt it only enough to know her hands were there—and she stood so a long time, trying to tell me something.

It was difficult. Pictures come through with relative ease, but now she was transmitting an abstraction of a complex kind: my clumsy brain really suffered in the effort to receive. Something did come across. I have only the crudest way of passing it on. Imagine an equilateral triangle; place the following words one at each corner—"recruiting," "collecting," "saving." The meaning she wanted to convey ought to be near the center of the triangle.

I had also the sense that her message provided a partial explanation of her errand in this lovable and damnable world.

She looked weary when she stood away from me. I put out my palm and she climbed into it, to be carried back to the nest.

She did not talk to me tonight, nor eat, but she gave a reason, coming out from Camilla's feathers long enough to turn her back and show me the wing stubs. The protective sheaths have dropped off; the wings are rapidly growing. They are probably damp and weak. She was quite tired and went back into the warm darkness almost at once.

Camilla must be exhausted, too. I don't think she has been off the nest more than twice since I brought them into the house.

June 4

Today she can fly.

I learned it in the afternoon, when I was fiddling

about in the garden and Judy was loafing in the sunshine she loves. Something apart from sight and sound called me to hurry back to the house. I saw my angel through the screen door before I opened it. One of her feet had caught in a hideous loop of loose wire at a break in the mesh. Her first tug of alarm must have tightened the loop so that her hands were not strong enough to force it open.

Fortunately I was able to cut the wire with a pair of shears before I lost my head; then she could free her foot without injury. Camilla had been frantic, rushing around fluffed up, but—here's an odd thing—perfectly silent. None of the recognized chicken noises of dismay: if an ordinary chick had been in trouble she would have raised the roof.

The angel flew to me and hovered, pressing her hands on my forehead. The message was clear at once: "No harm done." She flew down to tell Camilla the same thing.

Yes, in the same way. I saw Camilla standing near my feet with her neck out and head low, and the angel put a hand on either side of her scraggy comb. Camilla relaxed, clucked in the normal way, and spread her wings for a shelter. The angel went under it, but only to oblige Camilla, I think—at least, she stuck her head through the wing feathers and winked.

She must have seen something else, then, for she came out and flew back to me and touched a finger to my cheek, looked at the finger, saw it was wet, put it in her mouth, made a face, and laughed at me.

We went outdoors into the sun (Camilla too), and the angel gave me an exhibition of what flying ought to

be. Not even Schubert can speak of joy as her first free flying did. At one moment she would be hanging in front of my eyes, radiant and delighted; the next instant she would be a dot of color against a cloud. Try to imagine something that would make a hummingbird seem a bit dull and sluggish.

They do hum. Softer than a hummingbird, louder than a dragonfly.

Something like the sound of hawk-moths—*Hemaris thisbe*, for instance: the one I used to call hummingbird moth when I was a child.

I was frightened, naturally. Frightened first at what might happen to her, but that was unnecessary; I don't think she would be in danger from any savage animal except possibly man. I saw a Cooper's hawk slant down the invisible toward the swirl of color where she was dancing by herself; presently she was drawing iridescent rings around him; then, while he soared in smaller circles, I could not see her, but (maybe she felt my fright) she was again in front of me, pressing my forehead in the now familiar way. I knew she was amused and caught the idea that the hawk was a "lazy character." Not quite the way I'd describe *Accipiter cooperi*, but it's all in the point of view. I believe she had been riding his back, no doubt with her speaking hands on his terrible head.

And later I was frightened by the thought that she might not want to return to me. Can I compete with sunlight and open sky? The passage of that terror through me brought her back swiftly, and her hands said with great clarity: "Don't ever be afraid of anything—it isn't necessary for you "

Once this afternoon I was saddened by the realization that old Judy can take little part in what goes on now. I can well remember Judy running like the wind. The angel must have heard this thought in me, for she stood a long time beside Judy's drowsy head, while Judy's tail thumped cheerfully on the warm grass. . . .

In the evening the angel made a heavy meal on two or three cake crumbs and another drop of sherry, and we had what was almost a sustained conversation. I will write it in that form this time, rather than grope for anything more exact. I asked her, "How far away is your home?"

"My home is here."

"Thank God!—but I meant, the place your people came from."

"Ten light-years."

"The images you showed me—that quiet valley—that is ten light-years away?"

"Yes. But that was my father talking to you, through me. He was grown when the journey began. He is two hundred and forty years old—our years, thirty-two days longer than yours."

Mainly I was conscious of a flood of relief: I had feared, on the basis of terrestrial biology, that her explosively rapid growth after hatching must foretell a brief life. But it's all right—she can outlive me, and by a few hundred years, at that. "Your father is here now, on this planet—shall I see him?"

She took her hands away—listening, I believe. The answer was: "No. He is sorry. He is ill and cannot live long. I am to see him in a few days, when I fly a little better. He taught me for twenty years after I was born."

"I don't understand. I thought—"

"Later, friend. My father is grateful for your kindness to me."

I don't know what I thought about that. I felt no faintest trace of condescension in the message. "And he was showing me things he had seen with his own eyes, ten light-years away?"

"Yes." Then she wanted me to rest a while; I am sure she knows what a huge effort it is for my primitive brain to function in this way. But before she ended the conversation by humming down to her nest she gave me this, and I received it with such clarity that I cannot be mistaken: "He says that only fifty million years ago it was a jungle there, just as Terra is now."

June 8

When I woke four days ago the angel was having breakfast, and little Camilla was dead. The angel watched me rub sleep out of my eyes, watched me discover Camilla, and then flew to me. I received this: "Does it make you unhappy?"

"I don't know exactly." You can get fond of a hen, especially a cantankerous and homely old one whose personality has a lot in common with your own.

"She was old. She wanted a flock of chicks, and I couldn't stay with her. So I—" Something obscure here: probably my mind was trying too hard to grasp it—". . . so I saved her life." I could make nothing else out of it. She said "saved."

Camilla's death looked natural, except that I should have expected the death contractions to muss the straw, and that hadn't happened. Maybe the angel

had arranged the old lady's body for decorum, though I don't see how her muscular strength would have been equal to it—Camilla weighed at least seven pounds.

As I was burying her at the edge of the garden and the angel was humming over my head, I recalled a thing which, when it happened, I had dismissed as a dream. Merely a moonlight image of the angel standing in the nest box with her hands on Camilla's head, then pressing her mouth gently on Camilla's throat, just before the hen's head sank down out of my line of vision. Probably I actually woke and saw it happen. I am somehow unconcerned—even, as I think more about it, pleased. . . .

After the burial the angel's hands said, "Sit on the grass and we'll talk. . . . Question me. I'll tell you what I can. My father asks you to write it down."

So that is what we have been doing for the last four days. I have been going to school, a slow but willing pupil. Rather than enter anything in this journal (for in the evenings I was exhausted), I made notes as best I could. The angel has gone now to see her father and will not return until morning. I shall try to make a readable version of my notes.

Since she had invited questions, I began with something which had been bothering me, as a would-be naturalist, exceedingly. I couldn't see how creatures no larger than the adults I had observed could lay eggs as large as Camilla's. Nor could I understand why, if they were hatched in an almost adult condition and able to eat a varied diet, she had any use for that ridiculous, lovely, and apparently functional pair of breasts. When the angel grasped my difficulty she exploded with

laughter—her kind, which buzzed her all over the garden and caused her to fluff my hair on the wing and pinch my ear lobe. She lit on a rhubarb leaf and gave a delectably naughty representation of herself as a hen laying an egg, including the cackle. She got me to bumbling helplessly—my kind of laughter—and it was some time before we could quiet down. Then she did her best to explain.

They are true mammals, and the young—not more than two or at most three in a lifetime averaging two hundred and fifty years—are delivered in very much the human way. The baby is nursed—human fashion—until his brain begins to respond a little to their unspoken language; that takes three to four weeks. Then he is placed in an altogether different medium. She could not describe that clearly, because there was very little in my educational storehouse to help me grasp it. It is some gaseous medium that arrests bodily growth for an almost indefinite period, while mental growth continues. It took them, she says, about seven thousand years to perfect this technique after they first hit on the idea: they are never in a hurry. The infant remains under this delicate and precise control for anywhere from fifteen to thirty years, the period depending not only on his mental vigor but also on the type of life-work he tentatively elects as soon as his brain is knowing enough to make a choice. During this period his mind is guided with unwavering patience by teachers who—

It seems those teachers know their business. This was peculiarly difficult for me to assimilate, although the fact came through clearly enough. In their world,

the profession of teacher is more highly honored than any other—can such a thing be possible?—and so difficult to enter that only the strongest minds dare attempt it. (I had to rest a while after absorbing that.) An aspirant must spend fifty years (not including the period of infantile education) in merely getting ready to begin, and the acquisition of factual knowledge, while not understressed, takes only a small proportion of those fifty years. Then—if he's good enough—he can take a small part in the elementary instruction of a few babies, and if he does well on that basis for another thirty or forty years, he is considered a fair beginner. . . . Once upon a time I lurched around stuffy classrooms trying to insert a few predigested facts (I wonder how many of them *were* facts?) into the minds of bored and preoccupied adolescents, some of whom may have liked me moderately well. I was even able to shake hands and be nice while their terribly well-meaning parents explained to me how they ought to be educated. So much of our human effort goes down the drain of futility, I sometimes wonder how we ever got as far as the Bronze Age. Somehow we did, though, and a short way beyond.

After that preliminary stage of an angel's education is finished, the baby is transferred to more ordinary surroundings, and his bodily growth completes itself in a very short time. Wings grow abruptly (as I have seen), and he reaches a maximum height of six inches (our measure). Only then does he enter on that lifetime of two hundred and fifty years, for not until then does his body begin to age. My angel has been a living

personality for many years but will not celebrate her first birthday for almost a year. I like to think of that.

At about the same time that they learned the principles of interplanetary travel (approximately twelve million years ago) these people also learned how, by use of a slightly different method, growth could be arrested at any point short of full maturity. At first the knowledge served no purpose except in the control of illnesses which still occasionally struck them at that time. But when the long periods of time required for space travel were considered, the advantages became obvious.

So it happens that my angel was born ten light-years away. She was trained by her father and many others in the wisdom of seventy million years (that, she tells me, is the approximate sum of their *recorded* history), and then she was safely sealed and cherished in what my superamoebic brain regarded as a blue egg. Education did not proceed at that time; her mind went to sleep with the rest of her. When Camilla's temperature made her wake and grow again, she remembered what to do with the little horny bumps provided for her elbows. And came out—into this planet, God help her.

I wondered why her father should have chosen any combination so unreliable as an old hen and a human being. Surely he must have had plenty of excellent ways to bring the shell to the right temperature. Her answer should have satisfied me immensely, but I am still compelled to wonder about it. "Camilla was a nice hen, and my father studied your mind while you were asleep. It

was a bad landing, and much was broken—no such landing was ever made before after so long a journey: forty years. Only four other grownups could come with my father. Three of them died en route and he is very ill. And there were nine other children to care for."

Yes, I knew she'd said that an angel thought I was good enough to be trusted with his daughter. If it upsets me, all I need do is look at her and then in the mirror. As for the explanation, I can only conclude there must be more that I am not ready to understand. I was worried about those nine others, but she assured me they were all well, and I sensed that I ought not to ask more about them at present. . . .

Their planet, she says, is closely similar to this. A trifle larger, moving in a somewhat longer orbit around a sun like ours. Two gleaming moons, smaller than ours—their orbits are such that two-moon nights come rarely. They are magic, and she will ask her father to show me one, if he can. Their year is thirty-two days longer than ours; because of a slower rotation, their day has twenty-six of our hours. Their atmosphere is mainly nitrogen and oxygen in the proportions familiar to us; slightly richer in some of the rare gases. The climate is now what we should call tropical and subtropical, but they have known glacial rigors like those in our world's past. There are only two great continental land masses, and many thousands of large islands.

Their total population is only five billion. . . .

Most of the forms of life we know have parallels there—some quite exact parallels: rabbits, deer, mice, cats. The cats have been bred to an even higher intelli-

gence than they possess on our Earth; it is possible, she says, to have a good deal of intellectual intercourse with their cats, who learned several million years ago that when they kill, it must be done with lightning precision and without torture. The cats had some difficulty grasping the possibility of pain in other organisms, but once that educational hurdle was passed, development was easy. Nowadays many of the cats are popular storytellers; about forty million years ago they were still occasionally needed as a special police force, and served the angels with real heroism.

It seems my angel wants to become a student of animal life here on Earth. I, a teacher!—but bless her heart for the notion, anyhow. We sat and traded animals for a couple of hours last night. I found it restful, after the mental struggle to grasp more difficult matters. Judy was something new to her. They have several luscious monsters on that planet but, in her view, so have we. She told me of a blue sea snake fifty feet long (relatively harmless) that bellows cowlike and comes into the tidal marshes to lay black eggs; so I gave her a whale. She offered a bat-winged, day-flying ball of mammalian fluff as big as my head and weighing under an ounce; I matched her with a marmoset. She tried me with a small-sized pink brontosaur (very rare), but I was ready with the duck-billed platypus, and that caused us to exchange some pretty smart remarks about mammalian eggs; she bounced. All trivial in a way; also, the happiest evening in my fifty-three tangled years of life.

She was a trifle hesitant to explain these kangaroo-like people, until she was sure I really wanted to know.

It seems they are about the nearest parallel to human life on that planet; not a near parallel, of course, as she was careful to explain. Agreeable and always friendly souls (though they weren't always so, I'm sure) and of a somewhat more alert intelligence than we possess. Manual workers, mainly, because they prefer it nowadays, but some of them are excellent mathematicians. The first practical spaceship was invented by a group of them, with some assistance. . . .

Names offer difficulties. Because of the nature of the angelic language, they have scant use for them except for the purpose of written record, and writing naturally plays little part in their daily lives—no occasion to write a letter when a thousand miles is no obstacle to the speech of your mind. An angel's formal name is about as important to him, as, say, my Social Security number is to me. She has not told me hers, because the phonetics on which their written language is based have no parallel in my mind. As we would speak a friend's name, an angel will project the friend's image to his friend's receiving mind. More pleasant and more intimate, I think—although it was a shock to me at first to glimpse my own ugly mug in my mind's eye. Stories are occasionally written, if there is something in them that should be preserved precisely as it was in the first telling; but in their world the true storyteller has a more important place than the printer—he offers one of the best of their quieter pleasures: a good one can hold his audience for a week and never tire them.

"What is this 'angel' in your mind when you think of me?"

"A being men have imagined for centuries, when

they thought of themselves as they might like to be and not as they are."

I did not try too painfully hard to learn much about the principles of space travel. The most my brain could take in of her explanation was something like: "Rocket—then phototropism." Now, that makes scant sense. So far as I know, phototrophism—movement toward light—is an organic phenomenon. One thinks of it as a response of protoplasm, in some plants and animal organisms (most of them simple), to the stimulus of light; certainly not as a force capable of moving inorganic matter. I think that whatever may be the principle she was describing, this word "phototropism" was merely the nearest thing to it in my reservoir of language. Not even the angels can create understanding out of blank ignorance. At least I have learned not to set neat limits to the possible.

(There was a time when I did, though. I can see myself, not so many years back, like a homunculus squatting at the foot of Mt. McKinley, throwing together two handfuls of mud and shouting, "Look at the big mountain *I* made!")

And if I did know the physical principles which brought them here, and could write them in terms accessible to technicians resembling myself, I would not do it.

Here is a thing I am afraid no reader of this journal will believe: These people, as I have written, learned their method of space travel some twelve million years ago. But this is the first time they have ever used it to convey them to another planet. The heavens are rich in worlds, she tells me; on many of them there

is life, often on very primitive levels. No external force prevented her people from going forth, colonizing, conquering, as far as they pleased. They could have populated a Galaxy. They did not, and for this reason: they believed they were not ready. More precisely: *Not good enough.*

Only some fifty million years ago, by her account, did they learn (as we may learn eventually) that intelligence without goodness is worse than high explosives in the hands of a baboon. For beings advanced beyond the level of *Pithecanthropus*, intelligence is a cheap commodity—not too hard to develop, hellishly easy to use for unconsidered ends. Whereas goodness is not to be achieved without unending effort of the hardest kind, within the self, whether the self be man or angel.

It is clear even to me that the conquest of evil is only one step, not the most important. For goodness, so she tried to tell me, is an altogether positive quality; the part of living nature that swarms with such monstrosities as cruelty, meanness, bitterness, greed, is not to be filled by a vacuum when these horrors are eliminated. When you clear away a poisonous gas, you try to fill the whole room with clean air. Kindness, for only one example: one who can define kindness only as the absence of cruelty has surely not begun to understand the nature of either.

They do not aim at perfection, these angels: only at the attainable. . . . That time fifty million years ago was evidently one of great suffering and confusion. War and all its attendant plagues. They passed through many centuries while advances in technology merely worsened their condition and increased the peril of self-

annihilation. They came through that, in time. War was at length so far outgrown that its recurrence was impossible, and the development of wholly rational beings could begin. Then they were ready to start growing up, through millennia of self-searching, self-discipline, seeking to derive the simple from the complex, discovering how to use knowledge and not be used by it. Even then, of course, they slipped back often enough. There were what she refers to as "eras of fatigue." In their dimmer past, they had had many dark ages, lost civilizations, hopeful beginnings ending in dust. Earlier still, they had come out of the slime, as we did.

But their period of deepest uncertainty and sternest self-appraisal did not come until twelve million years ago, when they knew a universe could be theirs for the taking and knew they were not yet good enough.

They are in no more hurry than the stars.

Of course, they explored. Their little spaceships were roaming the ether before there was anything like man on this earth—roaming and listening, observing, recording; never entering nor taking part in the life of any home but their own: for five million years they even forbade themselves to go beyond their own solar system, though it would have been easy to do so. And in the following seven million years, although they traveled to incredible distances, the same stern restraint was in force. It was altogether unrelated to what we should call fear—that, I think, is as extinct in them as hate. There was so much to do at home!—I wish I could imagine it. They mapped the heavens and played in their own sunlight.

Naturally, I cannot tell you what goodness is. I

know only, moderately well, what it seems to mean to us human beings. It appears that the best of us can, with enormous difficulty, achieve a manner of life in which goodness is reasonably dominant, by a not too precarious balance, for the greater part of the time. Often, wise men have indicated they hope for nothing better than that in our present condition. We are, in other words, a fraction alive; the rest is in the dark. Dante was a bitter masochist, Beethoven a frantic and miserable snob, Shakespeare wrote potboilers. And Christ said, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

But give us fifty million years—I am no pessimist. After all, I've watched one-celled organisms on the slide and listened to Brahms' Fourth. Night before last I said to the angel, "In spite of everything, you and I are kindred."

She granted me agreement.

June 9

She was lying on my pillow this morning so that I could see her when I waked.

Her father has died, and she was with him when it happened. There was again that thought-impression that I could interpret only to mean that his life had been "saved." I was still sleep-bound when my mind asked, "What will you do?"

"Stay with you, if you wish it, for the rest of your life." Now, the last part of the message was clouded, but I am familiar with that—it seems to mean there is some further element that eludes me. I could not be mistaken about the part I did receive. It gives me amaz-

ing speculations. After all, I am only fifty-three; I might live for another thirty or forty years. . . .

She was preoccupied this morning, but whatever she felt about her father's death that might be paralleled by sadness in a human being was hidden from me. She did say her father was sorry he had not been able to show me a two-moon night.

One adult, then, remains in this world. Except to say that he is two hundred years old and full of knowledge, and that he endured the long journey without serious ill effects, she has told me little about him. And there are ten children, including herself.

Something was sparkling at her throat. When she was aware of my interest in it she took it off, and I fetched a magnifying glass. A necklace; under the glass, much like our finest human workmanship, if your imagination can reduce it to the proper scale. The stones appeared similar to the jewels we know: diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, the diamonds snapping out every color under heaven; but there were two or three very dark-purple stones unlike anything I know —not amethysts, I am sure. The necklace was strung on something more slender than cobweb, and the design of the joining clasp was too delicate for my glass to help me. The necklace had been her mother's, she told me; as she put it back around her throat I thought I saw the same shy pride that any human girl might feel in displaying a new pretty.

She wanted to show me other things she had brought, and flew to the table where she had left a sort of satchel an inch and a half long—quite a load for her to fly with, but the translucent substance is so light that

when she rested the satchel on my finger I scarcely felt it. She arranged a few articles happily for my inspection, and I put the glass to work again. One was a jeweled comb; she ran it through the down on her chest and legs to show me its use. There was a set of tools too small for the glass to interpret; I learned later they were a sewing kit. A book, and some writing instrument much like a metal pencil: imagine a book and pencil that could be used comfortably by hands hardly bigger than the paws of a mouse—that is the best I can do. The book, I understand, is a blank record for her use as needed.

And finally, when I was fully awake and dressed and we had finished breakfast, she reached in the bottom of the satchel for a parcel (heavy for her) and made me understand it was a gift for me. "My father made it for you, but I put in the stone myself, last night." She unwrapped it. A ring, precisely the size for my little finger.

I broke down, rather. She understood that, and sat on my shoulder petting my ear lobe till I had command of myself.

I have no idea what the jewel is. It shifts with the light from purple to jade-green to amber. The metal resembles platinum in appearance except for a tinge of rose at certain angles of light. . . . When I stare into the stone, I think I see—never mind that now. I am not ready to write it down, and perhaps never will be; anyway, I must be sure.

We improved our housekeeping later in the morning. I showed her over the house. It isn't much—Cape

Codder, two rooms up and two down. Every corner interested her, and when she found a shoe box in the bedroom closet, she asked for it. At her direction, I have arranged it on a chest near my bed and near the window, which will be always open; she says the mosquitos will not bother me, and I don't doubt her. I unearthed a white silk scarf for the bottom of the box; after asking my permission (as if I could want to refuse her anything!) she got her sewing kit and snipped off a piece of the scarf several inches square, folded it on itself several times, and sewed it into a narrow pillow an inch long. So now she had a proper bed and a room of her own. I wish I had something less coarse than silk, but she insists it's nice.

We have not talked very much today. In the afternoon she flew out for an hour's play in the cloud country; when she returned she let me know that she needed a long sleep. She is still sleeping, I think; I am writing this downstairs, fearing the light might disturb her.

Is it possible I can have thirty or forty years in her company? I wonder how teachable my mind still is. I seem to be able to assimilate new facts as well as I ever could; this ungainly carcass should be durable, with reasonable care. Of course, facts without a synthetic imagination are no better than scattered bricks; but perhaps my imagination—

I don't know.

Judy wants out. I shall turn in when she comes back. I wonder if poor Judy's life could be—the word is certainly "saved." I must ask.

June 10

Last night when I stopped writing I did go to bed but I was restless, refusing sleep. At some time in the small hours—there was light from a single moon—she flew over to me. The tension dissolved like an illness, and my mind was able to respond with a certain calm.

I made plain (what I am sure she already knew) that I would never willingly part company with her, and then she gave me to understand that there are two alternatives for the remainder of my life. The choice, she says, is altogether mine, and I must take time to be sure of my decision.

I can live out my natural span, whatever it proves to be, and she will not leave me for long at any time. She will be there to counsel, teach, help me in anything good I care to undertake. She says she would enjoy this; for some reason she is, as we'd say in our language, fond of me. We'd have fun.

Lord, the books I could write! I fumble for words now, in the usual human way: whatever I put on paper is a miserable fraction of the potential; the words themselves are rarely the right ones. But under her guidance—

I could take a fair part in shaking the world. With words alone, I could preach to my own people. Before long, I would be heard.

I could study and explore. What small nibblings we have made at the sum of available knowledge! Suppose I brought in one leaf from outdoors, or one common little bug—in a few hours of studying it with her I'd

know more of my own specialty than a flood of the best textbooks could tell me.

She has also let me know that when she and those who came with her have learned a little more about the human picture, it should be possible to improve my health greatly, and probably my life expectancy. I don't imagine my back could ever straighten, but she thinks the pain might be cleared away, possibly without drugs. I could have a clearer mind, in a body that would neither fail nor torment me.

Then there is the other alternative.

It seems they have developed a technique by means of which any unresisting living subject whose brain is capable of memory at all can experience a total recall. It is a by-product, I understand, of their silent speech, and a very recent one. They have practiced it for only a few thousand years, and since their own understanding of the phenomenon is very incomplete, they classify it among their experimental techniques. In a general way, it may somewhat resemble that reliving of the past that psychoanalysis can sometimes bring about in a limited way for therapeutic purposes; but you must imagine that sort of thing tremendously magnified and clarified, capable of including every detail that has ever registered on the subject's brain; and the end result is very different. The purpose is not therapeutic, as we would understand it: quite the opposite. The end result is death. Whatever is recalled by this process is transmitted to the receiving mind, which can retain it and record any or all of it if such a record is desired; but to the subject who recalls it, it is a flowing away, without

return. Thus it is not a true "remembering" but a giving. The mind is swept clear, naked of all its past, and, along with memory, life withdraws also. Very quietly. At the end, I suppose it must be like standing without resistance in the engulfment of a flood tide, until finally the waters close over.

That, it seems, is how Camilla's life was "saved." Now, when I finally grasped that, I laughed, and the angel of course caught my joke. I was thinking about my neighbor Steele, who boarded the old lady for me in his henhouse for a couple of winters. Somewhere safe in the angelic records there must be a hen's-eye image of the patch in the seat of Steele's pants. Well—good. And, naturally, Camilla's view of me, too: not too unkind, I hope—she couldn't help the expression on her rigid little face, and I don't believe it ever meant anything.

At the other end of the scale is the saved life of my angel's father. Recall can be a long process, she says, depending on the intricacy and richness of the mind recalling; and in all but the last stages it can be halted at will. Her father's recall was begun when they were still far out in space and he knew that he could not long survive the journey. When that journey ended, the recall had progressed so far that very little factual memory remained to him on his life on that other planet. He had what must be called a "deductive memory"; from the material of the years not yet given away, he could reconstruct what must have been; and I assume the other adult who survived the passage must have been able to shelter him from errors that loss of memory might involve. This, I infer, is why he could not show

me a two-moon night. I forgot to ask her whether the images he did send me were from actual or deductive memory. Deductive, I think, for there was a certain dimness about them not present when my angel gives me a picture of something seen with her own eyes.

Jade-green eyes, by the way—were you wondering?

In the same fashion, my own life could be saved. Every aspect of existence that I ever touched, that ever touched me, could be transmitted to some perfect record. The nature of the written record is beyond me, but I have no doubt of its relative perfection. Nothing important, good or bad, would be lost. And they need a knowledge of humanity, if they are to carry out whatever it is they have in mind.

It would be difficult, she tells me, and sometimes painful. Most of the effort would be hers, but some of it would have to be mine. In her period of infantile education, she elected what we should call zoology as her lifework; for that reason she was given intensive theoretical training in this technique. Right now, I guess she knows more than anyone else on this planet not only about what makes a hen tick but about how it feels to be a hen. Though a beginner, she is in all essentials already an expert. She can help me, she thinks (if I choose this alternative)—at any rate, ease me over the toughest spots, soothe away resistance, keep my courage from too much flagging.

For it seems that this process of recall is painful to an advanced intellect (she, without condescension, calls us very advanced) because, while all pretense and self-delusion are stripped away, there remains conscience, still functioning by whatever standards of good and bad

the individual has developed in his lifetime. Our present knowledge of our own motives is such a pathetically small beginning!—hardly stronger than an infant's first effort to focus his eyes. I am merely wondering how much of my life (if I choose this way) will seem to me altogether hideous. Certainly plenty of the "good deeds" that I still cherish in memory like so many well-behaved cherubs will turn up with the leering aspect of greed or petty vanity or worse.

Not that I am a bad man, in any reasonable sense of the term; not a bit of it. I respect myself; no occasion to grovel and beat my chest; I'm not ashamed to stand comparison with any other fair sample of the species. But there you are: I *am* human, and under the aspect of eternity so far, plus this afternoon's newspaper, that is a rather serious thing.

Without real knowledge, I think of this total recall as something like a passage down a corridor of myriad images—now dark, now brilliant; now pleasant, now horrible—guided by no certainty except an awareness of the open blind door at the end of it. It could have its pleasing moments and its consolations. I don't see how it could ever approximate the delight and satisfaction of living a few more years in this world with the angel lighting on my shoulder when she wishes, and talking to me.

I had to ask her of how great value such a record would be to them. Very great. Obvious enough—they can be of little use to us, by their standards, until they understand us; and they came here to be of use to us as well as to themselves. And understanding us, to them, means knowing us inside out with a completeness such

as our most dedicated and laborious scholars could never imagine. I remember those twelve million years: they will not touch us until they are certain no harm will come of it. On our tortured planet, however, there is a time factor. They know that well enough, of course. . . . Recall cannot begin unless the subject is willing or unresisting; to them, that has to mean willing, for any being with intellect enough to make a considered choice. Now, I wonder how many they could find who would be honestly willing to make that uneasy journey into death, for no reward except an assurance that they were serving their own kind and the angels?

More to the point, I wonder if I would be able to achieve such willingness myself, even with her help?

When this had been explained to me, she urged me again to make no hasty decision. And she pointed out to me what my thoughts were already groping at—why not both alternatives, within a reasonable limit of time? Why couldn't I have ten or fifteen years or more with her and then undertake the total recall—perhaps not until my physical powers had started toward senility? I thought that over.

This morning I had almost decided to choose that most welcome and comforting solution. Then the mailman brought my daily paper. Not that I needed any such reminder.

In the afternoon I asked her if she knew whether, in the present state of human technology, it would be possible for our folly to actually destroy this planet. She did not know, for certain. Three of the other children have gone away to different parts of the world, to learn what they can about that. But she had to tell me that

such a thing has happened before, elsewhere in the heavens. I guess I won't write a letter to the papers advancing an explanation for the occasional appearance of a nova among the stars. Doubtless others have hit on the same hypothesis without the aid of angels.

And that is not all I must consider. I could die by accident or sudden disease before I had begun to give my life.

Only now, at this very late moment, rubbing my sweaty forehead and gazing into the lights of that wonderful ring, have I been able to put together some obvious facts in the required synthesis.

I don't know, of course, what forms their assistance to us will take. I suspect human beings won't see or hear much of the angels for a long time to come. Now and then disastrous decisions may be altered, and those who believe themselves wholly responsible won't quite know why their minds worked that way. Here and there, maybe an influential mind will be rather strangely nudged into a better course. Something like that. There may be sudden new discoveries and inventions of kinds that will tend to neutralize the menace of our nastiest playthings. But whatever the angels decide to do, the record and analysis of my not too atypical life will be an aid: it could even be the small weight deciding the balance between triumph and failure. That is fact one.

Two: my angel and her brothers and sisters, for all their amazing level of advancement, are of perishable protoplasm, even as I am. Therefore, if this ball of earth becomes a ball of flame, they also will be destroyed. Even if they have the means to use their space-

ship again or to build another, it might easily happen that they would not learn their danger in time to escape. And for all I know, this could be tomorrow. Or tonight.

So there can no longer be any doubt as to my choice, and I will tell her when she wakes.

July 9

Tonight* there is no recall—I am to rest a while. I see it is almost a month since I last wrote in this journal. My total recall began three weeks ago, and I have already been able to give away the first twenty-eight years of my life.

Since I no longer require normal sleep, the recall begins at night, as soon as the lights begin to go out over there in the village and there is little danger of interruption. Daytimes, I putter about in my usual fashion. I have sold Steele my hens, and Judy's life was saved a week ago; that practically winds up my affairs, except that I want to write a codicil to my will. I might as well do that now, right here in this journal, instead of bothering my lawyer. It should be legal.

> To Whom It May Concern: I hereby bequeath to my friend Lester Morse, M.D., of Augusta, Maine, the ring which will be found at my death on the fifth finger of my left hand; and I would urge Dr. Morse to retain this ring in his private possession at all times,

* At this point Dr. Bannerman's handwriting alters curiously. From here on he used a soft pencil instead of a pen, and the script shows signs of haste. In spite of this, however, it is actually much clearer, steadier, and easier to read than the earlier entries in his normal hand. —Blaine.

and to make provision for its disposal, in the event of his own death, to some person in whose character he places the utmost faith.

(Signed) David Bannerman*

Tonight she has gone away for a while, and I am to rest and do as I please until she returns. I shall spend the time filling in some blanks in this record, but I am afraid it will be a spotty job, unsatisfactory to any readers who are subject to the blessed old itch for facts. Mainly because there is so much I no longer care about. It is troublesome to try to decide what things would be considered important by interested strangers.

Except for the lack of any desire for sleep, and a bodily weariness that is not at all unpleasant, I notice no physical effects thus far. I have no faintest recollection of anything that happened earlier than my twenty-eighth birthday. My deductive memory seems rather efficient, and I am sure I could reconstruct most of the story if it were worth the bother: this afternoon I grubbed around among some old letters of that period, but they weren't very interesting. My knowledge of English is unaffected; I can still read scientific German and some French, because I had occasion to use those languages fairly often after I was twenty-eight. The scraps of Latin dating from high school are quite gone. So are algebra and all but the simplest propositions of high-school geometry: I never needed 'em. I can remember thinking of my mother after twenty-eight, but do not know whether the image this provides really

* In spite of superficial changes in the handwriting, this signature has been certified genuine by an expert graphologist.

—Blaine.

resembles her; my father died when I was thirty-one, so I remember him as a sick old man. I believe I had a younger brother, but he must have died in childhood.*

Judy's passing was tranquil—pleasant for her, I think. It took the better part of a day. We went out to an abandoned field I know, and she lay in the sunshine with the angel sitting by her, while I dug a grave and then rambled off after wild raspberries. Toward evening the angel came and told me it was finished. And most interesting, she said. I don't see how there can have been anything distressing about it for Judy; after all, what hurts us worst is to have our favorite self-deceptions stripped away.

As the angel has explained it to me, her people, their cats, those kangaroo folk, man, and just possibly the cats on our planet (she hasn't met them yet) are the only animals she knows who are introspective enough to develop self-delusion and related pretenses. I suggested she might find something of the sort, at least in rudimentary form, among some of the other primates. She was immensely interested and wanted to learn everything I could tell her about monkeys and apes. It seems that long ago on the other planet there used to be clumsy, winged creatures resembling the angels to about the degree that the large anthropoids resemble us. They became extinct some forty million years ago, in spite of enlightened efforts to keep their kind alive. Their birth rate became insufficient for replacement, as if some necessary spark had simply flickered out; al-

* Dr. Bannerman's mother died in 1918 of influenza. His brother (three years older, not younger) died of pneumonia, 1906. —Blaine.

most as if nature, or whatever name you prefer for the unknown, had with gentle finality written them off. . . .

I have not found the recall painful, at least not in retrospect. There must have been sharp moments, mercifully forgotten, along with their causes, as if the process had gone on under anesthesia. Certainly there were plenty of incidents in my first twenty-eight years that I should not care to offer to the understanding of any but the angels. Quite often I must have been mean, selfish, base in any number of ways, if only to judge by the record since twenty-eight. Those old letters touch on a few of these things. To me, they now matter only as material for a record which is safely out of my hands.

However, to any persons I may have harmed, I wish to say this: you were hurt by aspects of my humanity which may not, in a few million years, be quite so common among us all. Against these darker elements I struggled, in my human fashion, as you do yourselves. The effort is not wasted.

It was a week after I told the angel my decision before she was prepared to start the recall. During that week she searched my present mind more closely than I should have imagined was possible: she had to be sure. During that week of hard questions I dare say she learned more about my kind than has ever gone on record even in a physician's office; I hope she did. To any psychiatrist who might question that, I offer a naturalist's suggestion: it is easy to imagine, after some laborious time, that we have noticed everything a given patch of ground can show us; but alter the viewpoint only a little—dig down a foot with a spade, say, or

climb a tree branch and look downward—it's a whole new world.

When the angel was not exploring me in this fashion, she took pains to make me glimpse the satisfactions and million rewarding experiences I might have if I chose the other way. I see how necessary that was; at the time it seemed almost cruel. She had to do it, for my own sake, and I am glad that I was somehow able to stand fast to my original choice. So was she, in the end; she has even said she loves me for it. What that troubling word means to her is not within my mind: I am satisfied to take it in the human sense.

Some evening during that week—I think it was June 12—Lester dropped around for sherry and chess. Hadn't seen him in quite a while, and haven't since. There is a moderate polio scare this summer, and it keeps him on the jump. The angel retired behind some books on an upper shelf—I'm afraid it was dusty—and had fun with our chess. She had a fair view of your bald spot, Lester; later she remarked that she liked your looks, and can't you do something about that weight? She suggested an odd expedient, which I believe has occurred to your medical self from time to time—eating less.

Maybe she shouldn't have done what she did with those chess games. Nothing more than my usual blundering happened until after my first ten moves; by that time I suppose she had absorbed the principles and she took over, slightly. I was not fully aware of it until I saw Lester looking like a boiled duck: I had imagined my astonishing moves were the result of my own damn cleverness.

Seriously, Lester, think back to that evening. You've played in stiff amateur tournaments; you know your own abilities and you know mine. Ask yourself whether I could have done anything like that without help. I tell you again, I didn't study the game in the interval when you weren't here. I've never had a chess book in the library, and if I had, no amount of study would take me into your class. Haven't that sort of mentality—just your humble sparring partner, and I've enjoyed it on that basis, as you might enjoy watching a prima-donna surgeon pull off some miracle you wouldn't dream of attempting yourself. Even if your game had been away below par that evening (I don't think it was), I could never have pinned your ears back three times running without help. That evening you were a long way out of *your* class, that's all.

I couldn't tell you anything about it at the time—she was clear on that point—so I could only bumble and preen myself and leave you mystified. But she wants me to write anything I choose in this journal, and somehow, Lester, I think you may find the next few decades pretty interesting. You're still young—some ten years younger than I. I think you'll see many things that I do wish I myself might see come to pass—or I would so wish if I were not convinced that my choice was the right one.

Most of those new events will not be spectacular, I'd guess. Many of the turns to a better way will hardly be recognized at the time for what they are, by you or anyone else. Obviously, our nature being what it is, we shall not jump into heaven overnight. To hope for that would be as absurd as it is to imagine that any formula,

ideology, theory of social pattern, can bring us into Utopia. As I see it, Lester—and I think your consulting room would have told you the same even if your own intuition were not enough—there is only one battle of importance: Armageddon. And Armageddon field is within each self, world without end.

At the moment I believe I am the happiest man who ever lived.

July 20

All but the last ten years now given away. The physical fatigue (still pleasant) is quite overwhelming. I am not troubled by the weeds in my garden patch—merely a different sort of flowers where I had planned something else. An hour ago she brought me the seed of a blown dandelion, to show me how lovely it was—I don't suppose I had ever noticed. I hope whoever takes over this place will bring it back to farming: they say the ten acres below the house used to be good potato land—nice early ground.

It is delightful to sit in the sun, as if I were old.

After thumbing over earlier entries in this journal, I see I have often felt quite bitter toward my own kind. I deduce that I must have been a lonely man—much of the loneliness self-imposed. A great part of my bitterness must have been no more than one ugly by-product of a life spent too much apart. Some of it doubtless came from objective causes, yet I don't believe I ever had more cause than any moderately intelligent man who would like to see his world a pleasanter place than it ever has been. My angel tells me that the pain in my back is due to an injury received in some early stage of

the world war that still goes on. That could have soured me, perhaps. It's all right—it's all in the record.

She is racing with a hummingbird—holding back, I think, to give the ball of green fluff a break.

Another note for you, Lester. I have already indicated that my ring is to be yours. I don't want to tell you what I have discovered of its properties, for fear it might not give you the same pleasure and interest that it has given me. Of course, like any spot of shifting light and color, it is an aid to self-hypnosis. It is much, much more than that, but—find out for yourself, at some time when you are a little protected from everyday distractions. I know it can't harm you, because I know its source.

By the way, I wish you would convey to my publishers my request that they either discontinue manufacture of my *Introductory Biology* or else bring out a new edition revised in accordance with some notes you will find in the top left drawer of my library desk. I glanced through that book after my angel assured me that I wrote it, and I was amazed. However, I'm afraid my notes are messy (I call them mine by a poetic license), and they may be too advanced for the present day—though the revision is mainly a matter of leaving out certain generalities that ain't so. Use your best judgment: it's a very minor textbook, and the thing isn't too important. A last wiggle of my personal vanity.

July 27

I have seen a two-moon night.

It was given to me by that other grownup, at the

end of a wonderful visit, when he and six of those nine other children came to see me. It was last night, I think—yes, must have been. First there was a murmur of wings above the house; my angel flew in, laughing; then they were here, all about me. Full of gaiety and colored fire, showing off in every way they knew would please me. Each one had something graceful and friendly to say to me. One brought me a moving image of the St. Lawrence seen at morning from half a mile up—clouds—eagles; now, how could he know that would delight me so much? And each one thanked me for what I had done.

But it's been so easy!

And at the end the old one—his skin is quite black, and his down is white and gray—gave the remembered image of a two-moon night. He saw it some sixty years ago.

I have not even considered making an effort to describe it—my fingers will not hold this pencil much longer tonight. Oh—soaring buildings of white and amber, untroubled countryside, silver on curling rivers, a glimpse of open sea; a moon rising in clarity, another setting in a wreath of cloud, between them a wide wandering of unfamiliar stars; and here and there the angels, worthy after fifty million years to live in such a night. No, I cannot describe anything like that. But, you human kindred of mine, I can do something better. I can tell you that this two-moon night, glorious as it was, was no more beautiful than a night under a single moon on this ancient and familiar Earth might be—if you will imagine that the rubbish of human evil has

been cleared away and that our own people have started at last on the greatest of all explorations.

July 29

Nothing now remains to give away but the memory of the time that has passed since the angel came. I am to rest as long as I wish, write whatever I want to. Then I shall get myself over to the bed and lie down as if for sleep. She tells me that I can keep my eyes open: she will close them for me when I no longer see her.

I remain convinced that our human case is hopeful. I feel sure that in only a few thousand years we may be able to perform some of the simpler preparatory tasks, such as casting out evil and loving our neighbors. And if that should prove to be so, who can doubt that in another fifty million years we might well be only a little lower than the angels?

LIBRARIAN'S NOTE: As is generally known, the original of the Bannerman Journal is said to have been in the possession of Dr. Lester Morse at the time of the latter's disappearance in 1964, and that disappearance has remained an unsolved mystery to the present day. McCarran is known to have visited Captain Garrison Blaine in October, 1951, but no record remains of that visit. Captain Blaine appears to have been a bachelor who lived alone. He was killed in line of duty, December, 1951. McCarran is believed not to have written about nor discussed the Bannerman affair with anyone else. It is almost certain that he himself removed the extract and related papers from the files (unofficially, it would seem!) when he severed his connection with the

FBI in 1957; at any rate, they were found among his effects after his assassination and were released to the public, considerably later, by Mrs. McCarran.

The following memorandum was originally attached to the extract from the Bannerman Journal; it carries the McCarran initialing.

Aug. 11, 1951

The original letter of complaint written by Stephen Clyde, M.D., and mentioned in the accompanying letter of Captain Blaine, has unfortunately been lost, owing perhaps to an error in filing.

Personnel presumed responsible have been instructed not to allow such error to be repeated except if, as, and/or when necessary.

C. McC.

On the margin of this memorandum there was a penciled notation, later erased. The imprint is sufficient to show the unmistakable McCarran script. The notation read in part as follows: *Far be it from a McC. to lose his job except if, as, and/or*—the rest is undecipherable, except for a terminal word which is regrettably unparliamentary.

STATEMENT BY LESTER MORSE, M.D.,
DATED AUGUST 9, 1951

On the afternoon of July 30, 1951, acting on what I am obliged to describe as an unexpected impulse, I drove out to the country for the purpose of calling on

my friend Dr. David Bannerman. I had not seen him nor had word from him since the evening of June 12 of this year.

I entered, as was my custom, without knocking. After calling to him and hearing no response, I went upstairs to his bedroom and found him dead. From superficial indications I judged that death must have taken place during the previous night. He was lying on his bed on his left side, comfortably disposed as if for sleep but fully dressed, with a fresh shirt and clean summer slacks. His eyes and mouth were closed, and there was no trace of the disorder to be expected at even the easiest natural death. Because of these signs I assumed, as soon as I had determined the absence of breath and heartbeat and noted the chill of the body, that some neighbor must have found him already, performed these simple rites out of respect for him, and probably notified a local physican or other responsible person. I therefore waited (Dr. Bannerman had no telephone), expecting that someone would soon call.

Dr. Bannerman's journal was on a table near his bed, open to that page on which he has written a codicil to his will. I read that part. Later, while I was waiting for others to come, I read the remainder of the journal, as I believe he wished me to do. The ring he mentions was on the fifth finger of his left hand, and it is now in my possession. When writing that codicil Dr. Bannerman must have overlooked or forgotten the fact that in his formal will, written some months earlier, he had appointed me executor. If there are legal technicalities involved, I shall be pleased to cooperate fully with the proper authorities.

The ring, however, will remain in my keeping, since that was Dr. Bannerman's expressed wish, and I am not prepared to offer it for examination or discussion under any circumstances.

The notes for a revision of one of his textbooks were in his desk, as noted in the journal. They are by no means "messy"; nor are they particularly revolutionary except insofar as he wished to rephrase, as theory or hypothesis, certain statements that I would have supposed could be regarded as axiomatic. This is not my field, and I am not competent to judge. I shall take up the matter with his publishers at the earliest opportunity.*

So far as I can determine, and bearing in mind the results of the autopsy performed by Stephen Clyde, M.D., the death of Dr. David Bannerman was not inconsistent with the presence of an embolism of some type not distinguishable on post mortem. I have so stated on the certificate of death. It would seem to be not in the public interest to leave such questions in doubt. I am compelled to add one other item of medical opinion for what it may be worth:

I am not a psychiatrist, but, owing to the demands of general practice, I have found it advisable to keep as up to date as possible with current findings and opinion in this branch of medicine. Dr. Bannerman possessed, in my opinion, emotional and intellectual stability to a better degree than anyone else of comparable intelligence in the entire field of my acquaintance, personal

* LIBRARIAN'S NOTE: But it seems he never did. No new edition of *Introductory Biology* was ever brought out, and the textbook has been out of print since 1952.

and professional. If it is suggested that he was suffering from a hallucinatory psychosis, I can only say that it must have been of a type quite outside my experience and not described, so far as I know, anywhere in the literature of psychopathology.

Dr. Bannerman's house, on the afternoon of July 30, was in good order. Near the open, unscreened window of his bedroom there was a coverless shoe box with a folded silk scarf in the bottom. I found no pillow such as Dr. Bannerman describes in the journal, but observed that a small section had been cut from the scarf. In this box, and near it, there was a peculiar fragrance, faint, aromatic, and very sweet, such as I have never encountered before and therefore cannot describe.

It may or may not have any bearing on the case that, while I remained in his house that afternoon, I felt no sense of grief or personal loss, although Dr. Bannerman had been a loved and honored friend for a number of years. I merely had, and have, a conviction that after the completion of some very great undertaking, he had found peace.

The Wrens in Grampa's Whiskers

I called my Grandfather Grandad. His father was the one we called Grampa. Grandad was old as a man needs to be, or I thought so in 1958, when I was ten. As for Grampa, he'd been ten years old himself when the little big guns set up a yattering at Gettysburg. Grampa used to say guns had been growing bigger ever since, but the way he heard it, the ones at Gettysburg killed the soldiers just as dead. It must have been in 1958 when I last heard him make that remark, the summer he was 106 and had decided to sit out on the front porch near-about as long as he pleased.

Grampa had worked hard for his first eighty-odd years, twitching rocks out of the Vermont dirt the way his grandfather had done before him; then he slowed down. He'd always been clean-shaven. At eighty-two he

grew a beard, took to reading a lot, on the front porch. "Built the thing myself," he said, "with underpinnings of hornbeam. Believe I can set on it some if I wish, at the commencement of my old age."

He could. He had three other sons besides Grandad, who was 81 the year I'm talking of, and the others pretty well-grown too. There were seven grandsons in the direct line, my Pop the youngest, and a flock of granddaughters and great-grands fairly well scattered over the eastern States. Anything the rest of the tribe couldn't fix to run right, my Ma could. No reason Grampa shouldn't subside if he chose.

On June evening in '58 when Grampa was out on the front porch, Ma called to tell him supper was ready. "Fine," he says, "where is it?"

Ma spoke through the window, "You trying to plague me, Grampa? Right here same as usual, so come and get it!"

Grampa just set. Ma went out to study him. "You all right?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" says Grampa. "Never sick a day in my life. Could lick my weight in wildcats, excepting I'm that ornery I'd more likely let 'em live and grieve. Where's my supper?"

Ma was young then as well as handsome. I was surveying the scene through the window because I smelt the unusual. I saw the handsome in Ma pepper up to a sort of glow—after an average fourteen-hour day Ma might have been a mite tired herself. She softened, though. She always did. "Is it your eyes gone back on you, Grampa, account of all that reading you've been doing? Why'n't you say so?"

"Judy, girl—" Ma's given name was Lyle, but Grampa made no never-minds about that, and would call her Judy, or Millicent, or Beulah, all good family names he'd known at one time or another—"Judy, long's you got nothing better to do than stand there, will you enlighten me why the good Lord made women with arguing organs? When's there been anything wrong with my eyes? Ain't I setting here on the same porch I built in 1913 with underpinnings of hornbeam, and got Mount Mansfield before my eyes plain as you be, which I don't mean that the way it sounds, for you're a good-looking heifer and no mistake, not to mention two-thirds of Lamoille County and all of it pretty as a picture? Eyes! I'm partial to having supper on time, by the way—always was."

That was a hazy evening. Mount Mansfield—why, you couldn't see him, not even a rising shadow of him in the mist that was spread all over the far side of yonder. Ma brought Grampa his supper on the porch. When he was done munching, which he did hearty, she carried in the dishes and not a word of complaint.

The mist thinned when it came on dark. Chilly, but I remember the fireflies circulating. Ma fetched a blanket, and Grampa thanked her for it but wouldn't allow her to tuck it around him, because he said that might disturb the wrens that had made a nest in his whiskers.

"Wrens," said Ma. "Ayah, there's been a pile of 'em around."

"Oh, there has you know," says Grampa. "I figure these got crowded out of the best places, seeing my eldest boy Joel has been too shiftless lately to put up more houses for 'em." He meant Grandad, and it was a

mite unfair, because Grandad at 81 was entitled to slow down some himself. "These birds'll be all right though, Judy," says Grampa, "if you'll just leave me set, and not bother, and not argue, and while you're about it you might fetch me a couple-three conveniences."

My room overlooked the roof of the front porch. When I'd gone to bed I heard Ma trying again. No use—Grampa wasn't intending to move. She sat with him a spell, and Pop joined them. While I dozed off I heard the three of them talking about the war. That was 1958, but some-way Grampa never got it through his head the war was over. You couldn't always be sure whether he meant the war in the 1940s or the first World War, or maybe even the Spanish War when Grampa might have admired to take a ride up San Juan Hill with Teddy Roosevelt, only they told him at the time that he was a shade too old for such. But that June night, the first one he spent out on the porch, I believe he was talking about the second World War, for while I was dropping off I heard him say you couldn't leave a man like Hitler running loose—Teddy would never have allowed it.

I woke later in the night and heard him snoring—gently for him, which I figured was on account of the wrens. I skun out over the roof and down the porch pillar, careful in case he quit snoring—not that I ever felt scared of Grampa the way some did. I just wanted a look at the wrens.

The mist wasn't quite gone. It was a night of small stars and a high-riding sliver of moon in a milky haze. Being ten and foolish, I was on the porch and beside Grampa's chair before I realized there'd be no seeing

the wrens in such a light. He woke and said, "That you, Saul?"

"Uhha," I said, "it's just me." Peculiar thing—Grampa was forever tangling up the names of Ma, and Pop, and plenty more. As for Pop's brothers and the great-grands, Grampa didn't even try—he called them all Jackson. Someway, though, my name always came out right. Well, I'd been underfoot for ten years in the same house with him, and I guess it helped to know my right name whenever he stumbled over me and needed to say something brisk. "It's just me, Grampa," I said. "I wanted to see the wrens."

"Why, Saul," he says, "the best time for that is real early morning before anyone else is up. Say an hour before sunup, that's when they begin a-twirping and a-fidgeting but don't feel like flying yet, so if you was on hand at exactly that right time, I wouldn't be a one to say you *couldn't* see 'em, understand? Meanwhile I'd admire to learn if you can shinny up that pillar as good as you can shinny down it, and how about doing it near-about as fast as you know how to shinny, before your Ma pops out and gives me an argument about growing boys needing their sleep?"

So I did.

All summer long I kept trying to hit the time exactly right. I didn't have much luck. I'd sneak down too early and he'd send me back, or I'd be late and he'd give me hark-from-the-tomb for being too lazy to get up early the way he used to.

One of the mornings when I was too early he said, "Oh, by the way, Saul, wasn't you telling me your Great-Aunt Doreen went and lost that amethyst brooch

she had from Cousin John Blaine before they was married?"

"Why," I says, a leg on each side of the pillar and my bare toes working because I was puzzled, "why, no, I wasn't, Grampa, but it's a fact. She was in a mortal taking about it all last evening, said it was one of the mighty few things she had to remember him by and didn't understand how she could've been that careless."

"Ayah, well, it come to me the thing likely fell off into the back of her closet, account she forgot to take it off when she hung up her dress and didn't have it pinned on too good. Thought I'd mention it."

I found it right there, next day, and took off after Aunt Doreen, figuring I'd say the bandits got it and I wrested it away from them single-handed like. Or maybe I'd tease her some and claim she'd stuck it on the back of her dress and folks'd been admiring it. I located her in the kitchen shelling garden peas, red-eyed still and distracted, half the peas going on the floor, and some-way none of my projects looked good. Aunt Doreen was shaped like a little Rocky Ford melon and nice all through. I couldn't think, so I said without thinking: "Know what, Aunt Doreen? I believe you left your window-screen open yesterday morning."

"My screen, honey?" she says. "Guess I did. Yes, I washed the glass, likely forgot the screen, I'm that careless," and she went to crying again, about the brooch. I remember there was a mess of wrens twittering around the kitchen window—appeared to be wrens.

I went on talking without thinking: "Well, Aunt Doreen, yesterday I happened to see one of them plague-take-it starlings go in your window and fly off

with something, didn't pay it no mind, only today I got to thinking and had a look under the tree where he lit, so here she be. You wasn't careless, it was just one of them plague-take-it starlings."

She grabbed the brooch, and then me, kissed me all to pieces. While I was picking up the peas that were flying around she went into a long story about how the starlings had pestered her and John when they was first married and living over to Lodi, New York—starlings being liable to do anything. So I knew she believed me. Don't know as I ever told a handsomer lie, or got more glory for it and did less harm. Peculiar thing though, how it sprang up full-grown in my empty head while those wrens were busy at the window. Near-about as peculiar as Grampa's knowing where the brooch was, when he hadn't been off the porch in a week and wouldn't've been found dead anywhere near a closet with female clothes in it. I know Grampa expected me to ask about that, but of course, seeing he hadn't let me look at the wrens, I was durned if I would.

But then there was just one morning in late July, when I hit the time so near right I figured I'd give up on it if Grampa still wouldn't let me see them. Pale early light, a few birds starting to talk in the woods, no big chorus yet. Light enough so that Grampa's eyes had begun to shine a natural robin's-egg blue instead of black, and I could make out only about half of the million crinkles around them. The old man had to admit I wasn't more than sixty seconds off, so he showed me a dark spot in the white fluff spreading over his chest, and he said if I'd stand quiet and just look

down, not poke around or stir up a commotion, maybe I'd see something, maybe I wouldn't.

All I saw down there was bit of motion. Naturally the nest itself was away inside the beard, for snugness. I couldn't swear they were wrens, although at the time I took his word for it. I'd no more than glimpsed that motion when Grampa said the parent birds were ready to fly, so I'd have to travel back up the pillar and stop bothering. But he suggested that if I was to squat on the porch roof same as if I had good sense, I just might watch them going off. I did that, and I think I caught a faint flicker of them flying west and beyond our lilac hedge. Flying sort of like wrens.

Through August I didn't try, much. It came to me that he thought I was too young, and I was sad about that, but it was the kind of thing where you didn't put up an argument, not with Grampa.

Along in August, Ma and Pop arranged for Dr. Wayne to come and see Grampa. Grampa was friendly —called the doctor Jackson and explained how the only reason he'd quit asking for half a dozen sausages along with his lunch was that the smell bothered the wrens, it didn't mean he was off his feed. Soon as Dr. Wayne got wound up to saying "Well, now—" Grampa admitted real polite that lack of exercise had whittled down his appetite, a smidgin. "But," says he, "ain't that natural, Jackson? I'm commencing to get old is the hell of it, and anyway I hate an argument." After Dr. Wayne left, Grampa asked Pop to bring him his shotgun.

Pop says: "Now look, Grampa—"

"Wheels of the Apocalypse!" says Grampa. "Am I

asking you for shells? Did I say a word about shooting anybody? All I want is the gun, and all I want to do is point it, the next time I see a doctor fussing around my wrens—you think he won't travel? He'll travel. Fetch me my shotgun, Jackson, or I'll commence to believe Judy there has learnt you how to argue, and any man that'll let his wife learn him to argue would suck wrens' eggs."

So he got his shotgun. Set it by his chair. I remember seeing him pat it and fondle it and shoo away the cat with it now and then. If he was feeling good he'd tell how he bought it in 1913 at Hines' Hardware—damn filling station now where Hines' Hardware used to stand, they call that progress?—and that was the same year he built this porch with underpinnings of hornbeam.

Word got around. If people smell something unusual you just can't make them quit bothering. Not that they didn't have a few fairly smart ideas. There was my Great-Uncle Jonas for instance, Grandad's kid brother, 78 that year, fat, with a gimp leg and a curious disposition. In August he started talking politics to Grampa. Grampa didn't mind—he enjoyed politics, and let Jonas wheeze along on one lungfull after another till he got to the point: "How you going to vote this year, Grampa?"

"How? You parted with your natural senses, boy? When'd you ever know me vote any way except straight Republican? Sooner vote for Coolidge, only I hear he's dead, but it don't matter, this Willkie's a good man, got a lot of sense. Use your head, Jonas."

"Ayah, well, but that wasn't what I meant. I was wondering—"

"You got any occasion to wonder about a man's politics that would've rid up San Juan Hill with Teddy only they told him he was too old for God's sake?"

"It ain't that, Grampa." His own father, but even Great-Uncle Jonas called him Grampa—the old man wouldn't answer to anything else. "Thing of it is, I just wondered—"

"You needn't to wonder. It come to me," said Grampa, "that I been paying taxes in this town since the year 1873, and never been in jail so far as I recall—well, there was something about shooting up a street-lamp for rejoicing the day they repealed the Volstead Commandment, and you should've been there yourself only I guess you was still working in the bank that year and kind of surrounded with virtue—I don't hold it against you, Jackson, I mean Jonas. Thing of it is, Jonas, if after all them taxes and never being in jail, this town is so hell-fired puky small and mean they can't wheel one of them new-fangled voting machines onto Joe Durvis's truck and fetch it up here for me—"

"Now just a minute, Grampa," says Great-Uncle Jonas, "the Selectmen wouldn't ever hear of it, you know that."

"Because if they won't," says Grampa, not listening "and far as that goes Joe Durvis'd be perfectly glad to do it for a dollar—if they won't, I'm fixing to stay home and vote socialist, and it won't be ten minutes before the entire county gets to hear about it."

I don't know what they would've done come November. Long before then, Ma and Pop started worrying about something else—September frost. Grandad helped them worry, stumping around chewing his own

short whiskers and remarking how the nights were already sharp and drawing in. Grampa overheard him—was meant to, likely.

"Joel boy," says Grampa, mild and gentle for him, "I'd quit a-fretting if I was you. They're fixing to go south any time now."

"That a fact?" says Grandad. Ma was behind Grandad twisting her fingers in her apron which she seldom did, and I was there, not underfoot, just listening. Aunt Doreen came out too. I couldn't look at Aunt Doreen those days without she'd finger the amethyst brooch and smile half-secret at me and muss my hair on the sly.

"Ayah," says Grampa, "or if they don't you can close in the porch—with blankets and thumbtacks, mind, I won't have no hammering around my wrens—and we'll make out with suet and birdseed. But I look for 'em to fly south real soon."

"It would be a dispensation—" said Ma— "almost." She said that soft. I guess Grampa didn't hear, anyhow he paid it no mind.

"We've raised three broods," Grampa said. "Three broods, by God. That's unusual, that is. What's the war news?"

Ma told him it was good, and went on to say something about the satellites, which didn't interest Grampa too much. He knew what they were, but claimed it was a waste of time flying the hell all over space when there was still a pile of things down here that could stand fixing if only people weren't too shiftless to notice it.

"Well, bother the war news too," says Aunt

Doreen. "People could live in peace if they'd mind their own business and learn not to get careless . . ."

Pop laid in extra blankets and bought an electric heater on the quiet, but the following week was balmy, no more said about winter. During that week my best friend Will Burke told me something about his kid sister Jenny. Jenny was seven, and she'd had polio the year before, right leg and hip all twisted up and miserable. Dr. Wayne couldn't give the Burkes any hope she'd ever walk right or even walk at all. Will told me she was walking.

He'd fetched something to her room and found her out of bed, where she could grab the bedpost if she needed it but standing without it and taking a step or two. She said she'd been as far as the window and back. She made Will swear not to tell the family till she was sure it was real. When Will told me, I had to swear, too, never to mention it—I wouldn't now, only Jenny's been dead some years, anyhow I can't imagine she'd have minded. And she made Will promise to see that her window screen was kept unlocked so the birds could get in.

Will did that—he'd have done anything for Jenny —but he never got to see the birds. I remember he was shook up when he told me. Some-way I had sense enough not to suggest Jenny was making it up. She'd said they probably weren't exactly birds, though they looked like it when they folded their arms in under the feathers. Birds, Jenny figured, don't have triangular green eyes on knobby little heads, and they sure enough don't have the sense to bring along a pointed branch and use it for levering up a window screen.

They sang now and then, she told Will, but not quite like birds. More like a kind of talking, if you could only understand it. Which is about the way I felt when the wrens, if you want to call them wrens, were chirping me that twenty-four-carat chunk of mahooha about the brooch and the starling.

Peculiar thing—later on Jenny forgot about the birds, or seemed to. I suppose you're bound to forget a lot of things that happened when you were seven. And of course people forget things that happen when they're older too. Like for instance the time—seems to me it was the following summer—when Joe Durvis and old Martin Smallways who'd been a-snarling and a-feuding over a line fence dispute for twenty-six years appeared to forget all about it. People saw them meet sudden on the green, and supposed it meant trouble, and the small boys and dogs began drifting in so as not to miss anything. But the two of them just look sort of puzzled, and here's old Martin scratching his bald head and saying, "Hiya, Joe—was you heading for the Ethan Allen?" Off they go to the inn and spend the evening crying into each other's beer happy as two boiled owls. People said there was a lot of wrens around that year too. I don't remember seeing any more than usual. Real wrens, I mean.

It did turn chilly that September of 1958. The morning after the first frost Grampa seemed peart enough. "They flew south yesterday evening," he said to Ma, "same as I foretold, and I got to admit I'm obliged to you for your patience with me and my wrens."

I wasn't on the porch. Ma told me about it. She didn't give me the whole story till much later, when I

was going on sixteen and she figured I might own a little sense in off-hours when I wasn't sparking around with Jenny Burke, who was walking as well as anyone by that time and pretty enough to make you cry. "He showed me," Ma said, "the place where he claimed the wrens nested. Spread out his beard and showed me—well, it's only the truth, Saul, there was a kind of little hollowed-out place, smooth like a bird's nest. Likely he could've made it himself working his fingers around in there, I wouldn't know. He showed me that, and he said to me, 'We raised three broods,' he says. 'Three broods, and that's unusual.' Then he asked me what the war news was. I guess I said it was good, and he kind of chuckled, he wasn't paying me much mind, Saul. He was that quiet, a-gazing off at Mount Mansfield, it was a long couple-three minutes before I understood he was gone."

Yes, that seems long ago, back there in 1958, but this happens to be the same porch with hardly a thing changed, that my great-grandfather built with underpinnings of hornbeam, and I can't think of any reason why I shouldn't sit here myself a while at the commencement of my old age. I'd rather you didn't look now, because the light's wrong and I think they've gone to bed, anyway I can't assert I understand them better than Grampa did, or as well.

I've been around, traveled more than he did. Seen plenty of trouble even though we don't have wars any more—trouble and hating and confusion and this and that, including plenty of people who don't get over things like polio miracle-style, the way my Jenny did.

Peculiar thing, how she forgot about the birds.

Maybe at first she just wasn't a-mind to speak of them because of the way people would look at her if she did, but later I think it was a real forgetting, for I don't believe she'd have shied off from speaking to me about them after we'd been married forty-five years. Never brought it up myself of course, being I'd given Will my word I wouldn't mention it.

I've been around, seen a lot. Classmate of mine was one of the first on Venus. Never did get upstairs myself —just here and there, setting my hand to whatever turned up.

No, I wouldn't be a one to tell you what they look like. If you was going to say I imagine them, I don't mind. I'd want to claim though, that if you mess around for a century or so trying to do things more or less right, you can maybe make a place for some little spark of wisdom with wings on it.

SCIENCE FICTION

**In the corner gas station,
the local saloon,
on the down-east farm,
in the settings of EVERYDAY—there appear
UNEXPECTEDLY
THE ALIEN, THE WEIRD, THE MYSTERIOUS**

The title story tells of one tearful stray from a herd of alien livestock which crushes most of Manhattan and causes apologetic herders to make amends. There is a shivery novelette about the abduction of a country wife by a hairy beast, and the story of a pickup truck full of mythical characters asking directions to Olympus. Then there are the ten-legged blue bugs from inner—or outer—space that can give you a dream—or a nightmare; the shadow-monkeys who have the absurd habit of following along and changing by what *you* think; the tiny angel that hatches from an egg; and the "wrens" that hatch from Grampa's beard the summer he was 106.

"Pangborn writes good human science fiction."—Jonathan Ward, *CBS Radio*

"Pangborn is not only imaginative—he's a fine stylist."—*The Philadelphia Bulletin*

"A new insight into how things are . . . Pangborn can move the reader to tears or to thoughtfulness. . . . It is a joy you must discover for yourself. Pangborn's writing is going to be with us for a long time."—*Newsday*

EDGAR PANGBORN is a master craftsman in science fiction, and has been writing stories for the past two decades for *Galaxy* and *Fantasy & Science Fiction.*

COLLIER BOOKS
866 THIRD AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022

PANGBORN **Good Neighbors and Other Strangers**

02360