NEBULA WINNERS FOURTEEN

EDITED BY

FREDERIK POHL

ISAAC ASIMOV
EDWARD BRYANT
C. J. CHERRYH
L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP
CHARLES L. GRANT
VONDA N. MCINTYRE
NORMAN SPINRAD
JOHN VARLEY
GENE WOLFE

$11.95

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Nebula Winners Fourteen is the newest volume in one of the most stimulating and popular annual science fiction anthologies. Sponsored by the Science Fiction Writers of America, who vote on the awards, the Nebula winners for stories first published in 1978 are:

BEST SHORT STORY:
"Stone"
by Edward Bryant

BEST NOVELLA:
The Persistence of Vision
by John Varley

BEST NOVELETTE:
A Glow of Candles: A Unicorn's Eye
by Charles L. Grant

BEST NOVEL:
Dreamsnake
by Vonda N. McIntyre

(continued on back flap)

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(continued from front flap)

All the award-winning stories are included in this year's volume plus an excerpt from Ms. McIntyre's novel. In addition, Frederik Pohl has included two other outstanding stories of the year—*Seven American Nights* by Gene Wolfe and "Cassandra" by C. J. Cherryh—plus original essays by Isaac Asimov, Norman Spinrad, and L. Sprague de Camp, the year's Grand Master.

Frederik Pohl is of course one of science fiction's most distinguished and durable authors and editors, and the winner of many awards—most recently an American Book Award for his novel *Jem*. Complemented with his foreword and introductions to each story and essay, *Nebula Winners Fourteen* is a genuinely exciting and thought-provoking volume, full of the best writing being done today.

Jacket design by Robin Malkin

Harper & Row, Publishers
10 East 53rd Street

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Nebula Winners Fourteen

EDITED BY FREDERIK POHL

HARPER & ROW, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK
Cambridge, Hagerstown, Philadelphia, San Francisco
London, Mexico City, São Paulo, Sydney

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FIRST EDITION

ISBN: 0–06–013382–1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER: 78–645226

80 81 82 83 84 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction: A Guide to the Perplexed

The business meetings of the Science Fiction Writers of America only happen a couple of times a year, and don't last more than two or three hours when they do. This is a good thing. They are pretty exhausting experiences.

It isn't because the people involved are so stubborn and individualistic . . . well, they are—but they're also pretty good people. Although the members of SFWA are scattered over dozens of states and a number of foreign countries, and it's rare for more than ten percent of them to turn up in one place at one time, still, you can usually find Joe Haldeman chain-smoking his Gauloises in about the third row, and Robert Silverberg sprawled gracefully over two or three seats near the door. The current president will be up at the lectern, getting ready to press the crown of thorns to his brow one more time and counting the days till his sentence expires. Right now the incumbent is gentle, wise Jack Williamson, but a dozen others have taken their turns in the barrel over the years. Most of them will be sitting somewhere toward the rear, smiling their contented smiles, knowing they won't have to chair

an SFWA business meeting again. Grand Masters Heinlein, Simak and de Camp sit ready to offer elder-statesman wisdom when the young bloods get too feistily ensnarled in bickering and legislation. Some of us drum our fingers, waiting for the coffee urn to arrive. Others fiddle with papers, getting ready to deliver reports or demand them. There is a lot of sturdily warm friendship among SFWA members, and a lot of kidding around; but there's also a fair amount of tension as the standard scenario unfolds. Committees report. Grievances are aired. The perennial troubling question of SFWA finances gets its regular discussion. Science-fiction writers, by and large, are terrible bookkeepers—their gifts do not include fiscal administration. And then someone clears his throat, asks for the floor and proposes that it is really, after all, about time we made a few little changes in the rules for the Nebula Awards. All sorts of changes. Covering every aspect of them. And everyone groans, and we settle in for another round of the endless debate.

Of all time spent in SFWA meetings, and space used in SFWA publications, undoubtedly more has been devoted to the Nebulas than to any other single subject. The arguments have strained some of those sturdy friendships and alienated some useful members.

The award process itself is neither quick nor easy. All through the year SFWA members make recommendations of stories they've liked and think others should consider. Someone has to tabulate these and print the results in the SFWA *Forum.* Someone has to prepare ballots—two rounds of them, going out in time to reach SFWA members spread out over several million square miles of the Earth's surface. Someone has to prepare the handsome crystal awards themselves—they are expensive things, and tricky to handle. You can't ship them by air, because pressure differences can make them crumble. The collective expenditure of man- and woman-hours that goes into each year's Nebula Awards could easily produce two or three extra science-fiction novels; and the endless worrying over the details of the rules uses up a lot of meeting time that could be spent much more pleasantly in conviviality.

So why do we do it?

Next time you find yourself chatting with an SFWA member you might ask him that question. Odds are he'll groan, and maybe swear a little, and at last say, "As far as I can tell, we don't have any choice."

The notion of handing out annual prizes for the best science-fiction stories has only been real for the past couple of decades. No one marked the great stories of the early Campbell years, or of Gernsback's pioneering era. Well, this is not really true, since certainly the readers did, and so did all the other writers who learned from them and grew thereby. But there was no trophy to put on Doc Smith's mantle for *The Skylark of Space,* or on A. E. Van Vogt's for *Slan.* There weren't any trophies to give, any more than there were Nobel Prizes for Shakespeare for *Hamlet,* or for Mark Twain for *Huckleberry Finn.*

There have always been some stories that stood out above the others, but usually that fact does not become evident at once. There is little doubt that the test of time is the truest measure of worth. Unfortunately, it does not become operative until a good deal of time has passed. Sometimes a great deal of time. Sometimes so much that the author has passed the point of being able to enjoy the results. (Or even of being alive.) From an author's point of view, that is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. It isn't all that good from the reader's, either. He would like some measure of which out of the flood of new books and stories are worth his attention, and that is not always easily determined.

To remedy these evils, awards were instituted among writers.* The Nebula was not the first science-fiction award. The Hugo, which is given each year by the World Science Fiction Convention, was inaugurated a decade earlier. But the Hugo is a fan award, and the writers wanted to do honor to their colleagues with

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*For interested parties, there is no better source on Nebulas, Hugos and International Fantasy Awards than the annual history published and revised each year by Howard DeVore, the sage of Dearborn, Michigan.

one of their own. Taken together, the Hugos and the Nebulas are science fiction's equivalent of the Academy Awards and the Pulitzers. Sometimes they agree on which are the "best" stories. Just as often, they do not. But they are a quick test of which stories are, at least, worth considering seriously.

And such a guide is really needed, especially now. There are about a thousand science-fiction books published each year in America alone. No human being would want to read all of them. Some sort of clue as to merit is very important.

I should say that it seems particularly important to me because I am mindful of history. A quarter of a century ago, before Nebulas, before even the Hugo was well established, there was a publishing boom in science fiction. There were something like thirty-eight science-fiction magazines on the stands. Some were good, some were not, but they all looked more or less the same on the newsstand.

It was a time, not unlike the present, in which a great many new people were discovering science fiction. Typically, old fan A would read a story and mention it to his non-fan friend B, who would perhaps himself read it, and like it and decide that maybe science fiction was worth reading.

So B would go to his corner newsstand, and behold!—there were all those magazines. Which one to buy? B usually was not sophisticated enough to know. He had not learned to distinguish the *Analog*s and *Galaxy*s and *F&SF*s from the derivative, often meretricious Brand Xs. A lot of the Brand X magazines were pretty poor. Many of them were made up out of rejects from the good ones. Some were even worse, written by contract on a gross-weight basis, with editors who had never heard of science fiction until their publishers noticed the sales figures of the established magazines—and often did not care to learn. So if new convert B happened to pick up one of the sleazes, the chances were good that he would not like it at all. And there, all too often, went a new convert.

The same risk exists today, and one of the safeguards for readers

lies in the Nebula process. If you see that a book has won a Nebula or a Hugo, you can't really be sure that you will rate it as high as the award voters did. Tastes differ. But you can at least be sure that there is *something* about it that is special. It may be the idea, the literary style, the effective use of innovative techniques. It may even simply be that the voters feel that the book's author has been long overdue for an award. But it is at least some guide for the perplexed—and it is to provide that guide, even more than to honor our own colleagues, that year after year we go through the same labor and the same strife to achieve some sort of consensus.

The stories in this volume represent this year's consensus. I hope you'll enjoy them.

—FREDERIK POHL

Red Bank, New Jersey

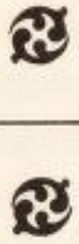
NEBULA WINNERS FOURTEEN

JOHN VARLEY

✪ *The Persistence of Vision*

All writers go through an apprenticeship, a time when they learn about the world and develop their points of view and sharpen their narrative skills. With most writers, you can see it happening, as their first attempts and initial fumblings grow and strengthen into mastery. Not John Varley. From his first year he was clearly a winner, and he has yet to set a foot wrong—whether he is writing about fast, bright adventures in a high-technology future, like *The Ophiuchus Hot Line*, or touching the heart of the reader, as in "The Persistence of Vision," which, to judge from the roar of approval when it was announced, is a popular favorite.

✪ Winner, Nebula, for Best Novella of 1978.



It was the year of the fourth non-depression. I had recently joined the ranks of the unemployed. The President had told me that I had nothing to fear but fear itself. I took him at his word, for once, and set out to backpack to California.

I was not the only one. The world's economy had been writhing like a snake on a hot griddle for the last twenty years, since the early seventies. We were in a boom-and-bust cycle that seemed to have no end. It had wiped out the sense of security the nation had so painfully won in the golden years after the thirties. People were accustomed to the fact that they could be rich one year and on the breadlines the next. I was on the breadlines in '81, and again in '88. This time I decided to use my freedom from the time clock to see the world. I had ideas of stowing away to Japan. I was forty-seven years old and might not get another chance to be irresponsible.

This was in late summer of the year. Sticking out my thumb along the interstate, I could easily forget that there were food riots back in Chicago. I slept at night on top of my bedroll and saw stars and listened to crickets.

I must have walked most of the way from Chicago to Des Moines. My feet toughened up after a few days of awful blisters. The rides were scarce, partly competition from other hitchhikers and partly the times we were living in. The locals were none too

anxious to give rides to city people, who they had heard were mostly a bunch of hunger-crazed potential mass murderers. I got roughed up once and told never to return to Sheffield, Illinois.

But I gradually learned the knack of living on the road. I had started with a small supply of canned goods from the welfare and by the time they ran out, I had found that it was possible to work for a meal at many of the farmhouses along the way.

Some of it was hard work, some of it was only a token from people with a deeply ingrained sense that nothing should come for free. A few meals were gratis, at the family table, with grandchildren sitting around while grandpa or grandma told oft-repeated tales of what it had been like in the Big One back in '29, when people had not been afraid to help a fellow out when he was down on his luck. I found that the older the person, the more likely I was to get a sympathetic ear. One of the many tricks you learn. And most older people will give you anything if you'll only sit and listen to them. I got very good at it.

The rides began to pick up west of Des Moines, then got bad again as I neared the refugee camps bordering the China Strip. This was only five years after the disaster, remember, when the Omaha nuclear reactor melted down and a hot mass of uranium and plutonium began eating its way into the earth, headed for China, spreading a band of radioactivity six hundred kilometers downwind. Most of Kansas City, Missouri, was still living in plywood and sheet-metal shantytowns till the city was rendered habitable again.

The refugees were a tragic group. The initial solidarity people show after a great disaster had long since faded into the lethargy and disillusionment of the displaced person. Many of them would be in and out of hospitals for the rest of their lives. To make it worse, the local people hated them, feared them, would not associate with them. They were modern pariahs, unclean. Their children were shunned. Each camp had only a number to identify it, but the local populace called them all Geigertowns.

I made a long detour to Little Rock to avoid crossing the Strip, though it was safe now as long as you didn't linger. I was issued

a pariah's badge by the National Guard—a dosimeter—and wandered from one Geigertown to the next. The people were pitifully friendly once I made the first move, and I always slept indoors. The food was free at the community messes.

Once at Little Rock, I found that the aversion to picking up strangers—who might be tainted with "radiation disease"—dropped off, and I quickly moved across Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. I worked a little here and there, but many of the rides were long. What I saw of Texas was through a car window.

I was a little tired of that by the time I reached New Mexico. I decided to do some more walking. By then I was less interested in California than in the trip itself.

I left the roads and went cross-country where there were no fences to stop me. I found that it wasn't easy, even in New Mexico, to get far from signs of civilization.

Taos was the center, back in the '60's, of cultural experiments in alternative living. Many communes and cooperatives were set up in the surrounding hills during that time. Most of them fell apart in a few months or years, but a few survived. In later years, any group with a new theory of living and a yen to try it out seemed to gravitate to that part of New Mexico. As a result, the land was dotted with ramshackle windmills, solar heating panels, geodesic domes, group marriages, nudists, philosophers, theoreticians, messiahs, hermits, and more than a few just plain nuts.

Taos was great. I could drop into most of the communes and stay for a day or a week, eating organic rice and beans and drinking goat's milk. When I got tired of one, a few hours' walk in any direction would bring me to another. There, I might be offered a night of prayer and chanting or a ritualistic orgy. Some of the groups had spotless barns with automatic milkers for the herds of cows. Others didn't even have latrines; they just squatted. In some, the members dressed like nuns, or Quakers in early Pennsylvania. Elsewhere, they went nude and shaved all their body hair and painted themselves purple. There were all-male and all-female groups. I was urged to stay at most of the former; at the latter, the responses ranged from a bed for the night and good

conversation to being met at a barbed-wire fence with a shotgun.

I tried not to make judgments. These people were doing something important, all of them. They were testing ways whereby people didn't have to live in Chicago. That was a wonder to me. I had thought Chicago was inevitable, like diarrhea.

This is not to say they were all successful. Some made Chicago look like Shangri-La. There was one group who seemed to feel that getting back to nature consisted of sleeping in pigshit and eating food a buzzard wouldn't touch. Many were obviously doomed. They would leave behind a group of empty hovels and the memory of cholera.

So the place wasn't paradise, not by a long way. But there were successes. One or two had been there since '63 or '64 and were raising their third generation. I was disappointed to see that most of these were the ones that departed least from established norms of behavior, though some of the differences could be startling. I suppose the most radical experiments are the least likely to bear fruit.

I stayed through the winter. No one was surprised to see me a second time. It seems that many people came to Taos and shopped around. I seldom stayed more than three weeks at any one place, and always pulled my weight. I made many friends and picked up skills that would serve me if I stayed off the roads. I toyed with the idea of staying at one of them forever. When I couldn't make up my mind, I was advised that there was no hurry. I could go to California and return. They seemed sure I would.

So when spring came I headed west over the hills. I stayed off the roads and slept in the open. Many nights I would stay at another commune, until they finally began to get farther apart, then tapered off entirely. The country was not as pretty as before.

Then, three days' leisurely walking from the last commune, I came to a wall.

In 1964, in the United States, there was an epidemic of German measles, or rubella. Rubella is one of the mildest of infectious

diseases. The only time it's a problem is when a woman contracts it in the first four months of her pregnancy. It is passed to the fetus, which usually develops complications. These complications include deafness, blindness, and damage to the brain.

In 1964, in the old days before abortion became readily available, there was nothing to be done about it. Many pregnant women caught rubella and went to term. Five thousand deaf-blind children were born in one year. The normal yearly incidence of deaf-blind children in the United States is one hundred and forty.

In 1970 these five thousand potential Helen Kellers were all six years old. It was quickly seen that there was a shortage of Anne Sullivans. Previously, deaf-blind children could be sent to a small number of special institutions.

It was a problem. Not just anyone can cope with a deaf-blind child. You can't tell them to shut up when they moan; you can't reason with them, tell them that the moaning is driving you crazy. Some parents were driven to nervous breakdowns when they tried to keep their children at home.

Many of the five thousand were badly retarded and virtually impossible to reach, even if anyone had been trying. These ended up, for the most part, warehoused in the hundreds of anonymous nursing homes and institutes for "special" children. They were put into beds, cleaned up once a day by a few overworked nurses, and generally allowed the full blessings of liberty: they were allowed to rot freely in their own dark, quiet, private universes. Who can say if it was bad for them? None of them were heard to complain.

Many children with undamaged brains were shuffled in among the retarded because they were unable to tell anyone that they were in there behind the sightless eyes. They failed the batteries of tactile tests, unaware that their fates hung in the balance when they were asked to fit round pegs into round holes to the ticking of a clock they could not see or hear. As a result, they spent the rest of their lives in bed, and none of them complained, either. To protest, one must be aware of the possibility of something better. It helps to have a language, too.

Several hundred of the children were found to have IQ's within the normal range. There were news stories about them as they approached puberty and it was revealed that there were not enough good people to properly handle them. Money was spent, teachers were trained. The education expenditures would go on for a specified period of time, until the children were grown, then things would go back to normal and everyone could congratulate themselves on having dealt successfully with a tough problem.

And indeed, it did work fairly well. There are ways to reach and teach such children. They involve patience, love, and dedication, and the teachers brought all that to their jobs. All the graduates of the special schools left knowing how to speak with their hands. Some could talk. A few could write. Most of them left the institutions to live with parents or relatives, or, if neither was possible, received counseling and help in fitting themselves into society. The options were limited, but people can live rewarding lives under the most severe handicaps. Not everyone, but most of the graduates, were as happy with their lot as could reasonably be expected. Some achieved the almost saintly peace of their role model, Helen Keller. Others became bitter and withdrawn. A few had to be put in asylums, where they became indistinguishable from the others of their group who had spent the last twenty years there. But for the most part, they did well.

But among the group, as in any group, were some misfits. They tended to be among the brightest, the top ten percent in the IQ scores. This was not a reliable rule. Some had unremarkable test scores and were still infected with the hunger to do something, to change things, to rock the boat. With a group of five thousand, there were certain to be a few geniuses, a few artists, a few dreamers, hell-raisers, individualists, movers and shapers: a few glorious maniacs.

There was one among them who might have been President but for the fact that she was blind, deaf, and a woman. She was smart, but not one of the geniuses. She was a dreamer, a creative force, an innovator. It was she who dreamed of freedom. But she was not

a builder of fairy castles. Having dreamed it, she had to make it come true.

The wall was made of carefully fitted stone and was about five feet high. It was completely out of context with anything I had seen in New Mexico, though it was built of native rock. You just don't build that kind of wall out there. You use barbed wire if something needs fencing in, but many people still made use of the free range and brands. Somehow it seemed transplanted from New England.

It was substantial enough that I felt it would be unwise to crawl over it. I had crossed many wire fences in my travels and had not gotten in trouble for it yet, though I had some talks with some ranchers. Mostly they told me to keep moving, but didn't seem upset about it. This was different. I set out to walk around it. From the lay of the land, I couldn't tell how far it might reach, but I had time.

At the top of the next rise I saw that I didn't have far to go. The wall made a right-angle turn just ahead. I looked over it and could see some buildings. They were mostly domes, the ubiquitous structure thrown up by communes because of the combination of ease of construction and durability. There were sheep behind the wall, and a few cows. They grazed on grass so green I wanted to go over and roll in it. The wall enclosed a rectangle of green. Outside, where I stood, it was all scrub and sage. These people had access to Rio Grande irrigation water.

I rounded the corner and followed the wall west again.

I saw a man on horseback about the same time he spotted me. He was south of me, outside the wall, and he turned and rode in my direction.

He was a dark man with thick features, dressed in denim and boots with a gray battered stetson. Navaho, maybe. I don't know much about Indians, but I'd heard they were out here.

"Hello," I said when he'd stopped. He was looking me over. "Am I on your land?"

"Tribal land," he said. "Yeah, you're on it."

"I didn't see any signs."

He shrugged.

"It's okay, bud. You don't look like you out to rustle cattle." He grinned at me. His teeth were large and stained with tobacco. "You be camping out tonight?"

"Yes. How much farther does the, uh, tribal land go? Maybe I'll be out of it before tonight?"

He shook his head gravely. "Nah. You won't be off it tomorrow. 'S all right. You make a fire, you be careful, huh?" He grinned again and started to ride off.

"Hey, what is this place?" I gestured to the wall and he pulled his horse up and turned around again. It raised a lot of dust.

"Why you asking?" He looked a little suspicious.

"I dunno. Just curious. It doesn't look like the other places I've been to. This wall . . ."

He scowled. "Damn wall." Then he shrugged. I thought that was all he was going to say. Then he went on.

"These people, we look out for 'em, you hear? Maybe we don't go for what they're doin'. But they got it rough, you know?" He looked at me, expecting something. I never did get the knack of talking to these laconic Westerners. I always felt that I was making my sentences too long. They use a shorthand of grunts and shrugs and omitted parts of speech, and I always felt like a dude when I talked to them.

"Do they welcome guests?" I asked. "I thought I might see if I could spend the night."

He shrugged again, and it was a whole different gesture.

"Maybe. They all deaf and blind, you know?" And that was all the conversation he could take for the day. He made a clucking sound and galloped away.

I continued down the wall until I came to a dirt road that wound up the arroyo and entered the wall. There was a wooden gate, but it stood open. I wondered why they took all the trouble with the wall only to leave the gate like that. Then I noticed a circle of

narrow-gauge train tracks that came out of the gate, looped around outside it, and rejoined itself. There was a small siding that ran along the outer wall for a few yards.

I stood there a few moments. I don't know what entered into my decision. I think I was a little tired of sleeping out, and I was hungry for a home-cooked meal. The sun was getting closer to the horizon. The land to the west looked like more of the same. If the highway had been visible, I might have headed that way and hitched a ride. But I turned the other way and went through the gate.

I walked down the middle of the tracks. There was a wooden fence on each side of the road, built of horizontal planks, like a corral. Sheep grazed on one side of me. There was a Shetland sheepdog with them, and she raised her ears and followed me with her eyes as I passed, but did not come when I whistled.

It was about half a mile to the cluster of buildings ahead. There were four or five domes made of something translucent, like greenhouses, and several conventional square buildings. There were two windmills turning lazily in the breeze. There were several banks of solar water heaters. These are flat constructions of glass and wood, held off the ground so they can tilt to follow the sun. They were almost vertical now, intercepting the oblique rays of sunset. There were a few trees, what might have been an orchard.

About halfway there I passed under a wooden footbridge. It arched over the road, giving access from the east pasture to the west pasture. I wondered, What was wrong with a simple gate?

Then I saw something coming down the road in my direction. It was traveling on the tracks and it was very quiet. I stopped and waited.

It was a sort of converted mining engine, the sort that pulls loads of coal up from the bottom of shafts. It was battery-powered, and it had gotten quite close before I heard it. A small man was driving it. He was pulling a car behind him and singing as loud as he could with absolutely no sense of pitch.

He got closer and closer, moving about five miles per hour, one hand held out as if he was signaling a left turn. Suddenly I realized what was happening, as he was bearing down on me. He wasn't going to stop. He was counting fenceposts with his hand. I scrambled up the fence just in time. There wasn't more than six inches of clearance between the train and the fence on either side. His palm touched my leg as I squeezed close to the fence, and he stopped abruptly.

He leaped from the car and grabbed me and I thought I was in trouble. But he looked concerned, not angry, and felt me all over, trying to discover if I was hurt. I was embarrassed. Not from the examination; because I had been foolish. The Indian had said they were all deaf and blind but I guess I hadn't quite believed him.

He was flooded with relief when I managed to convey to him that I was all right. With eloquent gestures he made me understand that I was not to stay on the road. He indicated that I should climb over the fence and continue through the fields. He repeated himself several times to be sure I understood, then held on to me as I climbed over to assure himself that I was out of the way. He reached over the fence and held my shoulders, smiling at me. He pointed to the road and shook his head, then pointed to the buildings and nodded. He touched my head and smiled when I nodded. He climbed back onto the engine and started up, all the time nodding and pointing where he wanted me to go. Then he was off again.

I debated what to do. Most of me said to turn around, go back to the wall by way of the pasture and head back into the hills. These people probably wouldn't want me around. I doubted that I'd be able to talk to them, and they might even resent me. On the other hand, I was fascinated, as who wouldn't be? I wanted to see how they managed it. I still didn't believe that they were *all* deaf and blind. It didn't seem possible.

The Sheltie was sniffing at my pants. I looked down at her and she backed away, then daintily approached me as I held out my

open hand. She sniffed, then licked me. I patted her on the head, and she hustled back to her sheep.

I turned toward the buildings.

The first order of business was money.

None of the students knew much about it from experience, but the library was full of Braille books. They started reading.

One of the first things that became apparent was that when money was mentioned, lawyers were not far away. The students wrote letters. From the replies, they selected a lawyer and retained him.

They were in a school in Pennsylvania at the time. The original pupils of the special schools, five hundred in number, had been narrowed down to about seventy as people left to live with relatives or found other solutions to their special problems. Of those seventy, some had places to go but didn't want to go there; others had few alternatives. Their parents were either dead or not interested in living with them. So the seventy had been gathered from the schools around the country into this one, while ways to deal with them were worked out. The authorities had plans, but the students beat them to it.

Each of them had been entitled to a guaranteed annual income since 1980. They had been under the care of the government, so they had not received it. They sent their lawyer to court. He came back with a ruling that they could not collect. They appealed, and won. The money was paid retroactively, with interest, and came to a healthy sum. They thanked their lawyer and retained a real estate agent. Meanwhile, they read.

They read about communes in New Mexico, and instructed their agent to look for something out there. He made a deal for a tract to be leased in perpetuity from the Navaho nation. They read about the land, found that it would need a lot of water to be productive in the way they wanted it to be.

They divided into groups to research what they would need to be self-sufficient.

Water could be obtained by tapping into the canals that carried it from the reservoirs on the Rio Grande into the reclaimed land in the south. Federal money was available for the project through a labyrinthine scheme involving HEW, the Agriculture Department, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. They ended up paying little for their pipeline.

The land was arid. It would need fertilizer to be of use in raising sheep without resorting to open range techniques. The cost of fertilizer could be subsidized through the Rural Resettlement Program. After that, planting clover would enrich the soil with all the nitrates they could want.

There were techniques available to farm ecologically, without worrying about fertilizers or pesticides. Everything was recycled. Essentially, you put sunlight and water into one end and harvested wool, fish, vegetables, apples, honey, and eggs at the other end. You used nothing but the land, and replaced even that as you recycled your waste products back into the soil. They were not interested in agribusiness with huge combine harvesters and crop dusters. They didn't even want to turn a profit. They merely wanted sufficiency.

The details multiplied. Their leader, the one who had had the original idea and the drive to put it into action in the face of overwhelming obstacles, was a dynamo named Janet Reilly. Knowing nothing about the techniques generals and executives employ to achieve large objectives, she invented them herself and adapted them to the peculiar needs and limitations of her group. She assigned task forces to look into solutions of each aspect of their project: law, science, social planning, design, buying, logistics, construction. At any one time, she was the only person who knew everything about what was happening. She kept it all in her head, without notes of any kind.

It was in the area of social planning that she showed herself to be a visionary and not just a superb organizer. Her idea was not to make a place where they could lead a life that was a sightless, soundless imitation of their unafflicted peers. She wanted a whole

new start, a way of living that was by and for the deaf-blind, a way of living that accepted no convention just because that was the way it had always been done. She examined every human cultural institution from marriage to indecent exposure to see how it related to her needs and the needs of her friends. She was aware of the peril of this approach, but was undeterred. Her Social Task Force read about every variant group that had ever tried to make it on its own anywhere, and brought her reports about how and why they had failed or succeeded. She filtered this information through her own experiences to see how it would work for her unusual group with its own set of needs and goals.

The details were endless. They hired an architect to put their ideas into Braille blueprints. Gradually the plans evolved. They spent more money. The construction began, supervised on the site by their architect, who by now was so fascinated by the scheme that she donated her services. It was an important break, for they needed someone there whom they could trust. There is only so much that can be accomplished at such a distance.

When things were ready for them to move, they ran into bureaucratic trouble. They had anticipated it, but it was a setback. Social agencies charged with overseeing their welfare doubted the wisdom of the project. When it became apparent that no amount of reasoning was going to stop it, wheels were set in motion that resulted in a restraining order, issued for their own protection, preventing them from leaving the school. They were twenty-one years old by then, all of them, but were judged mentally incompetent to manage their own affairs. A hearing was scheduled.

Luckily, they still had access to their lawyer. He also had become infected with the crazy vision, and put on a great battle for them. He succeeded in getting a ruling concerning the rights of institutionalized persons, later upheld by the Supreme Court, which eventually had severe repercussions in state and county hospitals. Realizing the trouble they were already in regarding the thousands of patients in inadequate facilities across the country, the agencies gave in.

By then, it was the spring of 1986, one year after their target date. Some of their fertilizer had washed away already for lack of erosion-preventing clover. It was getting late to start crops, and they were running short of money. Nevertheless, they moved to New Mexico and began the backbreaking job of getting everything started. There were fifty-five of them, with nine children aged three months to six years.

I don't know what I expected. I remember that everything was a surprise, either because it was so normal or because it was so different. None of my idiot surmises about what such a place might be like proved to be true. And of course I didn't know the history of the place; I learned that later, picked up in bits and pieces.

I was surprised to see lights in some of the buildings. The first thing I had assumed was that they would have no need of them. That's an example of something so normal that it surprised me.

As to the differences, the first thing that caught my attention was the fence around the rail line. I had a personal interest in it, having almost been injured by it. I struggled to understand, as I must if I was to stay even for a night.

The wood fences that enclosed the rails on their way to the gate continued up to a barn, where the rails looped back on themselves in the same way they did outside the wall. The entire line was enclosed by the fence. The only access was a loading platform by the barn, and the gate to the outside. It made sense. The only way a deaf-blind person could operate a conveyance like that would be with assurances that there was no one on the track. These people would *never* go on the tracks; there was no way they could be warned of an approaching train.

There were people moving around me in the twilight as I made my way into the group of buildings. They took no notice of me, as I had expected. They moved fast; some of them were actually running. I stood still, eyes searching all around me so no one would come crashing into me. I had to figure out how they kept from crashing into each other before I got bolder.

I bent to the ground and examined it. The light was getting bad, but I saw immediately that there were concrete sidewalks criss-crossing the area. Each of the walks was etched with a different sort of pattern in grooves that had been made before the stuff set —lines, waves, depressions, patches of rough and smooth. I quickly saw that the people who were in a hurry moved only on those walkways, and they were all barefoot. It was no trick to see that it was some sort of traffic pattern read with the feet. I stood up. I didn't need to know how it worked. It was sufficient to know what it was and stay off the paths.

The people were unremarkable. Some of them were not dressed, but I was used to that by now. They came in all shapes and sizes, but all seemed to be about the same age except for the children. Except for the fact that they did not stop and talk or even wave as they approached each other, I would never have guessed they were blind. I watched them come to intersections in the pathways—I didn't know how they knew they were there, but could think of several ways—and slow down as they crossed. It was a marvelous system.

I began to think of approaching someone. I had been there for almost half an hour, an intruder. I guess I had a false sense of these people's vulnerability; I felt like a burglar.

I walked along beside a woman for a minute. She was very purposeful in her eyes-ahead stride, or seemed to be. She sensed something, maybe my footsteps. She slowed a little, and I touched her on the shoulder, not knowing what else to do. She stopped instantly and turned toward me. Her eyes were open but vacant. Her hands were all over me, lightly touching my face, my chest, my hands, fingering my clothing. There was no doubt in my mind that she knew me for a stranger, probably from the first tap on the shoulder. But she smiled warmly at me, and hugged me. Her hands were very delicate and warm. That's funny, because they were calloused from hard work. But they felt sensitive.

She made me to understand—by pointing to the building, making eating motions with an imaginary spoon, and touching a num-

ber on her watch—that supper was served in an hour, and that I was invited. I nodded and smiled beneath her hands; she kissed me on the cheek and hurried off.

Well. It hadn't been so bad. I had worried about my ability to communicate. Later I found out she learned a great deal more about me than I had known.

I put off going into the mess hall or whatever it was. I strolled around in the gathering darkness looking at their layout. I saw the little Sheltie bringing the sheep back to the fold for the night. She herded them expertly through the open gate without any instructions, and one of the residents closed it and locked them in. The man bent and scratched the dog on the head and got his hand licked. Her chores done for the night, the dog hurried over to me and sniffed my pant leg. She followed me around the rest of the evening.

Everyone seemed so busy that I was surprised to see one woman sitting on a rail fence, doing nothing. I went over to her.

Closer, I saw that she was younger than I had thought. She was thirteen, I learned later. She wasn't wearing any clothes. I touched her on the shoulder, and she jumped down from the fence and went through the same routine as the other woman had, touching me all over with no reserve. She took my hand and I felt her fingers moving rapidly in my palm. I couldn't understand it, but knew what it was. I shrugged, and tried out other gestures to indicate that I didn't speak hand talk. She nodded, still feeling my face with her hands.

She asked me if I was staying to dinner. I assured her that I was. She asked me if I was from a university. And if you think that's easy to ask with only body movements, try it. But she was so graceful and supple in her movements, so deft at getting her meaning across. It was beautiful to watch her. It was speech and ballet at the same time.

I told her I wasn't from a university, and launched into an attempt to tell her a little about what I was doing and how I got there. She listened to me with her hands, scratching her head

graphically when I failed to make my meanings clear. All the time the smile on her face got broader and broader, and she would laugh silently at my antics. All this while standing very close to me, touching me. At last she put her hands on her hips.

"I guess you need the practice," she said, "but if it's all the same to you, could we talk mouthtalk for now? You're cracking me up."

I jumped as if stung by a bee. The touching, while something I could ignore for a deaf-blind girl, suddenly seemed out of place. I stepped back a little, but her hands returned to me. She looked puzzled, then read the problem with her hands.

"I'm sorry," she said. "You thought I was deaf and blind. If I'd known I would have told you right off."

"I thought everyone here was."

"Just the parents. I'm one of the children. We all hear and see quite well. Don't be so nervous. If you can't stand touching, you're not going to like it here. Relax, I won't hurt you." And she kept her hands moving over me, mostly my face. I didn't understand it at the time, but it didn't seem sexual. Turned out I was wrong, but it wasn't blatant.

"You'll need me to show you the ropes," she said, and started for the domes. She held my hand and walked close to me. Her other hand kept moving to my face every time I talked.

"Number one, stay off the concrete paths. That's where—"

"I already figured that out."

"You did? How long have you been here?" Her hands searched my face with renewed interest. It was quite dark.

"Less than an hour. I was almost run over by your train."

She laughed, then apologized and said she knew it wasn't funny to me.

I told her it *was* funny to me now, though it hadn't been at the time. She said there was a warning sign on the gate, but I had been unlucky enough to come when the gate was open—they opened it by remote control before a train started up—and I hadn't seen it.

"What's your name?" I asked her as we neared the soft yellow lights coming from the dining room.

Her hand worked reflexively in mine, then stopped. "Oh, I don't know. I *have* one; several, in fact. But they're in bodytalk. I'm . . . Pink. It translates as Pink, I guess."

There was a story behind it. She had been the first child born to the school students. They knew that babies were described as being pink, so they called her that. She felt pink to them. As we entered the hall, I could see that her name was visually inaccurate. One of her parents had been black. She was dark, with blue eyes and curly hair lighter than her skin. She had a broad nose, but small lips.

She didn't ask my name, so I didn't offer it. No one asked my name, in speech, the entire time I was there. They called me many things in bodytalk, and when the children called me it was "Hey, you!" They weren't big on spoken words.

The dining hall was in a rectangular building made of brick. It connected to one of the large domes. It was dimly lighted. I later learned that the lights were for me alone. The children didn't need them for anything but reading. I held Pink's hand, glad to have a guide. I kept my eyes and ears open.

"We're informal," Pink said. Her voice was embarrassingly loud in the large room. No one else was talking at all; there were just the sounds of movement and breathing. Several of the children looked up. "I won't introduce you around now. Just feel like part of the family. People will feel you later, and you can talk to them. You can take your clothes off here at the door."

I had no trouble with that. Everyone else was nude, and I could easily adjust to household customs by that time. You take your shoes off in Japan, you take your clothes off in Taos. What's the difference?

Well, quite a bit, actually. There was all the touching that went on. Everybody touched everybody else, as routinely as glancing. Everyone touched my face first, then went on with what seemed like total innocence to touch me everywhere else. As usual, it was not quite what it seemed. It was *not* innocent, and it was not the usual treatment they gave others in their group. They touched

each other's genitals a lot *more* than they touched mine. They were holding back with me so I wouldn't be frightened. They were very polite with strangers.

There was a long, low table, with everyone sitting on the floor around it. Pink led me to it.

"See the bare strips on the floor? Stay out of them. Don't leave anything in them. That's where people walk. Don't *ever* move anything. Furniture, I mean. That has to be decided at full meetings, so we'll all know where everything is. Small things, too. If you pick up something, put it back exactly where you found it."

"I understand."

People were bringing bowls and platters of food from the adjoining kitchen. They set them on the table, and the diners began feeling them. They ate with their fingers, without plates, and they did it slowly and lovingly. They smelled things for a long time before they took a bite. Eating was very sensual to these people.

They were *terrific* cooks. I have never, before or since, eaten as well as I did at Keller. (That's my name for it, in speech, though their bodytalk name was something very like that. When I called it Keller, everyone knew what I was talking about.) They started off with good, fresh produce, something that's hard enough to find in the cities, and went at the cooking with artistry and imagination. It wasn't like any national style I've eaten. They improvised, and seldom cooked the same thing the same way twice.

I sat between Pink and the fellow who had almost run me down earlier. I stuffed myself disgracefully. It was too far removed from beef jerky and the organic dry cardboard I had been eating for me to be able to resist. I lingered over it, but still finished long before anyone else. I watched them as I sat back carefully and wondered if I'd be sick. (I wasn't, thank God.) They fed themselves and each other, sometimes getting up and going clear around the table to offer a choice morsel to a friend on the other side. I was fed in this way by all too many of them, and nearly popped until I learned a pidgin phrase in handtalk, saying I was full to the brim. I learned

from Pink that a friendlier wa
myself.

Eventually I had nothing to
others. I began to be more ob
eating in solitude, but soon
flowing around the table. Hand
to see. They were spelling into
arms, bellies; any part of the b
ripple of laughter spread like fa
table to the other as some witt
was *fast.* Looking carefully, I
reaching one person, passed o
direction and was in turn passe
along the line and bouncing b
form, like water.

It was messy. Let's face it; ea
with your hands is going to get
minded. *I* certainly didn't. I w
talked to me, but I knew I was f
These people were friendly an
nothing about it. We couldn't

Afterwards, we all trooped
and took a shower beneath a se
water. I told Pink I'd like to he
just be in the way. I couldn't
learned their very specific ways
assuming already that I'd be a

Back into the building to dry
puppy dog friendliness, making

dome. It wasn't hard to follow, but I still tended to keep my arms and legs pulled in close so I wouldn't trip someone by sprawling into a walk space.

My misconceptions got me again. There was no sound but the soft whisper of flesh against flesh, so I thought I was in the middle of an orgy. I had been at them before, in other communes, and they looked pretty much like this. I quickly saw that I was wrong, and only later found out I had been right. In a sense.

What threw my evaluations out of whack was the simple fact that group conversation among these people *had* to look like an orgy. The much subtler observation that I made later was that with a hundred naked bodies sliding, rubbing, kissing, caressing, all at the same time, what was the point in making a distinction? There was no distinction.

I have to say that I use the noun "orgy" only to get across a general idea of many people in close contact. I don't like the word, it is too ripe with connotations. But I had these connotations myself at the time, so I was relieved to see that it was not an orgy. The ones I had been to had been tedious and impersonal, and I had hoped for better from these people.

Many wormed their way through the crush to get to me and meet me. Never more than one at a time; they were constantly aware of what was going on and were waiting their turn to talk to me. Naturally, I didn't know it then. Pink sat with me to interpret the hard thoughts. I eventually used her words less and less, getting into the spirit of tactile seeing and understanding. No one felt they really knew me until they had touched every part of my body, so there were hands on me all the time. I timidly did the same.

What with all the touching, I quickly got an erection, which embarrassed me quite a bit. I was berating myself for being unable to keep sexual responses out of it, for not being able to operate on the same intellectual plane I thought they were on, when I realized with some shock that the couple next to me was making love. They had been doing it for the last ten minutes, actually, and it had

seemed such a natural part of what was happening that I had known it and not known it at the same time.

No sooner had I realized it than I suddenly wondered if I was right. *Were they?* It was very slow and the light was bad. But her legs were up, and he was on top of her, that much I was sure of. It was foolish of me, but I really had to know. I had to find out *what the hell I was in.* How could I give the proper social responses if I didn't know the situation?

I was very sensitive to polite behavior after my months at the various communes. I had become adept at saying prayers before supper in one place, chanting Hare Krishna at another, and going happily nudist at still another. It's called "when in Rome," and if you can't adapt to it you shouldn't go visiting. I would kneel to Mecca, burp after my meals, toast anything that was proposed, eat organic rice and compliment the cook; but to do it right, you have to know the customs. I had thought I knew them, but had changed my mind three times in as many minutes.

They *were* making love, in the sense that he was penetrating her. They were also deeply involved with each other. Their hands fluttered like butterflies all over each other, filled with meanings I couldn't see or feel. But they were being touched by and were touching many other people around them. They were talking to all these people, even if the message was as simple as a pat on the forehead or arm.

Pink noticed where my attention was. She was sort of wound around me, without really doing anything I would have thought of as provocative. I just couldn't *decide.* It seemed so innocent, and yet it wasn't.

"That's (—) and (—)," she said, the parentheses indicating a series of hand motions against my palm. I never learned a sound word as a name for any of them but Pink, and I can't reproduce the bodytalk names they had. Pink reached over, touched the woman with her foot, and did some complicated business with her toes. The woman smiled and grabbed Pink's foot, her fingers moving.

"(—) would like to talk with you later," Pink told me. "Right after she's through talking to (—). You met her earlier, remember? She says she likes your hands."

Now this is going to sound crazy, I know. It sounded pretty crazy to me when I thought of it. It dawned on me with a sort of revelation that her word for talk and mine were miles apart. Talk, to her, meant a complex interchange involving all parts of the body. She could read words or emotions in every twitch of my muscles, like a lie detector. Sound, to her, was only a minor part of communication. It was something she used to speak to outsiders. Pink talked with her whole being.

I didn't have the half of it, even then, but it was enough to turn my head entirely around in relation to these people. They talked with their bodies. It wasn't all hands, as I'd thought. Any part of the body in contact with any other was communication, sometimes a very simple and basic sort—think of McLuhan's light bulb as the basic medium of information—perhaps saying no more than "I am here." But talk was talk, and if conversation evolved to the point where you needed to talk to another with your genitals, it was still a part of the conversation. What I wanted to know was *what were they saying?* I knew, even at that dim moment of realization, that it was much more than I could grasp. Sure, you're saying. You know about talking to your lover with your body as you make love. That's not such a new idea. Of course it isn't, but think how wonderful that talk is even when you're not primarily tactile-oriented. Can you carry the thought from there, or are you doomed to be an earthworm thinking about sunsets?

While this was happening to me, there was a woman getting acquainted with my body. Her hands were on me, in my lap, when I felt myself ejaculating. It was a big surprise to me, but to no one else. I had been telling everyone around me for many minutes, through signs they could feel with their hands, that it was going to happen. Instantly, hands were all over my body. I could almost understand them as they spelled tender thoughts to me. I got the gist, anyway, if not the words. I was terribly embarrassed for only

a moment, then it passed away in the face of the easy acceptance. It was very intense. For a long time I couldn't get my breath.

The woman who had been the cause of it touched my lips with her fingers. She moved them slowly, but meaningfully I was sure. Then she melted back into the group.

"What did she say?" I asked Pink.

She smiled at me. "You know, of course. If you'd only cut loose from your verbalizing. But, generally, she meant 'How nice for you.' It also translates as 'How nice for me.' And 'me,' in this sense, means all of us. The organism."

I knew I had to stay and learn to speak.

The commune had its ups and downs. They had expected them, in general, but had not known what shape they might take.

Winter killed many of their fruit trees. They replaced them with hybrid strains. They lost more fertilizer and soil in windstorms because the clover had not had time to anchor it down. Their schedule had been thrown off by the court actions, and they didn't really get things settled in a groove for more than a year.

Their fish all died. They used the bodies for fertilizer and looked into what might have gone wrong. They were using a three-stage ecology of the type pioneered by the New Alchemists in the seventies. It consisted of three domed ponds: one containing fish, another with crushed shells and bacteria in one section and algae in another, and a third full of daphnids. The water containing fish waste from the first pond was pumped through the shells and bacteria, which detoxified it and converted the ammonia it contained into fertilizer for the algae. The algae water was pumped into the second pond to feed the daphnids. Then daphnids and algae were pumped to the fish pond as food and the enriched water was used to fertilize greenhouse plants in all of the domes.

They tested the water and the soil and found that chemicals were being leached from impurities in the shells and concentrated down the food chain. After a thorough cleanup, they restarted and all went well. But they had lost their first cash crop.

They never went hungry. Nor were they cold; there was plenty of sunlight year-round to power the pumps and the food cycle and to heat their living quarters. They had built their buildings half-buried with an eye to the heating and cooling powers of convective currents. But they had to spend some of their capital. The first year they showed a loss.

One of their buildings caught fire during the first winter. Two men and a small girl were killed when a sprinkler system malfunctioned. This was a shock to them. They had thought things would operate as advertised. None of them knew much about the building trades, about estimates as opposed to realities. They found that several of their installations were not up to specifications, and instituted a program of periodic checks on everything. They learned to strip down and repair anything on the farm. If something contained electronics too complex for them to cope with, they tore it out and installed something simpler.

Socially, their progress had been much more encouraging. Janet had wisely decided that there would be only two hard and fast objectives in the realm of their relationships. The first was that she refused to be their president, chairwoman, chief, or supreme commander. She had seen from the start that a driving personality was needed to get the planning done and the land bought and a sense of purpose fostered from their formless desire for an alternative. But once at the promised land, she abdicated. From that point they would operate as a democratic communism. If that failed, they would adopt a new approach. Anything but a dictatorship with her at the head. She wanted no part of that.

The second principle was to accept nothing. There had never been a deaf-blind community operating on its own. They had no expectations to satisfy, they did not need to live as the sighted did. They were alone. There was no one to tell them not to do something simply because it was not done.

They had no clearer idea of what their society would be than anyone else. They had been forced into a mold that was not relevant to their needs, but beyond that they didn't know. They would

search out the behavior that made sense, the moral things for deaf-blind people to do. They understood the basic principles of morals: that nothing is moral always, and anything is moral under the right circumstances. It all had to do with social context. They were starting from a blank slate, with no models to follow.

By the end of the second year they had their context. They continually modified it, but the basic pattern was set. They knew themselves and what they were as they had never been able to do at the school. They defined themselves in their own terms.

I spent my first day at Keller in school. It was the obvious and necessary step. I had to learn handtalk.

Pink was kind and very patient. I learned the basic alphabet and practiced hard at it. By the afternoon she was refusing to talk to me, forcing me to speak with my hands. She would speak only when pressed hard, and eventually not at all. I scarcely spoke a single word after the third day.

This is not to say that I was suddenly fluent. Not at all. At the end of the first day I knew the alphabet and could laboriously make myself understood. I was not so good at reading words spelled into my own palm. For a long time I had to look at the hand to see what was spelled. But like any language, eventually you think in it. I speak fluent French, and I can recall my amazement when I finally reached the point where I wasn't translating my thoughts before I spoke. I reached it at Keller in about two weeks.

I remember one of the last things I asked Pink in speech. It was something that was worrying me.

"Pink, am I welcome here?"

"You've been here three days. Do you feel rejected?"

"No, it's not that. I guess I just need to hear your policy about outsiders. How *long* am I welcome?"

She wrinkled her brow. It was evidently a new question.

"Well, practically speaking, until a majority of us decide we want you to go. But that's never happened. No one's stayed here much longer than a few days. We've never had to evolve a policy

about what to do, for instance, if someone who sees and hears wants to join us. No one has, so far, but I guess it could happen. My guess is that they wouldn't accept it. They're very independent and jealous of their freedom, though you might not have noticed it. I don't think you could ever be one of them. But as long as you're willing to think of yourself as a guest, you could probably stay for twenty years."

"You said 'they.' Don't you include yourself in the group?"

For the first time she looked a little uneasy. I wish I had been better at reading body language at the time. I think my hands could have told me volumes about what she was thinking.

"Sure," she said. "The children are part of the group. We like it. I sure wouldn't want to be anywhere else, from what I know of the outside."

"I don't blame you." There were things left unsaid here, but I didn't know enough to ask the right questions. "But it's never a problem, being able to see when none of your parents can? They don't . . . resent you in any way?"

This time she laughed. "Oh, no. Never that. They're much too independent for that. You've seen it. They don't *need* us for anything they can't do themselves. We're part of the family. We do exactly the same things they do. And it really doesn't matter. Sight, I mean. Hearing, either. Just look around you. Do I have any special advantages because I can see where I'm going?"

I had to admit that she didn't. But there was still the hint of something she wasn't saying to me.

"I know what's bothering you. About staying here." She had to draw me back to my original question; I had been wandering.

"What's that?"

"You don't feel a part of the daily life. You're not doing your share of the chores. You're very conscientious and you want to do your part. I can tell."

She read me right, as usual, and I admitted it.

"And you won't be able to until you can talk to everybody.

So let's get back to your lessons. Your fingers are still very sloppy."

There was a lot of work to be done. The first thing I had to learn was to slow down. They were slow and methodical workers, made few mistakes, and didn't care if a job took all day so long as it was done well. When I was working by myself I didn't have to worry about it: sweeping, picking applies, weeding in the gardens. But when I was on a job that required teamwork I had to learn a whole new pace. Eyesight enables a person to do many aspects of a job at once with a few quick glances. A blind person will take each aspect of the job in turn if the job is spread out. Everything has to be verified by touch. At a bench job, though, they could be much faster than I. They could make me feel as though I was working with my toes instead of fingers.

I never suggested that I could make anything quicker by virtue of my sight or hearing. They quite rightly would have told me to mind my own business. Accepting sighted help was the first step to dependence, and after all, they would still be here with the same jobs to do after I was gone.

And that got me to thinking about the children again. I began to be positive that there was an undercurrent of resentment, maybe unconscious, between the parents and children. It was obvious that there was a great deal of love between them, but how could the children fail to resent the rejection of their talent? So my reasoning went, anyway.

I quickly fit myself into the routine. I was treated no better or worse than anyone else, which gratified me. Though I would never become part of the group, even if I should desire it, there was absolutely no indication that I was anything but a full member. That's just how they treated guests: as they would one of their own number.

Life was fulfilling out there in a way it has never been in the cities. It wasn't unique to Keller, this pastoral peace, but the people there had it in generous helpings. The earth beneath your bare feet is something you can never feel in a city park.

Daily life was busy and satisfying. There were chickens and hogs to feed, bees and sheep to care for, fish to harvest, and cows to milk. Everybody worked: men, women, and children. It all seemed to fit together without any apparent effort. Everybody seemed to know what to do when it needed doing. You could think of it as a well-oiled machine, but I never liked that metaphor, especially for people. I thought of it as an organism. Any social group is, but this one *worked.* Most of the other communes I'd visited had glaring flaws. Things would not get done because everyone was too stoned or couldn't be bothered or didn't see the necessity of doing it in the first place. That sort of ignorance leads to typhus and soil erosion and people freezing to death and invasions of social workers who take your children away. I'd seen it happen.

Not here. They had a good picture of the world as it is, not the rosy misconceptions so many other utopians labor under. They did the jobs that needed doing.

I could never detail all the nuts and bolts (there's that machine metaphor again) of how the place worked. The fish-cycle ponds alone were complicated enough to overawe me. I killed a spider in one of the greenhouses, then found out it had been put there to eat a specific set of plant predators. Same for the frogs. There were insects in the water to kill other insects; it got to a point where I was afraid to swat a mayfly without prior okay.

As the days went by I was told some of the history of the place. Mistakes had been made, though surprisingly few. One had been in the area of defense. They had made no provision for it at first, not knowing much about the brutality and random violence that reaches even to the out-of-the-way corners. Guns were the logical and preferred choice out here, but were beyond their capabilities.

One night a carload of men who had had too much to drink showed up. They had heard of the place in town. They stayed for two days, cutting the phone lines and raping many of the women.

The people discussed all the options after the invasion was over, and settled on the organic one. They bought five German shepherds. Not the psychotic wretches that are marketed under the

description of "attack dogs," but specially trained ones from a firm recommended by the Albuquerque police. They were trained as both Seeing-Eye and police dogs. They were perfectly harmless until an outsider showed overt aggression, then they were trained, not to disarm, but to go for the throat.

It worked, like most of their solutions. The second invasion resulted in two dead and three badly injured, all on the other side. As a backup in case of a concerted attack, they hired an ex-marine to teach them the fundamentals of close-in dirty fighting. These were not dewy-eyed flower children.

There were three superb meals a day. And there was leisure time, too. It was not all work. There was time to take a friend out and sit in the grass under a tree, usually around sunset, just before the big dinner. There was time for someone to stop working for a few minutes, to share some special treasure. I remember being taken by the hand by one woman—whom I must call Tall-one-with-green-eyes—to a spot where mushrooms were growing in the cool crawl space beneath the barn. We wriggled under until our faces were buried in the patch, picked a few, and smelled them. She showed me how to smell. I would have thought a few weeks before that we had ruined their beauty, but after all it was only visual. I was already beginning to discount that sense, which is so removed from the essence of an object. She showed me that they were still beautiful to touch and smell after we had apparently destroyed them. Then she was off to the kitchen with the pick of the bunch in her apron. They tasted all the better that night.

And a man—I will call him Baldy—who brought me a plank he and one of the women had been planing in the woodshop. I touched its smoothness and smelled it and agreed with him how good it was.

And after the evening meal, the Together.

During my third week there I had an indication of my status with the group. It was the first real test of whether I meant any-

thing to them. Anything special, I mean. I wanted to see them as my friends, and I suppose I was a little upset to think that just anyone who wandered in here would be treated the way I was. It was childish and unfair to them, and I wasn't even aware of the discontent until later.

I had been hauling water in a bucket into the field where a seedling tree was being planted. There was a hose for that purpose, but it was in use on the other side of the village. This tree was not in reach of the automatic sprinklers and it was drying out. I had been carrying water to it until another solution was found.

It was hot, around noon. I got the water from a standing spigot near the forge. I set the bucket down on the ground behind me and leaned my head into the flow of water. I was wearing a shirt made of cotton, unbuttoned in the front. The water felt good running through my hair and soaking into the shirt. I let it go on for almost a minute.

There was a crash behind me and I bumped my head when I raised it up too quickly under the faucet. I turned and saw a woman sprawled on her face in the dust. She was turning over slowly, holding her knee. I realized with a sinking feeling that she had tripped over the bucket I had carelessly left on the concrete express lane. Think of it: ambling along on ground that you trust to be free of all obstruction, suddenly you're sitting on the ground. Their system would only work with trust, and it had to be total; everybody had to be responsible all the time. I had been accepted into that trust and I had blown it. I felt sick.

She had a nasty scrape on her left knee that was oozing blood. She felt it with her hands, sitting there on the ground, and she began to howl. It was weird, painful. Tears came from her eyes, then she pounded her fists on the ground, going "Hunnnh, hunnnh, *hunnnh!*" with each blow. She was angry, and she had every right to be.

She found the pail as I hesitantly reached out for her. She grabbed my hand and followed it up to my face. She felt my face,

crying all the time, then wiped her nose and got up. She started off for one of the buildings. She limped slightly.

I sat down and felt miserable. I didn't know what to do.

One of the men came out to get me. It was Big Man. I called him that because he was the tallest person at Keller. He wasn't any sort of policeman, I found out later; he was just the first one the injured woman had met. He took my hand and felt my face. I saw tears start when he felt the emotions there. He asked me to come inside with him.

An impromptu panel had been convened. Call it a jury. It was made up of anyone who was handy, including a few children. There were ten or twelve of them. Everyone looked very sad. The woman I had hurt was there, being consoled by three or four people. I'll call her Scar, for the prominent mark on her upper arm.

Everybody kept telling me—in handtalk, you understand—how sorry they were for me. They petted and stroked me, trying to draw some of the misery away.

Pink came racing in. She had been sent for to act as a translator if needed. Since this was a formal proceeding it was necessary that they be sure I understood everything that happened. She went to Scar and cried with her for a bit, then came to me and embraced me fiercely, telling me with her hands how sorry she was that this had happened. I was already figuratively packing my bags. Nothing seemed to be left but the formality of expelling me.

Then we all sat together on the floor. We were close, touching on all sides. The hearing began.

Most of it was in handtalk, with Pink throwing in a few words here and there. I seldom knew who said what, but that was appropriate. It was the group speaking as one. No statement reached me without already having become a consensus.

"You are accused of having violated the rules," said the group, "and of having been the cause of an injury to (the one I called Scar). Do you dispute this? Is there any fact that we should know?"

"No," I told them. "I was responsible. It was my carelessness."

"We understand. We sympathize with you in your remorse, which is evident to all of us. But carelessness is a violation. Do you understand this? This is the offense for which you are (—)." It was a set of signals in shorthand.

"What was that?" I asked Pink.

"Uh . . . 'brought before us'? 'Standing trial'?" She shrugged, not happy with either interpretation.

"Yes. I understand."

"The facts not being in question, it is agreed that you are guilty." (" 'Responsible,' " Pink whispered in my ear.) "Withdraw from us a moment while we come to a decision."

I got up and stood by the wall, not wanting to look at them as the debate went back and forth through the joined hands. There was a burning lump in my throat that I could not swallow. Then I was asked to rejoin the circle.

"The penalty for your offense is set by custom. If it were not so, we would wish we could rule otherwise. You now have the choice of accepting the punishment designated and having the offense wiped away, or of refusing our jurisdiction and withdrawing your body from our land. What is your choice?"

I had Pink repeat this to me, because it was so important that I know what was being offered. When I was sure I had read it right, I accepted their punishment without hesitation. I was very grateful to have been given an alternative.

"Very well. You have elected to be treated as we would treat one of our own who had done the same act. Come to us."

Everyone drew in closer. I was not told what was going to happen. I was drawn in and nudged gently from all directions.

Scar was sitting with her legs crossed more or less in the center of the group. She was crying again, and so was I, I think. It's hard to remember. I ended up face down across her lap. She spanked me.

I never once thought of it as improbable or strange. It flowed naturally out of the situation. Everyone was holding on to me and caressing me, spelling assurances into my palms and legs and neck

and cheeks. We were all crying. It was a difficult thing that had to be faced by the whole group. Others drifted in and joined us. I understood that this punishment came from everyone there, but only the offended person, Scar, did the actual spanking. That was one of the ways I had wronged her, beyond the fact of giving her a scraped knee. I had laid on her the obligation of disciplining me and that was why she had sobbed so loudly, not from the pain of her injury, but from the pain of knowing she would have to hurt me.

Pink later told me that Scar had been the staunchest advocate of giving me the option to stay. Some had wanted to expel me outright, but she paid me the compliment of thinking I was a good enough person to be worth putting herself and me through the ordeal. If you can't understand that, you haven't grasped the feeling of community I felt among these people.

It went on for a long time. It was very painful, but not cruel. Nor was it primarily humiliating. There was some of that, of course. But it was essentially a practical lesson taught in the most direct terms. Each of them had undergone it during the first months, but none recently. You *learned* from it, believe me.

I did a lot of thinking about it afterward. I tried to think of what else they might have done. Spanking grown people is really unheard of, you know, though that didn't occur to me until long after it had happened. It seemed so natural when it was going on that the thought couldn't even enter my mind that this was a weird situation to be in.

They did something like this with the children, but not as long or as hard. Responsibility was lighter for the younger ones. The adults were willing to put up with an occasional bruise or scraped knee while the children learned.

But when you reached what they thought of as adulthood—which was whenever a majority of the adults thought you had or when you assumed the privilege yourself—that's when the spanking really got serious.

They had a harsher punishment, reserved for repeated or mali-

cious offenses. They had not had to invoke it often. It consisted of being sent to Coventry. No one would touch you for a specified period of time. By the time I heard of it, it sounded like a very tough penalty. I didn't need it explained to me.

I don't know how to explain it, but the spanking was administered in such a loving way that I didn't feel violated. *This hurts me as much as it hurts you. I'm doing this for your own good. I love you, that's why I'm spanking you.* They made me understand those old clichés by their actions.

When it was over, we all cried together. But it soon turned to happiness. I embraced Scar and we told each other how sorry we were that it had happened. We talked to each other—made love if you like—and I kissed her knee and helped her dress it.

We spent the rest of the day together, easing the pain.

As I became more fluent in handtalk, "the scales fell from my eyes." Daily, I would discover a new layer of meaning that had eluded me before; it was like peeling the skin of an onion to find a new skin beneath it. Each time I thought I was at the core, only to find that there was another layer I could not yet see.

I had thought that learning handtalk was the key to communication with them. Not so. Handtalk was baby talk. For a long time I was a baby who could not even say goo-goo clearly. Imagine my surprise when, having learned to say it, I found that there were syntax, conjunctions, parts of speech, nouns, verbs, tense, agreement, and the subjunctive mood. I was wading in a tide pool at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.

By handtalk I mean the International Manual Alphabet. Anyone can learn it in a few hours or days. But when you talk to someone in speech, do you spell each word? Do you read each letter as you read this? No, you grasp words as entities, hear groups of sounds and see groups of letters as a gestalt full of meaning.

Everyone at Keller had an absorbing interest in language. They each knew several languages—spoken languages—and could read and spell them fluently.

While still children they had understood the fact that handtalk was a way for deaf-blind people to talk to *outsiders.* Among themselves it was much too cumbersome. It was like Morse Code: useful when you're limited to on-off modes of information transmission, but not the preferred mode. Their ways of speaking to each other were much closer to our type of written or verbal communication, and—dare I say it?—better.

I discovered this slowly, first by seeing that though I could spell rapidly with my hands, it took *much* longer for me to say something than it took anyone else. It could not be explained by differences in dexterity. So I asked to be taught their shorthand speech. I plunged in, this time taught by everyone, not just Pink.

It was hard. They could say any word in any language with no more than two moving hand positions. I knew this was a project for years, not days. You learn the alphabet and you have all the tools you need to spell any word that exists. That's the great advantage in having your written and spoken speech based on the same set of symbols. Shorthand was not like that at all. It partook of none of the linearity or commonality of handtalk; it was not code for English or any other language; it did not share construction or vocabulary with any other language. It was wholly constructed by the Kellerites according to their needs. Each word was something I had to learn and memorize separately from the handtalk spelling.

For months I sat in the Togethers after dinner saying things like "Me love Scar much much well," while waves of conversation ebbed and flowed and circled around me, touching me only at the edges. But I kept at it, and the children were endlessly patient with me. I improved gradually. Understand that the rest of the conversations I will relate took place in either handtalk or shorthand, limited to various degrees by my fluency. I did not speak nor was I spoken to orally from the day of my punishment.

I was having a lesson in bodytalk from Pink. Yes, we were making love. It had taken me a few weeks to see that she was a sexual being, that her caresses, which I had persisted in seeing as inno-

cent—as I had defined it at the time—both were and weren't innocent. She understood it as perfectly natural that the result of her talking to my penis with her hands might be another sort of conversation. Though still in the middle flush of puberty, she was regarded by all as an adult and I accepted her as such. It was cultural conditioning that had blinded me to what she was saying.

So we talked a lot. With her, I understood the words and music of the body better than with anyone else. She sang a very uninhibited song with her hips and hands, free of guilt, open and fresh with discovery in every note she touched.

"You haven't told me much about yourself," she said. "What did you do on the outside?" I don't want to give the impression that this speech was in sentences, as I have presented it. We were bodytalking, sweating and smelling each other. The message came through from hands, feet, mouth.

I got as far as the sign for pronoun, first person singular, and was stopped.

How could I tell her of my life in Chicago? Should I speak of my early ambition to be a writer, and how that didn't work out? And why hadn't it? Lack of talent, or lack of drive? I could tell her about my profession, which was meaningless shuffling of papers when you got down to it, useless to anything but the Gross National Product. I could talk of the economic ups and downs that had brought me to Keller when nothing else could dislodge me from my easy sliding through life. Or the loneliness of being forty-seven years old and never having found someone worth loving, never having been loved in return. Of being a permanently displaced person in a stainless-steel society. One-night stands, drinking binges, nine-to-five, Chicago Transit Authority, dark movie houses, football games on television, sleeping pills, the John Hancock Tower where the windows won't open so you can't breathe the smog or jump out. That was me, wasn't it?

"I see," she said.

"I travel around," I said, and suddenly realized that it was the truth.

"I see," she repeated. It was a different sign for the same thing.

Context was everything. She had heard and understood both parts of me, knew one to be what I had been, the other to be what I hoped I was.

She lay on top of me, one hand lightly on my face to catch the quick interplay of emotions as I thought about my life for the first time in years. And she laughed and nipped my ear playfully when my face told her that for the first time I could remember, I was happy about it. Not just telling myself I was happy, but truly happy. You cannot lie in bodytalk any more than your sweat glands can lie to a polygraph.

I noticed that the room was unusually empty. Asking around in my fumbling way, I learned that only the children were there.

"Where is everybody?" I asked.

"They are all out ***," she said. It was like that: three sharp slaps on the chest with the fingers spread. Along with the finger configuration for "verb form, gerund," it meant that they were all out ***ing. Needless to say, it didn't tell me much.

What did tell me something was her bodytalk as she said it. I read her better than I ever had. She was upset and sad. Her body said something like "Why can't I join them? Why can't I (smell-taste-touch-hear-see) *sense* with them?" That is exactly what she said. Again, I didn't trust my understanding enough to accept that interpretation. I was still trying to force my conceptions on the things I experienced there. I was determined that she and the other children be resentful of their parents in some way, because I was sure they had to be. They *must* feel superior in some way, they *must* feel held back.

I found the adults, after a short search of the area, out in the north pasture. All the parents, none of the children. They were standing in a group with no apparent pattern. It wasn't a circle, but it was almost round. If there was any organization, it was in the fact that everybody was about the same distance from everybody else.

The German shepherds and the Sheltie were out there, sitting

on the cool grass facing the group of people. Their ears were perked up, but they were not moving.

I started to go up to the people. I stopped when I became aware of the concentration. They were touching, but their hands were not moving. The silence of seeing all those permanently moving people standing that still was deafening to me.

I watched them for at least an hour. I sat with the dogs and scratched them behind the ears. They did that choplicking thing that dogs do when they appreciate it, but their full attention was on the group.

It gradually dawned on me that the group was moving. It was very slow, just a step here and another there, over many minutes. It was expanding in such a way that the distance between any of the individuals was the same. Like the expanding universe, where all galaxies move away from all others. Their arms were extended now; they were touching only with fingertips, in a crystal lattice arrangement.

Finally they were not touching at all. I saw their fingers straining to cover distances that were too far to bridge. And still they expanded equilaterally. One of the shepherds began to whimper a little. I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up. Chilly out here, I thought.

I closed my eyes, suddenly sleepy.

I opened them, shocked. Then I forced them shut. Crickets were chirping in the grass around me.

There was something in the darkness behind my eyeballs. I felt that if I could turn my eyes around I would see it easily, but it eluded me in a way that made peripheral vision seem like reading headlines. If there was ever anything impossible to pin down, much less describe, that was it. It tickled at me for a while as the dogs whimpered louder, but I could make nothing of it. The best analogy I could think of was the sensation a blind person might feel from the sun on a cloudy day.

I opened my eyes again.

Pink was standing there beside me. Her eyes were screwed

shut, and she was covering her ears with her hands. Her mouth was open and working silently. Behind her were several of the older children. They were all doing the same thing.

Some quality of the night changed. The people in the group were about a foot away from each other now, and suddenly the pattern broke. They all swayed for a moment, then laughed in that eerie, unselfconscious noise deaf people use for laughter. They fell in the grass and held their bellies, rolled over and over and roared.

Pink was laughing, too. To my surprise, so was I. I laughed until my face and sides were hurting, like I remembered doing sometimes when I'd smoked grass.

And that was ***ing.

I can see that I've only given a surface view of Keller. And there are some things I should deal with, lest I foster an erroneous view.

Clothing, for instance. Most of them wore something most of the time. Pink was the only one who seemed temperamentally opposed to clothes. She never wore anything.

No one ever wore anything I'd call a pair of pants. Clothes were loose: robes, shirts, dresses, scarves and such. Lots of men wore things that would be called women's clothes. They were simply more comfortable.

Much of it was ragged. It tended to be made of silk or velvet or something else that felt good. The stereotyped Kellerite would be wearing a Japanese silk robe, hand-embroidered with dragons, with many gaping holes and loose threads and tea and tomato stains all over it while she sloshed through the pigpen with a bucket of slop. Wash it at the end of the day and don't worry about the colors running.

I also don't seem to have mentioned homosexuality. You can mark it down to my early conditioning that my two deepest relationships at Keller were with women: Pink and Scar. I haven't said anything about it simply because I don't know how to present it. I talked to men and women equally, on the same terms. I had surprisingly little trouble being affectionate with the men.

I could not think of the Kellerites as bisexual, though clinically they were. It was much deeper than that. They could not even recognize a concept as poisonous as a homosexuality taboo. It was one of the first things they learned. If you distinguish homosexuality from heterosexuality you are cutting yourself off from communication—*full* communication—with half the human race. They were pansexual; they could not separate sex from the rest of their lives. They didn't even have a word in shorthand that could translate directly into English as sex. They had words for male and female in infinite variation, and words for degrees and varieties of physical experience that would be impossible to express in English, but all those words included other parts of the world of experience also; none of them walled off what we call *sex* into its own discrete cubbyhole.

There's another question I haven't answered. It needs answering, because I wondered about it myself when I first arrived. It concerns the necessity for the commune in the first place. Did it really have to be like this? Would they have been better off adjusting themselves to our ways of living?

All was not a peaceful idyll. I've already spoken of the invasion and rape. It could happen again, especially if the roving gangs that operate around the cities start to really rove. A touring group of motorcyclists could wipe them out in a night.

There were also continuing legal hassles. About once a year the social workers descended on Keller and tried to take their children away. They had been accused of everything possible, from child abuse to contributing to delinquency. It hadn't worked so far, but it might someday.

And after all, there are sophisticated devices on the market that allow a blind and deaf person to see and hear a little. They might have been helped by some of those.

I met a deaf-blind woman living in Berkeley once. I'll vote for Keller.

As to those machines . . .

In the library at Keller there is a seeing machine. It uses a

television camera and a computer to vibrate a closely set series of metal pins. Using it, you can feel a moving picture of whatever the camera is pointed at. It's small and light, made to be carried with the pinpricker touching your back. It cost about thirty-five thousand dollars.

I found it in the corner of the library. I ran my finger over it and left a gleaming streak behind as the thick dust came away.

Other people came and went, and I stayed on.

Keller didn't get as many visitors as the other places I had been. It was out of the way.

One man showed up at noon, looked around, and left without a word.

Two girls, sixteen-year-old runaways from California, showed up one night. They undressed for dinner and were shocked when they found out I could see. Pink scared the hell out of them. Those poor kids had a lot of living to do before they approached Pink's level of sophistication. But then Pink might have been uneasy in California. They left the next day, unsure if they had been to an orgy or not. All that touching and no getting down to business, very strange.

There was a nice couple from Santa Fe who acted as a sort of liaison between Keller and their lawyer. They had a nine-year-old boy who chattered endlessly in handtalk to the other kids. They came up about every other week and stayed a few days, soaking up sunshine and participating in the Together every night. They spoke halting shorthand and did me the courtesy of not speaking to me in speech.

Some of the Indians came around at odd intervals. Their behavior was almost aggressively chauvinistic. They stayed dressed at all times in their Levis and boots. But it was evident that they had a respect for the people, though they thought them strange. They had business dealings with the commune. It was the Navahos who trucked away the produce that was taken to the gate every day, sold it, and took a percentage. They would sit and powwow in sign

language spelled into hands. Pink said they were scrupulously honest in their dealings.

And about once a week all the parents went out in the field and ***ed.

I got better and better at shorthand and bodytalk. I had been breezing along for about five months and winter was in the offing. I had not examined my desires as yet, not really thought about what it was I wanted to do with the rest of my life. I guess the habit of letting myself drift was too ingrained. I was there, and constitutionally unable to decide whether to go or to face up to the problem if I wanted to stay for a long, long time.

Then I got a push.

For a long time I thought it had something to do with the economic situation outside. They were aware of the outside world at Keller. They knew that isolation and ignoring problems that could easily be dismissed as not relevant to them was a dangerous course, so they subscribed to the Braille *New York Times* and most of them read it. They had a television set that got plugged in about once a month. The kids would watch it and translate for their parents.

So I was aware that the non-depression was moving slowly into a more normal inflationary spiral. Jobs were opening up, money was flowing again. When I found myself on the outside again shortly afterward, I thought that was the reason.

The real reason was more complex. It had to do with peeling off the onion layer of shorthand and discovering another layer beneath it.

I had learned handtalk in a few easy lessons. Then I became aware of shorthand and bodytalk, and of how much harder they would be to learn. Through five months of constant immersion, which is the only way to learn a language, I had attained the equivalent level of a five- or six-year-old in shorthand. I knew I could master it, given time. Bodytalk was another matter. You couldn't measure progress as easily in bodytalk. It was a variable

and highly interpersonal language that evolved according to the person, the time, the mood. But I was learning.

Then I became aware of Touch. That's the best I can describe it in a single, unforced English noun. What *they* called this fourth-stage language varied from day to day, as I will try to explain.

I first became aware of it when I tried to meet Janet Reilly. I now knew the history of Keller, and she figured very prominently in all the stories. I knew everyone at Keller, and I could find her nowhere. I knew everyone by names like Scar, and She-with-the-missing-front-tooth, and Man-with-wiry-hair. These were short-hand names that I had given them myself, and they all accepted them without question. They had abolished their outside names within the commune. They meant nothing to them; they told nothing and described nothing.

At first I assumed that it was my imperfect command of short-hand that made me unable to clearly ask the right question about Janet Reilly. Then I saw that they were not telling me on purpose. I saw why, and I approved, and thought no more about it. The name Janet Reilly described what she had been *on the outside,* and one of her conditions for pushing the whole thing through in the first place had been that she be no one special on the inside. She melted into the group and disappeared. She didn't want to be found. All right.

But in the course of pursuing the question I became aware that each of the members of the commune had no specific name at all. That is, Pink, for instance, had no less than one hundred and fifteen names, one from each of the commune members. Each was a contextual name that told the story of Pink's relationship to a particular person. My simple names, based on physical descriptions, were accepted as the names a child would apply to people. The children had not yet learned to go beneath the outer layers and use names that told of themselves, their lives, and their relationships to others.

What is even more confusing, the names evolved from day to day. It was my first glimpse of Touch, and it frightened me. It was

a question of permutations. Just the first simple expansion of the problem meant there were no less than thirteen thousand names in use, and they wouldn't stay still so I could memorize them. If Pink spoke to me of Baldy, for instance, she would use her Touch name for him, modified by the fact that she was speaking to me and not Short-chubby-man.

Then the depths of what I had been missing opened beneath me and I was suddenly breathless with fear of heights.

Touch was what they spoke to each other. It was an incredible blend of all three other modes I had learned, and the essence of it was that it never stayed the same. I could listen to them speak to me in shorthand, which was the real basis for Touch, and be aware of the currents of Touch flowing just beneath the surface.

It was a language of inventing languages. Everyone spoke their own dialect because everyone spoke with a different instrument: a different body and set of life experiences. It was modified by everything. *It would not stand still.*

They would sit at the Together and invent an entire body of Touch responses in a night; idiomatic, personal, totally naked in its honesty. And they used it only as a building block for the next night's language.

I didn't know if I wanted to be that naked. I had looked into myself a little recently and had not been satisfied with what I found. The realization that every one of them knew more about it than I, because my honest body had told what my frightened mind had not wanted to reveal, was shattering. I was naked under a spotlight in Carnegie Hall, and all the no-pants nightmares I had ever had came out to haunt me. The fact that they all loved me with all my warts was suddenly not enough. I wanted to curl up in a dark closet with my ingrown ego and let it fester.

I might have come through this fear. Pink was certainly trying to help me. She told me that it would only hurt for a while, that I would quickly adjust to living my life with my darkest emotions written in fire across my forehead. She said Touch was not as hard as it looked at first, either. Once I learned shorthand and bodytalk,

Touch would flow naturally from it like sap rising in a tree. It would be unavoidable, something that would happen to me without much effort at all.

I almost believed her. But she betrayed herself. No, no, no. Not that, but the things in her concerning ***ing convinced me that if I went through this I would only bang my head hard against the next step up the ladder.

***

I had a little better definition now. Not one that I can easily translate into English, and even that attempt will only convey my hazy concept of what it was.

"It is the mode of touching without touching," Pink said, her body going like crazy in an attempt to reach me with her own imperfect concept of what it was, handicapped by my illiteracy. Her body denied the truth of her shorthand definition, and at the same time admitted to me that she did not know what it was herself.

"It is the gift whereby one can expand oneself from the eternal quiet and dark into something else." And again her body denied it. She beat on the floor in exasperation.

"It is an attribute of being in the quiet and dark all the time, touching others. All I know for sure is that vision and hearing preclude it or obscure it. I can make it as quiet and dark as I possibly can and be aware of the edges of it, but the visual orientation of the mind persists. That door is closed to me, and to all the children."

Her verb "to touch" in the first part of that was a Touch amalgam, one that reached back into her memories of me and what I had told her of my experiences. It implied and called up the smell and feel of broken mushrooms in soft earth under the barn with Tall-one-with-green-eyes, she who taught me to feel the essence of an object. It also contained references to our bodytalking while I was penetrating into the dark and wet of her, and her running account to me of what it was like to receive me into herself. This was all one word.

I brooded on that for a long time. What was the point of suffering through the nakedness of Touch, only to reach the level of frustrated blindness enjoyed by Pink?

What was it that kept pushing me away from the one place in my life where I had been happiest?

One thing was the realization, quite late in coming, that can be summed up as "What the hell am I *doing* here?" The question that should have answered that question was "What the hell would I do if I *left?*"

I was the only visitor, the only one in *seven years* to stay at Keller for longer than a few days. I brooded on that. I was not strong enough or confident enough in my opinion of myself to see it as anything but a flaw in *me,* not in those others. I was obviously too easily satisfied, too complacent to see the flaws that those others had seen.

It didn't have to be flaws in the people of Keller, or in their system. No, I loved and respected them too much to think that. What they had going certainly came as near as anyone ever has in this imperfect world to a sane, rational way for people to exist without warfare and with a minimum of politics. In the end, those two old dinosaurs are the only ways humans have yet discovered to be social animals. Yes, I do see war as a way of living with another; by imposing your will on another in terms so unmistakable that the opponent has to either knuckle under to you, die, or beat your brains out. And if that's a solution to anything, I'd rather live without solutions. Politics is not much better. The only thing going for it is that it occasionally succeeds in substituting talk for fists.

Keller *was* an organism. It was a new way of relating, and it seemed to work. I'm not pushing it as a solution for the world's problems. It's possible that it could only work for a group with a common self-interest as binding and rare as deafness and blindness. I can't think of another group whose needs are so interdependent.

The cells of the organism cooperated beautifully. The organism was strong, flourishing, and possessed of all the attributes I've ever

heard used in defining life except the ability to reproduce. That might have been its fatal flaw, if any. I certainly saw the seeds of something developing in the children.

The strength of the organism was communication. There's no way around it. Without the elaborate and impossible-to-falsify mechanisms for communication built into Keller, it would have eaten itself in pettiness, jealousy, possessiveness, and any dozen other "innate" human defects.

The nightly Together was the basis of the organism. Here, from after dinner till it was time to fall asleep, everyone talked in a language that was incapable of falsehood. If there was a problem brewing, it presented itself and was solved almost automatically. Jealousy? Resentment? Some little festering wrong that you're nursing? You couldn't conceal it at the Together, and soon everyone was clustered around you and loving the sickness away. It acted like white corpuscles, clustering around a sick cell, not to destroy it, but to heal it. There seemed to be no problem that couldn't be solved if it was attacked early enough, and with Touch, your neighbors knew about it before you did and were already laboring to correct the wrong, heal the wound, to make you feel better so you could laugh about it. There was a lot of laughter at the Togethers.

I thought for a while that I was feeling possessive about Pink. I know I had done so a little at first. Pink was my special friend, the one who had helped me out from the first, who for several days was the only one I could talk to. It was her hands that had taught me handtalk. I know I felt stirrings of territoriality the first time she lay in my lap while another man made love to her. But if there was any signal the Kellerites were adept at reading, it was that one. It went off like an alarm bell in Pink, the man, and the women and men around me. They soothed me, coddled me, told me in every language that it was all right, not to feel ashamed. Then the man in question began loving *me.* Not Pink, but the man. An observational anthropologist would have had subject matter for a whole thesis. Have you seen the films of baboons' social behavior?

Dogs do it, too. Many male mammals do it. When males get into dominance battles, the weaker can defuse the aggression by submitting, by turning tail and surrendering. I have never felt so defused as when that man surrendered the object of our clash of wills—Pink—and turned his attention to me. What could I do? What I did was laugh, and he laughed, and soon we were all laughing, and that was the end of territoriality.

That's the essence of how they solved most "human nature" problems at Keller. Sort of like an oriental martial art; you yield, roll with the blow so that your attacker takes a pratfall with the force of the aggression. You do that until the attacker sees that the initial push wasn't worth the effort, that it was a pretty silly thing to do when no one was resisting you. Pretty soon he's not Tarzan of the Apes, but Charlie Chaplin. And he's laughing.

So it wasn't Pink and her lovely body and my realization that she could never be all mine to lock away in my cave and defend with a gnawed-off thighbone. If I'd persisted in that frame of mind she would have found me about as attractive as an Amazonian leech, and that was a great incentive to confound the behaviorists and overcome it.

So I was back to those people who had visited and left, and what did they see that I didn't see?

Well, there was something pretty glaring. I was not part of the organism, no matter how nice the organism was to me. I had no hopes of ever becoming a part, either. Pink had said it in the first week. She felt it herself, to a lesser degree. She could not ***, though that fact was not going to drive her away from Keller. She had told me that many times in shorthand and confirmed it in bodytalk. If I left, it would be without her.

Trying to stand outside and look at it, I felt pretty miserable. What was I trying to *do,* anyway? Was my goal in life *really* to become a part of a deaf-blind commune? I was feeling so low by that time that I actually thought of that as denigrating, in the face of all the evidence to the contrary. I should be out in the real world where the real people lived, not these freakish cripples.

I backed off from that thought very quickly. I was not totally out of my mind, just on the lunatic edges. These people were the best friends I'd ever had, maybe the only ones. That I was confused enough to think that of them even for a second worried me more than anything else. It's possible that it's what pushed me finally into a decision. I saw a future of growing disillusion and unfulfilled hopes. Unless I was willing to put out my eyes and ears, I would always be on the outside. *I* would be the blind and deaf one. I would be the freak. I didn't want to be a freak.

They knew I had decided to leave before I did. My last few days turned into a long goodbye, with a loving farewell implicit in every word touched to me. I was not really sad, and neither were they. It was nice, like everything they did. They said goodbye with just the right mix of wistfulness and life-must-go-on, and hope-to-touch-you-again.

Awareness of Touch scratched on the edges of my mind. It was not bad, just as Pink had said. In a year or two I could have mastered it.

But I was set now. I was back in the life groove that I had followed for so long. Why is it that once having decided what I must do, I'm afraid to reexamine my decision? Maybe because the original decision cost me so much that I didn't want to go through it again.

I left quietly in the night for the highway and California. They were out in the fields, standing in that circle again. Their fingertips were farther apart than ever before. The dogs and children hung around the edges like beggars at a banquet. It was hard to tell which looked more hungry and puzzled.

The experiences at Keller did not fail to leave their mark on me. I was unable to live as I had before. For a while I thought I could not live at all, but I did. I was too used to living to take the decisive step of ending my life. I would wait. Life had brought one pleasant thing to me; maybe it would bring another.

I became a writer. I found I now had a better gift for communicating than I had before. Or maybe I had it now for the first time. At any rate, my writing came together and I sold. I wrote what I wanted to write, and was not afraid of going hungry. I took things as they came.

I weathered the non-depression of '97, when unemployment reached twenty percent and the government once more ignored it as a temporary downturn. It eventually upturned, leaving the jobless rate slightly higher than it had been the time before, and the time before that. Another million useless persons had been created with nothing better to do than shamble through the streets looking for beatings in progress, car smashups, heart attacks, murders, shootings, arson, bombings, and riots: the endlessly inventive street theater. It never got dull.

I didn't become rich, but I was usually comfortable. That is a social disease, the symptoms of which are the ability to ignore the fact that your society is developing weeping pustules and having its brains eaten out by radioactive maggots. I had a nice apartment in Marin County, out of sight of the machine-gun turrets. I had a car, at a time when they were beginning to be luxuries.

I had concluded that my life was not destined to be all I would like it to be. We all make some sort of compromise, I reasoned, and if you set your expectations too high you are doomed to disappointment. It did occur to me that I was settling for something far from "high," but I didn't know what to do about it. I carried on with a mixture of cynicism and optimism that seemed about the right mix for me. It kept my motor running, anyway.

I even made it to Japan, as I had intended in the first place.

I didn't find someone to share my life. There was only Pink for that, Pink and all her family, and we were separated by a gulf I didn't dare cross. I didn't even dare think about her too much. It would have been very dangerous to my equilibrium. I lived with it, and told myself that it was the way I was. Lonely.

The years rolled on like a caterpillar tractor at Dachau, up to the penultimate day of the millennium.

San Francisco was having a big bash to celebrate the year 2000. Who gives a shit that the city is slowly falling apart, that civilization is disintegrating into hysteria? Let's have a party!

I stood on the Golden Gate Dam on the last day of 1999. The sun was setting in the Pacific, on Japan, which had turned out to be more of the same but squared and cubed with neo-samurai. Behind me the first bombshells of a firework celebration of holocaust tricked up to look like festivity competed with the flare of burning buildings as the social and economic basket cases celebrated the occasion in their own way. The city quivered under the weight of misery, anxious to slide off along the fracture lines of some subcortical San Andreas Fault. Orbiting atomic bombs twinkled in my mind, up there somewhere, ready to plant mushrooms when we'd exhausted all the other possibilities.

I thought of Pink.

I found myself speeding through the Nevada desert, sweating, gripping the steering wheel. I was crying aloud but without sound, as I had learned to do at Keller.

Can you go back?

I slammed the citicar over the potholes in the dirt road. The car was falling apart. It was not built for this kind of travel. The sky was getting light in the east. It was the dawn of a new millennium. I stepped harder on the gas pedal and the car bucked savagely. I didn't care. I was not driving back down that road, not ever. One way or another, I was here to stay.

I reached the wall and sobbed my relief. The last hundred miles had been a nightmare of wondering if it had been a dream. I touched the cold reality of the wall and it calmed me. Light snow had drifted over everything, gray in the early dawn.

I saw them in the distance. All of them, out in the field where I had left them. No, I was wrong. It was only the children. Why had it seemed like so many at first?

Pink was there. I knew her immediately, though I had never

seen her in winter clothes. She was taller, filled out. She would be nineteen years old. There was a small child playing in the snow at her feet, and she cradled an infant in her arms. I went to her and talked to her hand.

She turned to me, her face radiant with welcome, her eyes staring in a way I had never seen. Her hands flitted over me and her eyes did not move.

"I touch you, I welcome you," her hands said. "I wish you could have been here just a few minutes ago. Why did you go away, darling? Why did you stay away so long?" Her eyes were stones in her head. She was blind. She was deaf.

All the children were. No, Pink's child sitting at my feet looked up at me with a smile.

"Where is everybody?" I asked when I got my breath. "Scar? Baldy? Green-eyes? And what's happened? What's happened to you?" I was tottering on the edge of a heart attack or nervous collapse or something. My reality felt in danger of dissolving.

"They've gone," she said. The word eluded me, but the context put it with the *Mary Celeste* and Roanoke, Virginia. It was complex, the way she used the word *gone.* It was like something she had said before: unattainable, a source of frustration like the one that had sent me running from Keller. But now her word told of something that was not hers yet, but was within her grasp. There was no sadness in it.

"Gone?"

"Yes. I don't know where. They're happy. They ***ed. It was glorious. We could only touch a part of it."

I felt my heart hammering to the sound of the last train pulling away from the station. My feet were pounding along the ties as it faded into the fog. Where are the Brigadoons of yesterday? I've never yet heard of a fairy tale where you can go back to the land of enchantment. You wake up, you find that your chance is gone. You threw it away. *Fool!* You only get one chance; that's the moral, isn't it?

Pink's hands laughed along my face.

"Hold this part-of-me-who-speaks-mouth-to-nipple," she said, and handed me her infant daughter. "I will give you a gift."

She reached up and lightly touched my ears with her cold fingers. The sound of the wind was shut out, and when her hands came away it never came back. She touched my eyes, shut out all the light, and I saw no more.

We live in the lovely quiet and dark.

EDWARD BRYANT

✪ *Stone*

There is an image of the writer which has it that his brain only works when his fingers are connected to the keys of the typewriter, so that in normal human affairs he is stammering and incoherent. 'Tisn't true. Least of all is it true of Ed Bryant. When he isn't writing, he is going to science-fiction conventions; and what he does at them is to act as toastmaster at the banquets. Lots of writers do that. Bryant does it brilliantly. If the gift of writing ever passes from him, he can make a living as a stand-up comedian—but it isn't likely he'll have to do that, as long as he is capable of writing stories like "Stone."

✪ Winner, Nebula, for Best Short Story of 1978.

1

Up above the burning city, a woman wails the blues. How she cries out, how she moans. Flames fed by tears rake fingers across the sky.

It is an old, old song:

Fill me like the mountains
Fill me like the sea

Writhing in the heat, she stands where there is no support. The fire licks her body.

All of me

So finely drawn, and with the glitter of ice, the manipulating wires radiate outward. Taut bonds between her body and the flickering darkness, all wires lead to the intangible overshadowing figure behind her. Without expression, Atropos gazes down at the woman.

Face contorting, she looks into the hearts of a million fires and cries out.

All of me

As Atropos raises the terrible, cold-shining blades of the Norn-shears and with only the barest hesitation cuts the wires. Limbs

spread-eagled to the compass points, the woman plunges into the flames. She is instantly and utterly consumed.

The face of Atropos remains shrouded in shadows.

2

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JAIN SNOW

with

MOOG INDIGO

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3

My name is Robert Dennis Clary and I was born twenty-three years ago in Oil City, Pennsylvania, which is also where I was raised. I've got a degree in electrical engineering from MIT and some grad credit at Cal Tech in electronics. *"Not suitable, Mr.*

Clary," said the dean. "You lack the proper team spirit. Frankly speaking, you are selfish. And a cheat."

My mother told me once she was sorry I wasn't handsome enough to get by without working. *Listen, Ma, I'm all right. There's nothing wrong with working the concert circuit.* I'm working damned hard now. I was never genius enough that I could have got a really good job with, say, Bell Futures or one of the big space firms. But I've got one marketable talent—what the interviewer called a peculiarly coordinative affinity for multiplex circuitry. *He looked a little stunned after I finished with the stim console. "Christ, kid, you really get into it, don't you?"*

That's what got me the job with Alpertron, Ltd., the big promotion and booking agency. I'm on the concert tour and work their stim board, me and my console over there on the side of the stage. It isn't that much different in principle from playing one of the instruments in the backup band, though it's a hell of a lot more complex than even Nagami's synthesizer. It all sounds simple enough: my console is the critical link between performer and audience. Just one glorified feedback transceiver: pick up the empathic load from Jain, pipe it into the audience, they react and add their own load, and I feed it all back to the star. And then around again as I use the sixty stim tracks, each with separate controls to balance and augment and intensify. It can get pretty hairy, which is why not just anyone can do the job. It helps that I seem to have a natural resistance to the side-band slopover radiation from the empathic transmissions. *"Ever think of teaching?" said the school voc counselor. "No," I said. "I want the action."*

And that's why I'm on the concert circuit with Jain Snow; as far as I'm concerned, the only real blues singer and stim star.

Jain Snow, my intermittent unrequited love. *Her voice is shagreen-rough; you hear it smooth until it tears you to shreds.*

She's older than I am, four, maybe five years; but she looks like she's in her middle teens. Jain's tall, with a tumbleweed bush of red hair; her face isn't so much pretty as it is intense. I've never known anyone who didn't want to make love to her. *"When you're*

a star," she said once, half drunk, "you're not hung up about taking the last cookie on the plate."

That includes me, and sometimes she's let me come into her bed. But not often. *"You like it?" she said. I answered sleepily, "You're really good." "Not me," she said. "I mean being in a star's bed." I told her she was a bitch and she laughed.* Not often enough.

I know I don't dare force the issue; even if I did, there would still be Stella.

Stella Vanilla—I've never learned exactly what her real last name is—is Jain's bodyguard. Other stim stars have whole platoons of karate-trained killers for protection. Jain needs only Stella. *"Stella, pick me up a fifth? Yeah, Irish. Scotch if they don't."*

She's shorter than I am, tiny and dark with curly chestnut hair. She's also proficient in any martial art I can think of. And if all else fails, in her handbag she carries a .357 Colt Python with a four-inch barrel. When I first saw that bastard, I didn't believe she could even lift it.

But she can. I watched Stella outside Bradley Arena in L.A. when some overanxious bikers wanted to get a little too close to Jain. *"Back off, creeps." "So who's tellin' us?"* She had to hold the Python with both hands, but the muzzle didn't waver. Stella fired once; the slug tore the guts out of a parked Harley-Wankel. The bikers backed off very quickly.

Stella enfolds Jain in her protection like a raincape. It sometimes amuses Jain; I can see that. *Stella, get Alpertron on the phone for me. Stella? Can you score a couple grams? Stella, check out the dudes in the hall. Stella— It never stops.*

When I first met her, I thought that Stella was the coldest person I'd ever encountered. *And in Des Moines I saw her crying alone in a darkened phone booth—Jain had awakened her and told her to take a walk for a couple hours while she screwed some rube she'd picked up in the hotel bar. I tapped on the glass; Stella ignored me.*

Stella, do you want her as much as I?

So there we are—a nice symbolic obtuse triangle. And yet—We're all just one happy show-biz family.

4

This is Alpertron, Ltd.'s, own chartered jet, flying at 37,000 feet above western Kansas. Stella and Jain are sitting across the aisle from me. It's a long flight and there's been a lull in the usually boisterous flight conversation. Jain flips through a current Neiman-Marcus catalogue; exclusive mailorder listings are her present passion.

I look up as she bursts into raucous laughter. "I'll be goddamned. Will you look at this?" She points at the open catalogue on her lap.

Hollis, Moog Indigo's color operator, is seated behind her. She leans forward and cranes her neck over Jain's shoulder. "Which?"

"That," she says. "The VTP."

"What's VTP?" says Stella.

Hollis says, "Video tape playback."

"Hey, everybody!" Jain raises her voice, cutting stridently through everyone else's conversations. "Get this. For a small fee, these folks'll put a video tape gadget in my tombstone. It's got everything—stereo sound and color. All I've got to do is go in before I die and cut the tape."

"Terrific!" Hollis says. "You could leave an album of greatest hits. You know, for posterity. Free concerts on the grass every Sunday."

"That's really sick," Stella says.

"Free, hell." Jain grins. "Anybody who wants to catch the show can put a dollar in the slot."

Stella stares disgustedly out the window.

Hollis says, "Do you want one of those units for your birthday?"

"Nope." Jain shakes her head. "I'm not going to need one."

"Never?"

"Well . . . not for a long time." But I think her words sound unsure.

Then I only half listen as I look out from the plane across the scattered cloud banks and the Rockies looming to the west of us. Tomorrow night we play Denver. *"It's about as close to home as I'm gonna get," Jain had said in New Orleans when we found out Denver was booked.*

"A what?" Jain's voice is puzzled.

"A cenotaph," says Hollis.

"Shut up," Stella says. "Damn it."

5

We're in the Central Arena, the architectural pride of Denver District. This is the largest gathering place in all of Rocky Mountain, that heterogeneous, anachronistic strip-city clinging to the front ranges of the continental divide all the way from Billings down to the southern suburb of El Paso.

The dome stretches up beyond the range of the house lights. If it were rigid, there could never be a Rocky Mountain Central Arena. But it's made of a flexible plastic-variant and blowers funnel up heated air to keep it buoyant. We're on the inner skin of a giant balloon. When the arena's full, the body heat from the audience keeps the dome aloft, and the arena crew turns off the blowers.

I killed time earlier tonight reading the promo pamphlet on this place. As the designer says, the combination of arena and spectators turns the dome into one sustaining organism. At first I misread it as "orgasm."

I monitor crossflow conversations through plugs inserted in both ears as set-up people check out the lights, sound, color, and all the rest of the systems. Finally some nameless tech comes on circuit to give my stim console a run-through.

"Okay, Rob, I'm up in the booth above the east aisle. Give me just a tickle." *My nipples were sensitized to her tongue, rough as a cat's.*

I'm wired to a test set fully as powerful as the costume Jain'll

wear later—just not as exotic. I slide a track control forward until it reaches the five-position on a scale calibrated to one hundred.

"Five?" the tech says.

"Right."

"Reading's dead-on. Give me a few more tracks."

I comply. *She kisses me with lips and tongue, working down across my belly.*

"A little higher, please."

I push the tracks to fifteen.

"You're really in a mood, Rob."

"So what do you want me to think?" I say.

"Jesus," says the tech. "You ought to be performing. The crowd would love it."

"They pay Jain. She's the star." *I tried to get on top; she wouldn't let me. A moment later it didn't matter.*

"Did you just push the board to thirty?" The tech's voice sounds strange.

"No. Did you read that?"

"Negative, but for a moment it felt like it." He pauses. "You're not allowing your emotional life to get in the way of your work, are you?"

"Screw off," I answer. "None of your business."

"No threats," says the tech. "Just a suggestion."

"Stick it."

"Okay, okay. She's a lovely girl, Rob. And like you say, she's the star."

"I know."

"Fine. Feed me another five tracks, Rob; broad spectrum this time."

I do so and the tech is satisfied with the results. "That ought to do it," he says. "I'll get back to you later." He breaks off the circuit. All checks are done; there's nothing now on the circuits but a background scratch like insects climbing over old newspapers. *She will not allow me to be exhausted for long.*

Noisily, the crowd is starting to file into the Arena.

I wait for the concert.

6

There's never before been a stim star of the magnitude of Jain Snow. Yet somehow the concert tonight fails. Somewhere the chemistry goes wrong. The faces out there are as always—yet somehow they are not *involved.* They care, but not enough.

I don't think the fault's in Jain. I detect no significant difference from other concerts. Her skin still tantalizes the audience as nakedly, only occasionally obscured by the cloudy metal mesh that transforms her entire body into a single antenna. I've been there when she's performed a hell of a lot better, maybe, but I've also seen her perform worse and still come off the stage happy.

It isn't Moog Indigo; they're laying down the sound and light patterns behind Jain as expertly as always.

Maybe it's me, but I don't think I'm handling the stim console badly. If I were, the nameless tech would be on my ass over the com circuit.

Jain goes into her final number. It does not work. The audience is enthusiastic and they want an encore, but that's just it: they shouldn't want one. They shouldn't *need* one.

She comes off the stage crying. I touch her arm as she walks past my console. Jain stops and rubs her eyes and asks me if I'll go back to the hotel with her.

7

It seems like the first time I was in Jain Snow's bed. Jain keeps the room dark and says nothing as we go through the positions. Her breathing grows a little ragged; that is all. And yet she is more demanding of me than ever before.

When it's done, she holds me close and very tightly. Her rate of breathing slows and becomes regular. I wonder if she is asleep.

"Hey," I say.

"What?" She slurs the word sleepily.

"I'm sorry about tonight."

". . . Not your fault."

"I love you very much."

She rolls to face me. "Huh?"

"I love you."

"No, babe. Don't say that."

"It's true," I say.

"Won't work."

"Doesn't matter," I say.

"It can't work."

I know I don't have any right to feel this, but I'm pissed, and so I move away in the bed. "I don't care." *The first time: "Such a goddamned adolescent, Rob."*

After a while, she says, "Robbie, I'm cold," and so I move back to her and hold her and say nothing. I realize, rubbing against her hip, that I'm hard again; she doesn't object as I pour back into her all the frustration she unloaded in me earlier.

Neither of us sleeps much the rest of the night. Sometime before dawn I doze briefly and awaken from a nightmare. I am disoriented and can't remember the entirety of the dream, but I do remember hard wires and soft flows of electrons. My eyes suddenly focus and I see her face inches away from mine. Somehow she knows what I am thinking. "Whose turn is it?" she says. *The antenna.*

8

At least a thousand hired kids are there setting up chairs in the arena this morning, but it's still hard to feel I'm not alone. The dome is that big. Voices get lost here. Even thoughts echo.

"It's gonna be a hell of a concert tonight. I know it." Jain had said that and smiled at me when she came through here about ten. She'd swept down the center aisle in a flurry of feathers and shimmering red strips, leaving all the civilians stunned and quivering.

God only knows why she was up this early; over the last eight months, I've never seen her get up before noon on a concert day.

That kind of sleep-in routine would kill me. I was out of bed by eight this morning, partly because I've got to get this console modified by show-time, and partly because I didn't feel like being in the star's bed when she woke up.

"The gate's going to be a lot bigger than last night," Jain had said. "Can you handle it?"

"Sure. Can you?"

Jain had flashed me another brilliant smile and left. And so I sit here substituting circuit chips.

A couple kids climb on stage and pull breakfasts out of their backpacks. "You ever read this?" says one, pulling a tattered paperback from his hip pocket. His friend shakes her head. "You?" He turns the book in my direction; I recognize the cover.

It was two, maybe three months ago in Memphis, in a studio just before rehearsal. Jain had been sitting and reading. She reads quite a lot, though the promotional people downplay it—Alpertron, Ltd., likes to suck the country-girl image for all it's worth.

"What's that?" Stella says.

"A book." Jain holds up the book so she can see.

"I know that." Stella reads the title: *Receptacle.* "Isn't that the—"

"Yeah," says Jain.

Everybody knows about *Receptacle*—the best-seller of the year. It's all fact, about the guy who went to Prague to have a dozen artificial vaginas implanted all over his body. Nerve grafts, neural rerouting, the works. I'd seen him interviewed on some talk show where he'd worn a jumpsuit zipped to the neck.

"It's grotesque," Stella says.

Jain takes back the book and shrugs.

"Would you try something like this?"

"Maybe I'm way beyond it." *A receptacle works only one-way.*

Stella goes white and bites off whatever it is she was about to say.

"Oh, baby, I'm sorry." Jain smiles and looks fourteen again. Then she stands and gives Stella a quick hug. She glances over at me and winks, and my face starts to flush. *One-way.*

Now, months later, I remember it and my skin again goes warm. "Get out of here," I say to the kids. "I'm trying to concentrate." They look irritated, but they leave.

I'm done with the circuit chips. Now the easy stuff. I wryly note the male and female plugs I'm connecting. *Jain . . .*

The com circuit buzzes peremptorily and Jain's voice says, "Robbie? Can you meet me outside?"

I hesitate, then say, "Sure, I'm almost done with the board."

"I've got a car; we're going away."

"What?"

"Just for the afternoon."

"Listen, Jain—"

She says, "Hurry," and cuts off.

It's gonna be a hell of a concert.

9

Tonight's crowd strains even the capacity of the Rocky Mountain Central Arena. The gate people say there are more than nine hundred thousand people packed into the smoky recesses of the dome. It's not just hard to believe; it's scary. But computer ticket-totes don't lie.

I look out at the crowd and it's like staring at the Pacific after dark; the gray waves march out to the horizon until you can't tell one from the other. Here on the stage, the crowd-mutter even sounds like the sea, exactly as though I was on the beach trying to hear in an eighteen-foot surf. It all washes around me and I'm grateful for the twin earpieces, reassured to hear the usual check-down lists on the in-house com circuit.

I notice that the blowers have cut off. It's earlier than usual, but obviously there's enough body heat to keep the dome buoyed aloft. I imagine the Central Arena drifting away like that floating city they want to make out of Venice, California. There is something appealing about the thought of this dome floating away like dandelion fluff. But now the massive air-conditioning units hum on and the fantasy dies.

The house lights momentarily dim and the crowd noise raises a few decibels. I realize I can't see features or faces or even separate bodies. There are simply too many people to comprehend. The crowd has fused into one huge tectonic slab of flesh.

"Rob, are you ready?" The tech's soft voice in my earpiece.

"Ready."

"It's a big gate tonight. Can you do it?"

Sixty overlay tracks and one com board between Jain and maybe a cool million horny, sweating spectators? "Sure," I say. "Easy." But momentarily I'm not sure and I realize how tightly I'm gripping the ends of the console. I consciously will my fingers to loosen.

"Okay," the tech says. "But if anything goes wrong, cut it. Right? Damp it completely."

"Got it."

"Fine," he says. "About a minute, stand by. Ms. Snow wants to say hello."

"Hello, Robbie?"

"Yeah," I say. "Good luck."

Interference crackles and what she says is too soft to hear.

I tell her, "Repeat, please."

"Stone don't break. At least not easy." She cuts off the circuit.

I've got ten seconds to stare out at that vast crowd. Where, I wonder, did the arena logistics people scrape up almost a million in/out headbands? I know I'm hallucinating, but for just a moment I see the scarlet webwork of broadcast power reaching out from my console to those million skulls. I don't know why; I find myself reaching for the shield that covers the emergency total cutoff. I stop my hand.

The house lights go all the way down; the only illumination comes from a thousand exit signs and the equipment lights. Then Moog Indigo troops onstage as the crowd begins to scream in anticipation. The group finds their instruments in the familiar darkness. The crowd is already going crazy.

Hollis strokes her color board and shoots concentric spheres of

hard primaries expanding through the arena; red, yellow, blue. Start with the basics. Red.

Nagami's synthesizer spews a volcanic flow of notes like burning magma.

And then Jain is there. Center stage.

"Damn it," says the tech in my ear. "Level's too low. Bring it up in back." I must have been dreaming. I am performing stupidly, like an amateur. Gently I bring up two stim balance slides.

"—love you. Every single one of you."

The crowd roars back. The filling begins. I cut in four more low-level tracks.

"—ready. How about you?"

They're ready. I cut in another dozen tracks, then mute two. Things are building just a little too fast. The fine mesh around Jain's body seems to glitter with more than reflected light. Her skin already gleams with moisture.

"—get started easy. And then things'll get hard. Yeah?"

"YEAH!" from thousands of throats simultaneously.

I see her stagger slightly. I don't think I am feeding her too much too fast, but mute another pair of tracks anyway. Moog Indigo takes their cue and begins to play. Hollis gives the dome the smoky pallor of slow-burning leaves. Then Jain Snow sings.

And I fill her with them. And give her back to them.

space and time
measured in my heart

10

In the afternoon:

Jain gestures in an expansive circle. "This is where I grew up."

The mountains awe me. "Right here?"

She shakes her head. "It was a lot like this. My pa ran sheep. Maybe a hundred miles north."

"But in the mountains?"

"Yeah. Really isolated. My pa convinced himself he was one of the original settlers. He was actually a laid-off aerospace engineer out of Seattle."

The wind flays us for a moment; Jain's hair whips and she shakes it back from her eyes. I pull her into the shelter of my arms, wrapping my coat around us both. "Do you want to go back down to the car?"

"Hell, no," she says. "A mountain zephyr can't scare me off."

I'm not used to this much open space; it scares me a little, though I'm not going to admit that to Jain. We're above timberline, and the mountainside is too stark for my taste. I suddenly miss the rounded, wooded hills of Pennsylvania. Jain surveys the rocky fields rubbed raw by wind and snow, and I have a quick feeling she's scared too. "Something wrong?"

"Nope. Just remembering."

"What's it like on a ranch?"

"Okay, if you don't like people," she says slowly, obviously recalling details. "My pa didn't."

"No neighbors?"

"Not a one in twenty miles."

"Brothers?" I say. "Sisters?"

She shakes her head. "Just my pa." I guess I look curious because she looks away and adds, "My mother died of tetanus right after I was born. It was a freak thing."

I try to change the subject. "Your father didn't come down to the first concert, did he? Is he coming tonight?"

"No way," she says. "He didn't and he won't. He doesn't like what I do." I can't think of anything to say now. After a while Jain rescues me. "It isn't your hassle, and it isn't mine anymore."

Something perverse doesn't let me drop it now. "So you grew up alone."

"You noticed," she says softly. "You've got a hell of a way with understatement."

I persist. "Then I don't understand why you still come up here. You must hate this."

"Ever see a claustrophobe deliberately walk into a closet and shut the door? If I don't fight it this way—" Her fingers dig into my arms. Her face is fierce. "This has got to be better than what I do on stage." She swings away from me. "Shit!" she says. "Damn it all to hell." She stands immovable, staring down the mountain for several minutes. When she turns back toward me, her eyes are softer and there's a fey tone in her voice. "If I die—" She laughs. "When I die. I want my ashes here."

"Ashes?" I say, unsure how to respond. *Humor her.* "Sure."

"You." She points at me. "Here." She indicates the rock face. The words are simple commands given to a child.

"Me." I manage a weak smile.

Her laugh is easy and unstrained now. "Kid games. Did you do the usual things when you were a kid, babe?"

"Most of them." *I hardly ever won, but then I liked to play games with outrageous risks.*

"Hammer, rock and scissors?"

"Sure, when I was really young." I repeat by long-remembered rote: "Rock breaks scissors, scissors cut paper, paper covers rock."

"Okay," she says. "Let's play." I must look doubtful. "Rob," she says warningly.

"Okay." I hold out my right hand.

Jain says, "One, two, three." On "three," we each bring up our right hand. Hers is a clenched fist: stone. My first two fingers form the snipping blades of a pair of scissors. "I win!" she crows, delighted.

"What do you win?"

"You. Just for a little while." She pulls my hands close and lays them on her body.

"Right here on the mountain?" I say.

"I'm from pioneer stock. But you—" She shrugs. "Too delicate?"

I laugh and pull her close.

"Just—" She hesitates. "Not like the other times? Don't take this seriously, okay?"

In my want I forget the other occasions. "Okay."

Each of us adds to the other's pleasure, and it's better than

the other times. But even when she comes, she stares through me, and I wonder whose face she's seeing—no, not even that: how many faces she's seeing. *Babe, no man can fill me like* they *do.*

And then I come also and—briefly—it doesn't matter.

My long coat is wrapped around the two of us, and we watch each other inches apart. "So much passion, Rob . . . It seems to build."

I remember the stricture and say, "You know why."

"You really like me so much?" *The little-girl persona.*

"I really do."

"What would you do for me, if I asked you?"

"Anything."

"Would you kill for me?"

I say, "Sure."

"Really?"

"Of course." I smile. I know how to play.

"This is no game."

My face must betray my confusion. I don't know how I should react.

Her expression mercurially alters to sadness. "You're scissors, Robbie. All shiny cold metal. How can you ever hope to cut stone?"

Would I want to?

11

Things get worse.

Is it simply that I'm screwing up on my own hook, or is it because we're exploring a place no performance has ever been? I don't have time to worry about it; I play the console like it was the keyboard on Nagami's synthesizer.

Take it
When you can get it
Where you can get it

Jain sways and the crowd sways; she thrusts and the crowd thrusts. It is one gigantic act. It is as though a temblor shakes the Front Range.

Insect chittering in my earpiece: "What the hell's going on, Rob? I'm monitoring the stim feed. You're oscillating from hell to fade-out."

"I'm trying to balance." I juggle slides. "Any better?"

"At least it's no worse," says the tech. He pauses. "Can you manage the payoff?"

The payoff. The precision-engineered and carefully timed upslope leading to climax. The Big Number. I've kept the stim tracks plateaued for the past three sets. "Coming," I say. "It's coming. There's time."

"You're in bad trouble with New York if there isn't," says the tech. "I want to register a jag. Now."

"Okay," I say.

Love me
Eat me
All of me

"Better," the tech says. "But keep it rising. I'm still only registering a sixty percent."

Sure, bastard. It isn't your brain burning with the output of these million strangers. My violence surprises me. But I push the stim up to seventy. Then Nagami goes into a synthesizer riff, and Jain sags back against a vertical rank of amps.

"Robbie?" It comes into my left ear, on the in-house com circuit reserved for performer and me alone.

"I'm here, Jain."

"You're not trying, babe."

I stare across the stage and she's looking back at me. Her eyes flash emerald in the wave from Hollis's color generator. She subvocalizes so her lips don't move.

"I mean it."

"This is new territory," I answer. "We never had a million before." I know she thinks it's an excuse.

"This is it, babe," she says. "It's tonight. Will you help me?"

I've known the question would come, though I hadn't known who'd articulate it—her or me. My hesitation stretches much longer in my head than it does in realtime. *So much passion, Rob . . . It seems to build. Would you kill for me?*

"Yes," I say.

"Then I love you," and breaks off as the riff ends and she struts back out into the light. I reluctantly touch the console and push the stim to seventy-five. Fifty tracks are in. *Jain, will you love me if I don't?*

A bitter look

Eighty. I engage five more tracks. Five to go. The crowd's getting damn near all of her. And, of course, the opposite's true.

A flattering word

Since I first heard her in Washington, I've loved this song the best. I push more keys. Eighty-two. Eighty-five. I know the tech's happily watching the meters.

A kiss

The last tracks cut in. *Okay, you're getting everything from the decaying food in her gut to her deepest buried childhood fears of an empty echoing house.*

Ninety.

A sword

And the song ends, one last diminishing chord, but her body continues to move. For her there is still music.

On the com circuit the tech yells: "Idiot! I'm already reading ninety. Ninety, damn it. There's still one number to go."

"Yeah," I say. "Sorry. Just . . . trying to make up for previous lag-time."

He continues to shout and I don't answer. On the stage Nagami and Hollis look at each other and at the rest of the group, and then Moog Indigo slides into the last number with

scarcely a pause. Jain turns toward my side of the stage and gives me a soft smile. And then it's back to the audience and into the song she always tops her concerts with, the number that really made her.

Fill me like the mountains

Ninety-five. There's only a little travel left in the console slides.

The tech's voice is aghast. "Are you out of your mind, Rob? I've got a ninety-five here—damned needle's about to peg. Back off to ninety."

"Say again?" I say. "Interference. Repeat, please."

"I said back off! We don't want her higher than ninety."

Fill me like the sea

Jain soars to the climax. I shove the slides all the way forward. The crowd is on its feet; I have never been so frightened in my life.

"Rob! I swear to God you're canned, you—"

Somehow Stella's on the com line too: "You son of a bitch! You hurt her—"

Jain flings her arms wide. Her back arches impossibly.

All of me

One hundred.

I cannot rationalize electronically what happens. I cannot imagine the affection and hate and lust and fear cascading into her and pouring back out. But I see the antenna mesh around her naked body glowing suddenly whiter until it flares in an actinic flash and I shut my eyes.

When I open them again, Jain is a blackened husk tottering toward the front of the stage. Her body falls over the edge into the first rows of spectators.

The crowd still thinks this is part of the set, and they love it.

12

No good-bys. I know I'm canned. When I go into the Denver Alpertron office in another day and a half to pick up my final check, some subordinate I've never seen before gives me the envelope.

"Thanks," I say. He stares at me and says nothing.

I turn to leave and meet Stella in the hall. The top of her head comes only to my shoulders, and so she has to tilt her face up to glare at me. She says, "You're not going to be working for any promoter in the business. New York says so."

"Fine," I say. I walk past her.

Before I reach the door, she stops me by saying, "The initial report is in already."

I turn. "And?"

"The verdict will probably end up accidental death. Everybody's bonded. Jain was insured for millions. Everything will turn out all right for everyone." She stares at me for several seconds. "Except Jain. You bastard."

We have our congruencies.

The package comes later, along with a stiff legal letter from a firm of attorneys. The substance of the message is this: "Jain Snow wished you to have possession of this. She informed you prior to her demise of her desires; please carry them out accordingly." The packet contains a chrome cylinder with a screw cap. The cylinder contains ashes; ashes and a few bone fragments. I check. Jain's ashes, unclaimed by father, friends or employer.

I drive west, away from the soiled towers of the strip-city. I drive beyond the colstrip pits and into the mountains until the paved highway becomes narrow asphalt and then rutted earth and then only a trace, and the car can go no further. With the metal cylinder in one hand I flee on foot until I no longer hear sounds of city or human beings.

At last the trees end and I climb over bare mountain grades. I

rest briefly when the pain in my lungs is too sharp to ignore. At last I reach the summit.

I scatter Jain's ashes on the wind.

Then I hurl the empty cylinder down toward the timberline; it rolls and clatters and finally is only a distant glitter on the talus slope.

"Jain!" I scream at the sky until my voice is gone and vertigo destroys my balance. The echoes die. *As Jain died.*

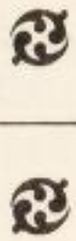
I lie down unpeacefully—exhausted—and sleep, and my dreams are of weathered stone. And I awake empty.

CHARLES L. GRANT

✪ *A Glow of Candles, A Unicorn's Eye*

I mentioned the fact that writers need to serve an apprenticeship in order to master their craft. Charles Grant surely did, in one of the hardest and most thankless jobs any writer has ever taken on. His exalted title was Executive Secretary of the Science Fiction Writers of America; but the reality behind the hyperbole was that he was the person who did everything the volunteer committee people and officers of SFWA were supposed to do, but didn't. And he learned—as is proven by stories like "A Glow of Candles, A Unicorn's Eye."

✪ Winner, Nebula, for Best Novelette of 1978.



There are no gods but those that are muses. You may quote me on that if you are in need of an argument. It's original. One of the few truly original things I have done with my life, in my life, throughout my life, which has been spent in mostly running. Bad grammar that, I suppose. But nevertheless true for the adverb poorly placed.

And how poorly placed have I been.

Not that I am complaining, you understand. I could have, and with cause, some thirty years ago, and for the first thirty-seven I did—though the causes were much more nebulous. But the complaints I have now are of the softer kind, the kind that grows out of loving, and are meant—in loving—not to be heard, not to be taken seriously.

For example, consider my beard. Helena loved it, once she became accustomed to its prickly assaults. But I do not need it anymore. There is no need for the hiding because I have been forgiven my sins—or so it says here on this elegant paper I must carry with me in case the message has been lost—forgiven my trespasses. But I like the stupid beard now. Its lacing of gray lends a certain dignity to a face that is never the same twice in one week. And it helps me to forget what I am beneath the costumes and the makeup and the words that are not mine. Yet it's not a forgetting that is demanded by remorse, nor is it a forgetting necessitated by a deep and agonizing secret.

It is a forgetting of years, to keep me from weeping.

Because the secret is out.

Has been, in fact, since the first evening I presented this prologue—a device not original, but originally apt.

No secret, then.

But I like the beard anyway.

And so did my Helena, whose hair—such hair!—was once so wonderfully long.

Attend then—or so says the script I no longer need to guide me—but before you decide where applause is warranted, be sure that you understand, be sure that you know exactly what you are applauding. We are still, after all, and in the last sight of the law, criminals, you know. I nearly murdered, and she nearly surrendered.

And I think that they will catch up with us at the last. Not because we have escaped and were pardoned. But because we have escaped and have been free.

1

Gordon was alone and friendless. . . .

Well, not really, but at the time there wasn't much that I wanted more. I tried to be careful, however, not to disrupt the taping session by allowing my reinforced skepticism and growing discomfort to put lines in my face where character should be, and where, I prayed constantly, it would stay before the bottom dropped out of this market, too, and I had to return to so-called regular employment to build up my account. To cover myself then, I placed right palm to right cheek in what I had been taught was an overt display of not-quite-hopeless despair coupled subtly with the proper degree of Shakespearean melancholy. Then, working at not flinching, I lowered my buttocks onto the conveniently flat rock behind me and stared at the river. They called it a river. Actually, it was something less than two hundred meters of recycled water not nearly deep enough to drown a gnat.

. . . his weary but undaunted brain struggling mightily for the miraculous wherewithal to extricate him from his precarious dilemma. . . .

The subvocal narration buzzing in my left ear so I could follow

the cues raised in me first a gagging sensation, then an impulse to swat at a nonexistent fly. I managed to swallow several times without its showing, then shifted my palm to my chin and supported it by resting my elbow on one knee. I could have brought it off. But my concentration slipped. The fact that I was naked, cold, and resignedly anticipating a drenching from the slate-gray clouds massing efficiently overhead goaded me into a mistake. After five minutes of gazing I could not help but frown instead of assuming the attitude of intense problem-solving on the subconscious level. And when it was done, there was no taking it back . . . and I knew it without anyone's prompting.

Unfortunately, no one bothered to turn off the tiger.

I heard it, a grumbling that should have come from the clouds. I rose quickly as it stalked into view, a creature so magnificent in the terror that it instilled that I could not take my eyes from its pelt, its face, the waterlike rippling of its muscles at shoulder and haunch.

A dark-feathered bird swept in front of it, but its gaze did not leave me for even the length of a blink.

Slowly, I backed toward the river, crouched, my fingers hooked into pitiful imitations of claws. Everything inside me from heart to stomach had suddenly become weightless and was floating toward my throat, and I felt a curious giddiness that split the air into fluttering dark spots before coalescing into stripes, massive paws, and disdainful curled lips exposing sharp white death.

It should have leaped when it reached the boulder I had been sitting on. And it did. And despite the training, the quiet talks, the assurances of my continuing good health . . . despite it all, I screamed.

The tiger struck me full on the chest, its front paws grabbing for a hold, its rear claws reaching to disembowel. I fell as I used the creature's momentum to spin us around, dropping off the edge of the low bank and into the water. There were three rows of fire across my ribs, six more on my shoulder blades, but I held the tiger under, a minute, more, until at last it quieted and I thrust it away from me and staggered back to land. The entire sequence could

not have lasted more than three minutes from start to finish, but I felt as though a dozen years had been suddenly added to my life. What there was of it.

I fell, gasping, spitting out water, then rolled onto my back and stared at my hands. They were bloody, and I sat up abruptly, looking around wildly for someone to patch me.

This was not supposed to happen.

I was to be strong, clever, luring the beast to its drowning . . . but I was not supposed to be clawed.

Immediately, a white-coated tech raced out from behind me and waded into the water with two assistants, the better to lug the simulacrum back to the shop for another repair job and, I imagined, another shot at another sucker like me. A fourth man, his shirt and trousers rumpled and soiled, wandered over to me and slapped in quick succession antiseptic and medpatches onto my injuries. I smiled at him. He scowled. I knew what was bothering him. If I couldn't be cajoled into doing it again, he would have to do some pretty fancy editing to keep the blood from showing. I think he expected me to feel sorry for him. As though it were my fault.

And when he was done, with not a word of condolence, or even of encouragement, I moved stiffly back to my rock and sat, waiting with dripping hair while those clouds waited to soak me until, finally, the artfully gnarled bole of a beautiful oak on the opposite bank split open with a zipperlike tear, and the director stepped out.

"Great," I muttered, and dropped my hands into my lap.

The director paused for a moment as if reorienting himself, sighed, and retrieved a powered megaphone from the rushes on the riverbank. He sniffed, looked everywhere but at me, and yanked a crimson beret down hard over an impossibly battered left ear.

"You're Gordon Anderson, right?" The voice should have been godlike, under the circumstances. Unfortunately, it wasn't. It squeaked.

I nodded.

"You okay?"

Bless you, I thought sourly, and nodded.

"Shouldn't have done that."

I didn't know whether he meant me or the tiger.

"Gordon Anderson," he said again, as if tasting it for some hint of its flavor, or for some trace of its poison.

He stared at the sky, sighed once more, and then I realized I was expected to stand up. That I refused to do. The last time I was naked and standing, my female costar had nearly strangled laughing. It had almost cost me the job, but she had felt sorry for me and blamed it on her lunch.

Besides, those patches weren't new. The antiseptic was weak and I was hurting, badly.

Meanwhile, the squeaking continued.

"Sorry about the animal, but you're supposed to be experienced at this sort of thing, Anderson. That's what they told me at casting. You're supposed to be experienced. A stage actor, right? You're supposed to know about these things, Anderson, if I know anything about that sort of . . . living. Am I getting through to you, Anderson? You're supposed to know!"

I could think of little more to do at the moment but nod again. My fingers kept returning to the patches, touching, pressing, wondering how I was supposed to handle the flood sequence without ripping open the bandages and bleeding to death. I would see the Diagmed people afterward, of course, but I had a feeling they could do nothing for me. The healing would be speeded up, but there probably would be scars. And why not?

"You're supposed to be brave, yet frightened, Anderson," the voice piped on, as though my screams hadn't been real enough. "Fearless, yet hinting at grave doubts as to your next plan of action. There is a flood coming, Anderson, a *flood!* Do you have any idea what that means?"

"I'll drown," I said, just loud enough for him to misunderstand.

"I don't think you're right for this job, Anderson, to tell you the truth," the director said after a carefully measured dozen beats of pacing, and waiting for word that the tiger was all right. "You

. . . you are required, you see, to set an example, the perfect example, for the audience—in case you've forgotten. You must radiate courage, determination, and just a *drop* of apprehension. You have trials yet to come, remember, trials that you cannot possibly imagine. And these trials that you cannot possibly imagine are filling you with challenge and trepidation. And, I might add, those children out there who are watching will want to *be with you!* They have to understand not only the vicissitudes of life, but also their symbolic representations in your journey. If they don't, they're only going to get nightmares. Do you follow me, Anderson? I say, do you follow me?"

Whither thou directeth, midget, I thought, then quickly nodded and raised my hands in a virtuoso combination display of supplication (for the continuance of the job), surrender (to the director's artistic authority), and defiance (for the sole benefit of the tapeman who was still running his idiotic machine).

The director grinned.

I clamped my hands firmly on my knees and straightened to my full sitting height.

"That's fine, Anderson. I knew we would be able to communicate once you got to know me a little better. Now, we have about thirty minutes or so before the flood. Why don't you take a short break and prepare yourself? We can run through the close-ups later on, when the flood goes down. Is that all right with you?"

"Whatever you say, boss," I said. And after he had tramped off somewhere to commune with whatever he communed with to make these tapes, I slid off the rock to the carefully trimmed grass, crossed my legs, and folded my hands over my stomach. After a doubtful glance at the sky, I closed my eyes, wrinkled my brow in practiced concentration, and fell asleep.

When I dreamed, it was of a small glass unicorn surrounded by low-burning candles.

The flood came precisely on cue—the director wouldn't have had it otherwise—but the finely woven strands of safety line that should have prevented me from being swept away into the next

sound stage snapped under the pressure. Luckily, I was out of position and managed to grab on to the director's oak, where they found me tightly gripping the trunk when the waters subsided. When I opened my eyes and they realized I was far more frightened than injured, they let me be. Except for the director, who slapped me on the back, patted me slyly on the left cheek (both of them), and strode bellowing off toward the setting of the next scene—the earthquake.

Slowly, testing one limb at a time, I unwrapped myself from the plastic tree and snatched at the robe one of the crewmen held out for me. After a moment's hard glare at the water and the sky, I stumbled off to the dressing room we all used in common. There was no one inside the long, narrow building when I arrived, and for that one small favor I was eternally grateful. I dried myself as best I could with my hands refusing to close, my arms disobeying the commands from my muddled brain, then I sat in front of my mirror and watched a single drop of water fall from my chin.

I stared at my reflection. Stared at the array of small and large jars, long and short tubes, hairpieces and skin dyes, falseflesh and false eyes. Stared at them all until they blurred into a parody of a rainbow; stared, grunted, and swung my fist into their midst, smashing until all were scattered on the floor.

Stared at the mirror, at the reflection, at the high creased forehead and brown eyes and slightly hooked nose and slightly soft chin. My fist came up to my shoulder. Trembled. I wanted to split open my knuckles on that face in the mirror, and drive cracks through the world that existed behind my back.

But at the moment—and only at the moment—it was all the world I had, and my hand dropped slowly to the table, where it rested on a ragged bit of cloth I used out of habit to wipe off my face.

In the beginning the idea had been a tempting one. Begun by the British and expanded by the Americans, the tapes were the foundation of a dream-induced system through which young people would hopefully be matured without actually suffering

through the birth pangs of adolescence. Hospital wards with soft colors, nurses with kind faces, and for two hours and twenty minutes every other day the young were wired and hooked and taped to a machine, which I and others like me, those actors with no place to go, inhabited. We wrestled with tigers, endured floods, endured women and men and disasters personal. It was, as the narration stressed again and again and again—who knows how often?—all very symbolic, and all very real.

Watch! the voice ordered.

Take care, the voice cautioned.

Watch, and take care, and listen, and apply . . . apply . . . apply . . . listen . . . apply . . .

A debriefing, then, which lasted for something like an hour. More, if you were new to growing without aging. Less, if you'd been in the system for a year or more.

The first children/adults would not be through the entire program for, the director once told me, at least another ten months. But, if you listened to him carefully and believed his raving, things were moving along just splendidly.

I could see it without much prompting.

Eleven-year-olds with graying hair and wrinkles and a walk that bordered on the burlesque of infirmity.

A girl twelve with the mind of a woman.

A boy ten with the rebellion sponged—exorcised out of him, exorcised and leaving him without dreams of how it had been when he had been . . . but he never had been . . . young.

It was, admittedly, exciting. And the nightmares I had about the possible consequences were only just that. So I rationalized whenever I went to the studio. After all, frankly, it was a job. An actor's job. Just about the only one left.

I had been in Lofrisco, wandering about that coast-long cityplex, when Vivian-my-agent called me and brought me back to Philayork. It was *the break,* she told me confidently—the chance for exposure, and the cash, that I needed.

"Listen, Gordy," she'd said, "these kids will know you for the

rest of their lives! Not by name, but they'll recognize your face! They'll want to see you on stage—if that's what you're still after —on the comunit channels, the cinema bowls. You'll have it made, you idiot. You can't pass this up."

And, to be honest, I hadn't. But neither had I forgotten the near-empty houses I had played to when I had managed to wheedle permission to leave those joyhall holovid arenas and cinema bowls.

Near empty.

Partially full.

There had been five in which I was an understudy. I didn't much care. It was live, actors and audience, and I drifted from one theater to another waiting for the chance to get in on the action. But they all folded in less than a month, the audiences deserting them long before the last curtain. Drifting in, stalking out, curious more than anything, and no one bothered to wait for the players who slunk from their failures from unlocked stage doors. Several times I tried to ask someone just why he was leaving, but never got an answer that cured the question.

Finally, when I cornered one of the directors and demanded to know why her play was a failure, she only snapped an arm toward the gap that was the stage and shrugged. "I guess we're running out of gimmicks. We need a new one. I don't know. The way things are going, I don't really care."

The Storm's Eye had three dozen sets, and auditorium seats that slowly tilted back to focus audience attention on a holovid simulation of the typhoon threatening the actors on stage.

Great World Yearning had catapults and springboards, trapezes, and a 360-degree stage.

Blessing had four orchestras, three tenors, waterfalls, ceiling-storms, a marching band, rehearsals for the audience's instrument parts, and a prominent reviewer who insisted on getting every name in the theater for his comprehensive critique.

Take This Crown had seventy-nine speaking parts and four burnings at the stake.

Where Hath God Raged had a planetarium, an espernarrator, and a colonist from the Moon.

Three playwright/producers had created them all. And when the last one gave up hope, I took the slip marking the deposit to my account and wandered from theater to theater. Something, I knew, had died in both artist and observer. Then, taking the easy way out, I managed to locate and assault with tears and fists all three of the creators one by one. All in darkness, I sought out those so-called playwrights, and after each attack I fled until my lungs burned me to a halt.

My justification at the time was simple: They were murderers, of something I could not yet understand. They had been part of a conspiracy to kill off words.

I wandered, waiting to be caught for my crime, listening for the accusing scream of a WatchDog swooping angrily beneath the Walkways, netting me, lifting me, locking me away.

I had to have been mad to have done it. But there were no still and small voices directing my attacks, no sudden blind fury that drove me to the call of insanity that guided my hand, only those questions, all beginning with *why?* and the knowledge that the playwrights had been midwives to disaster, had birthed disasters before, and were part and parcel of what I knew was the dying of a dying art.

Yet there was no feeling of catharsis.

I had done it.

Nothing more.

So I sat in front of the dressing-room mirror and thought of the tiger and its claws, and of the tiny director who was forcing me unknowingly to remember.

It was a play within a play within a play within a dream.

Like a beautiful thing I had seen once, and from which all I could remember was a tiny, shattered, fragile glass unicorn.

I pushed away from the table and dressed as best I could with the patches pulling at my shoulders and ribs. My fingers fumbled as I snapped my shirt closed. My thighs were elastic as I slipped

on my boots. Sooner or later I would have to tell someone what I had done. There had been nothing on the news and, though I wondered, I kept silent.

But not for long.

Helena.

A studio flyer took me to the entrance of my Keyloft and, once inside the lobby, I sagged against the liftube frame and held on. Looking down. Looking up. Rising free, falling free. No need to worry, Gordon, old son, the magic of science will give you faith.

2

I had been born, raised, and eventually cast willingly adrift in Philayork, the largest of the East Coast cityplexes. My father was the owner/manager of a joyhall which, in addition to the usual game rooms, gaming rooms, and stunt rooms, had a small cinema arena. None of the major features played there, but the minor ones were nevertheless sufficient to lure me from spools and tapes, to spend days and hours drifting through the stories that holoed around me. It wasn't the technics that ensnared me, enraptured me, but the men and women who portrayed the characters, and the men and women who paid their small admissions to eavesdrop on the plots.

("Marta, over here, hurry! Listen to what this guy is saying about the Count." "You listen, Will, I'm trying to find out what happened to the Colonel. We'll meet by the Grand Canyon when I'm done.")

They all knew it was sham and that they could if they wished put their hands through heads and cannon fire and the rings of Saturn or the domes on the Moon. But naturally they wouldn't. They listened, compared notes, reconstructed stories, and returned for what they had missed.

By the time I was in University, I succumbed to a temptation, which was easy enough since I knew most of the plots by

rote. I stole time here, sleep there, and several times managed to last through nearly three quarters of a show before anyone realized I wasn't part of the action. The idea that I could be something and someone I wasn't intrigued me. I did research, spent time in regular theaters in the less-visited parts of the city, and changed my emphasis in University without telling my father. When he did find out, and heard my dreams, one of us lost, and I left.

Studied. Learned.

Discovered agents and sold myself to Vivian. Who laughed at my studies. (*"My God, Gordy, nobody needs a script on the stage anymore; who told you you needed to learn how to memorize?"*) She took me quite literally in hand and showed me what show business was, outside of the school.

For eighteen years, then, I managed a fairly steady and obviously unspectacular living playing that man over there in the corner talking to the beautiful blonde, and that wounded trooper crawling through the Martian sandstorm, and that body, and that face, and . . . and. Until, between takes, I found myself wandering back into theaters that had stages and audiences and waterfalls and . . . and . . .

There's nothing to say that would stand alone as a reason. I loved it, that's all. Loved it, and hated it, because it didn't take long for me to see that something was wrong. Lethally wrong.

"You're crazy, you know that, Gordon."

"Just get me the jobs, Viv, that's all I ask."

"It takes a special kind of training. I've told you it's not like learning lines from a holovid script!"

"I'll learn."

"But, Gordon, you'll have to improvise! That's all the whole thing is, except for the effects. You're given an outline and you bluff your way through it. It takes years to learn it right."

"I've done it before, you know that. What's the big fuss? You'll get your percentage."

"You don't get it, do you?"

"I'll learn. That's all there is to it."
"You don't get it at all."

There was a wave of nostalgia that had, for the briefest of lightning-lit moments, the old-style theaters rejuvenated, rejoicing, rehiring actors and producers and directors and such. Lord, how we tried. But the wave flattened, and by the time I was making those dream-tapes for children, nothing was left but the must, the dust, and the drifting in and out.

3

I went into my home: living room, bedroom, alcoves for lav and ovenwall. All in shades of black and white.

I ate, not tasting, and stared at the Keylofts across the street. I watched a news summary and discovered the playwrights I had attacked were recovering. Euphemisms abounded, but the message was the same: person or persons unknown.

God, I wished that hadn't been so bloody damned true.

And fifteen minutes later, Philip and Helena came for a visit and I fed them their eager rations of stories about my taping day. All the time watching Helena, as though Philip were only a ghost along for the ride.

"He sounds like an insect I worked for once," Philip said of the director. Philip was fifteen years older than my own thirty-seven (Helena was four years younger). He enjoyed reminiscing about the, as he called it, flesh-and-blood theater he had been in, but it was a dream that he lived—Helena told me he had been a minor bit player who seldom had lines and was lucky to find two weeks' work in fifty. I don't know why, perhaps because of Helena, but he liked me. "An insect, Gordon. Stamp him out. You won't miss him. I promise you."

"Oh, don't be a fool," Helena muttered. "He has to finish the contract." She was sitting cross-legged in the center of the floor, swirling a snifter half full of a brandy I had hoped to save for another, more special, occasion. Not that just being able to look at

her wasn't special—and the moment I thought that was the first time I realized that I'd fallen in love. "Gordy, you can't pass up that money, you know. I mean, that's as far as it goes. No money, no food. How much simpler can it get?"

Philip, who was portly and conscientiously pompous, nodded and retrenched, scratching at his hairless scalp. "She's right, you know. There's no sense ranting about artistic integrity when you have to provide bread for the table."

"It isn't fair," I mumbled.

"Nobody said it was, man. But then, nothing ever is. There is no such creature as a Universal Fair, and I'm absolutely stunned that you haven't learned that by now. I mean, son, there you are, aren't you? Beating your head against the wall, trying to live on, of all things, the stage theater. You can scream all you want to about its lamented demise, but there's nothing you can do about it. Nothing at all."

I could only tug at my chin and gaze at the ceiling. It was true —God!—that the year of the Romantic had closed eons ago. No more traveling shows to the towns between the plexes, and only a single course in stage history at University, while the instructors told me sadly that the art was falling apart. But it wasn't. It was falling in, like a building whose inner supports had been dissolved in acid. A flurry of subsidies provided a revival or two, but essentially only prolonged the collapse, and when the charities took over most of the funding, there was a death knell unmistakable along the length of the aisles.

I closed my eyes and rubbed them, wishing Philip would banish himself so I could talk to Helena.

I smiled then when she crawled over to sit beside me, a gentle white hand resting on my calf, massaging absently.

"Gordy, if you drop out now—"

"Helena, I don't think Gordon wants to hear any more."

I sat up quickly. There was something in the big man's voice, a warning. I frowned and looked to Helena, who was brushing a finger idly through the carpet's low nap.

"Gordy, let's face it," she said without looking up, "if you cut

from the contract, Vivian will let you go. And if she does, you'll end up like us. Like me. And like Philip."

"And what," he demanded loudly, "is wrong with the way we are managing? We hang in, don't we? We've been—"

"Starving, you idiot," she snapped. "And I won't have Gordy going the same way."

"Starving?" Philip's laugh was singularly mirthless. He punched lightly at his stomach and stretched out his hands to exhibit the fat that clung to them. "One doesn't starve, girl, and still look like that."

"You know what I mean. Starving for work."

"We manage, I told you."

"We manage, we manage," she mimicked in a high, child's voice. She looked back to me, and the gray in her eyes had slowly shifted to black. "One part between us, Gordy, since June. One stinking part, and the thing folded before the first week was over. He refuses to . . . what's the word? condescend? . . . refuses to condescend to do the work you do. He's a fine one to talk about artistic integrity. And he's fat because he takes most of the food dole in starches. He has a Falstaff complex, Vivian says."

"I refuse to listen to this—"

"Then don't," she yelled. "Go back to your loft and improvise something. Improvise thin. And don't call me, Philip. My vione is closed, for the duration."

"Helena, I will not be spoken to in—"

I'd had enough, more than enough. I unwound from the couch and moved to Philip's side. It helped that I was a full head taller and that my weight was distributed to give me at least the illusion of strength in my chest and arms. But the illusion was all I needed, and Philip fumbled into a meek silence.

"I can't help it," he finally said, almost whining. "Vivian fired us today."

I blinked dumbly, turned around to Helena, who was still on the floor. If I had been struck with a steel pipe I couldn't have been more stunned.

But: "True," she said. "She says she can't live on a percentage of nothing."

"But I am still man enough," Philip persisted as he looked for a way to regain the advantage, "I am still man enough not to have to condone the manner in which you two have—"

I shut him up by grabbing his arm and nearly dragging him to the door. He was too surprised to say anything. I slid the door back, eased him out, and stood there to be sure he entered the liftube.

"You'll pay for this, Gordon," he warned as he descended. "I am not without influence in some . . ."

I laughed and held on to the door frame. "That line is older than all of us put together, Philip. Why don't you just get yourself a job. In a restaurant." I had to shout the last, since he had already dropped from view, but the noise made me feel better. Somewhat, anyway. And I closed the door quietly, instead of slamming it.

Get a job.

Helena came up behind me then, reached to my shoulders and massaged them skillfully while she rested her cheek against my back. I closed my eyes for a moment, then took a calming deep breath and began talking. Explaining. Describing. Telling her everything and knowing that if she wanted to, she could run out to the Blues and probably collect a reward. The police were always giving out rewards. It was part of the system of mutual cooperation and protection. I stopped my confession only once, when her hands left my shoulder. But I finished. And when I was done, everything that had been keeping me upright deserted me. I sagged. She caught me and led me into the bedroom. And this time there was a catharsis of a sort. The weight of the attempted murders was, not lifted, but lessened. And I'm ashamed to admit that I was doubly relieved that she had not run to the Blues, for the reward.

And when we lay on the bed, each to a side, and did not touch or attempt to peel off our clothes, I knew she did not pity me, but loved me instead.

"I can't believe they're not really dead," I said into the darkness

when the silence grew too long for me to accept. "But from the report I heard—and would you believe it was only just before you came here?—from what I heard, none of them will be the same when they recover. The worst part is: now that I've told you I don't feel guilty anymore. And that's got to be wrong! I wonder if I should stick around until I'm caught. I'm bound to be, you know. One of them must have seen something. And if my name and picture go out through the network, there's no place I can hide. Not for long, anyway."

"But Gordy, it's been nearly two weeks. If the police knew something, they'd be busting already."

I smiled. Grinned. Shook my head even though I knew she couldn't see it. "What's their hurry? I haven't tried to leave the country."

"Maybe . . . maybe you were lucky. Maybe they didn't know who it was, didn't recognize you, I mean."

I rolled over onto my side, one arm up against my cheek. I tried to see her, but couldn't. But I saw her anyway. "I keep telling myself that. It's a hope, I guess. I wish I knew."

"Gordy?"

"I'm awake."

"Are you wondering if I hate you for what you did? I mean, I did a show for one of them a year or so ago."

"A little, I think."

"Well, it's dumb, but I don't. I'm a bit frightened, though."

"I know that one well enough, don't I? Two weeks, and I still can't figure out why I did it."

"You were angry. Furious. That's obvious enough."

"Sure, but why? It wasn't the first time I was ever in a flop." I worked at a laugh, then, to take the sting out. "When you think about it, I guess, they're all flops, aren't they?"

"Of course they are. You just don't know why."

"Gordy, I want to help you."

"Escape?"

"No. I want to find out what's going wrong. I don't want it to happen. I . . . I have some scripts in my loft. I keep them under the bed, and when I get too depressed I read them."

"Scripts I don't need, believe me."

"No, not those kind. I mean real play scripts. Shakespeare, Williams, Miller, Chekhov . . . people like that. I'll bet I have more than two dozen of them. I got them . . . well, let's say they just gravitated into my gorgeous little fingers when I was visiting friends . . . places."

"God, Helena, you're a crook!"

"Look who's talking. It's funny, Gordy, but I'll bet I know almost every line of them by heart. It must have been nice, not to have to make up things as you went along. It's all down there, just like your cinema things. 'When beggars die there are no comets seen.' You sure can't improvise something like that, can you?"

"Who said that?"

"I don't know. Miller, maybe. I don't remember."

"You should."

"Why? Who cares besides you and me?"

"What about the guy who wrote it?"

I drifted back and forth from a sleep filled with candles and unicorns, and when I asked Helena about it, she told me the scene was from something about a hundred and seventy years old. She quoted me a long passage from the end of the play, about worlds lit by lightning and change and things like that. I'm no history buff, so I can't say how appropriate that might have been to the time it appeared, but I know about lightning now. And when I tried to explain it to her, all I could do was choke and tell her never mind.

Finally, just before dawn took the black from the ocean outside the plex, I cupped and pillowed my hands behind my head and whistled softly a song I once knew. It would have been nice if it had been a lullaby my father used to sing. Would have been. But it wasn't.

"Helena, there's one thing I know, now."

"What? And don't you ever get tired?"

"No, not often. And what I know is: we're dying. You and me and Philip and the rest of the whole stupid stable. Now that's a good word: stable. We're horses, Helena, in a motorcar world. One by one they're shooting us down. These tapes I'm making, they're supposed to be helping kids grow up. And what do I do? Me, the hero who survives floods and earthquakes and invasions of god-awful monsters? Just like a kid I lash out and hit someone just because I don't get it. I almost killed those guys, Helena. And they'll come for me. Someday."

A rustling. The bedclothes. Helena had finally given up and slipped in between the sheets. "Then we'll have to escape. It's as simple as that."

"We?"

"Oh, come on, Gordy! Do you think I'm going to let you have all the fun?"

This time the laughter was real, delightfully so, and I stretched out, gathered her to me, and we rocked, like children, until the spasms had passed and we were sober again.

"Look," I said, "there's no sense in my making some big dramatic escape until, and unless, the Blues come for me. It'll be easy to hide in a plex this big, right? And I want to finish the contract so I can get a job somewhere else if I have to. I don't need that blot on my work record, not now. And I have to find something else out. Like you said, sort of: I want to rate a comet. Even a small one. And to do it, I'll have to learn everything I can about why we're . . . dying."

"I know the answer already."

"Sure."

"The public doesn't like us anymore. It took a few thousand years, but they've finally decided they don't want us to live."

"No," I said, hovering close to an answer, yet not close enough to know what I was seeing. "No, there's something more. And before I start running, I want to know what."

"Then the first thing you're going to have to do is not to be so

solemn. If we're going to hunt for this thing of yours, we'd better do it smiling."

"Why?"

"Oh, go to sleep, Gordon. You're no fun anymore."

Two days later a pamph came, announcing the limited engagement of a series of original material to be performed by players from one of the lunar domes. I had seen them before. I needed to see them again, knowing without knowing that they held the key. Vivian got me the tickets, and I repaid her by showing that simp of a director just how good an actor I could be. He loved me. I loved me. And, thankfully, I still wasn't picked up by a WatchDog patrol. I still jumped at shadows, still looked over my shoulder, but I was beginning to believe that I would always remain free. Or so I tried telling myself each night before sleeping.

The second day after the lunar pamph came, I was stopped in the Keyloft lobby by my landlord, who told me there was a friend of mine waiting upstairs.

"He didn't have a latch, Mr. Anderson," he said, "but I seen him around here a lot of times so I figured you wouldn't mind that I tubed up and let him in."

I nodded thoughtfully, thanked him for his kindness, and spent most of the time in the liftube wondering if maybe it had been a Blue plant, and my dear old landlord would be collecting that reward.

But it wasn't.

It was Philip.

He was just signing off the vione when I came in, and as fast as I stepped around the couch to see who he was talking to, he shifted his bulk until the screen staticked into darkness.

"What?" I said, perching on the couch's arm.

Philip spread his arms in an attitude of peace-making. I didn't believe it for a minute. Without a single direct word, I had taken Helena from him, and had made him admit twice that he was

living a deadly romantic lie. The friendship we had had was buried. Deep.

"Come on, Phil, I'm hungry, and then I have some studying to do for tomorrow." Half true. After eating, I was going to continue reading some of the scripts Helena had let me borrow.

"All right, then," he said, still standing by the vione. "I've come to inform you that I overheard something this morning that I believe you would be interested in. In return, I expect a favor."

"I don't get it," I said. "You want to make some kind of deal?"

He nodded.

"For what? A lousy favor? What do you need, money? A place to stay?"

"Just wait a moment, Gordon, and you'll find out everything. I am, as you well know, currently unemployed. According to procedure, just being part of Vivian's client menagerie marked me employed. When she unceremoniously, and without real cause, dumped me, I had to gain a measure of strength and make myself known to the nearest Blue Station Local to . . . to sign up for the complete dole." His hands fluttered, clasping at his stomach, grabbing at the baggy trousers he hadn't bothered to tuck into his boots. He was all in green today, his lucky color.

"I'm sorry, Phil."

His grin was short-lived and insincere. "I'm sure you are. But that's not the point, is it? While I was there I overheard a couple of the Locals—one was a Dog pilot, I think—talking about a series of criminal attacks down in the old district. Where you hang out, Gordon. I imagine you've heard about them."

I nodded, slowly, my face a masterpiece of serenity.

"Well, one of them was a regular patron of . . ." He rolled his eyes in an effort to display to me how distasteful his words were. To him. Not for me. "He enjoyed spending many off-duty hours in a joyhall." The words came in a rush, as if acidic on his tongue. "Arena stuff. You know what I mean. The sagas and things that you are always blathering about."

"Phil," I said, rising and heading for the ovenwall, "if you're

going to be snide, just show yourself out, okay? I don't need that kind of aggravation today."

"I'm sorry," he said, standing behind me as I selected my last-meal, and pointedly made the selection for one. When I turned around, he shrugged. "The Local was saying that he was sure that one of the actors fit the description of the man—they think those things were done by one man, you see—of the man who did them. Of course, I couldn't hear what the man looked like."

He stopped. I waited.

"I thought you might like to know."

"Oh? What for?"

"Well, really, Gordon, you holo folk stick together like I don't know what. I thought you might like to put out the word to your friends, have them watch their backs. So to speak."

I kept my hands in my pockets—clenched, to keep them from trembling. I nodded, hoping to appear contrite and grateful simultaneously, and led him toward the door.

"The favor?"

"What favor?" I said. "Oh. Well, sure. What is it?"

He took my arm at the elbow, his fat hand tight, the fingers pinching. "Please, talk to Vivian, won't you? I can't stand having to beg for a meal every day. I mean—really, Gordon, it's so demeaning, if you know what I mean."

"Philip, Vivian could get you a dozen parts tomorrow if you would only let her. But you won't. And until you do, there's nothing I can do, either."

He stepped back as if I had slapped him. Then, a scowl as dark as midnight crowding his face, he shouldered by me into the corridor outside the loft. He took a step toward the liftube, looked back over his shoulder, and smiled.

"You'd force me to do that, wouldn't you?"

"Phil, I'm not forcing you to do a thing. You want me to ask Vivian to let you back, you'll have to compromise. That, my friend, is all there is to it."

"I'm sorry for you, then," he said, and left.

I waited for him to make a reappearance—waited, then hurried back into the loft and made a careful search to see if he had taken anything, disturbed anything. The only evidence he'd been there, however, was the pamph. It had been picked up from my couch, obviously read, and tossed onto the floor. I retrieved it, folded it into quarters, and stuffed it into my pocket. It had on it the date Vivian had gotten me the tickets, and the man I was to see to pick them up.

I felt sorry for Philip and his nonsense ways, but had more important things to worry about at the time. I ate rapidly, watched the news for indications of impending arrests, then called Helena and we spent the rest of the night tying up the vione, reading random scenes from the scripts she had lent me. I would read a line and try to stump her for the next. I seldom won, but what was more important: I was learning them myself, and moving about the room grandly, until she snapped once that I kept disappearing from the vione's range.

It was, without a doubt or a worry, the single best way to pass the time—short of actually having her in my arms, of course.

That, I promised her a dozen times during the night, would come later. And often.

And all the time, that hovering I had felt drew more steady, closer, and the answering light more clear.

At last, a week later, I stood in front of the theater in the park. It was a low dome, black and silver and sprouting several cowl-like entrances through which people were already filing. A mosaic apron in blue, gold, and white led up to the dome, and from its center rose a tall post with four huge spotlights. Their soft glare was somewhat reassuring, but it turned the surrounding foliage into a dense black wall.

"Gordon!"

My name was like a slap across the back of my head. I stiffened, not knowing whether to run or surrender, then turned. It was Helena who stepped out of the shadows. Lithe, she looked uncom-

monly lovely in a plain gray tunic and trousers. Her auburn hair was almost like a veil. I held out my hands and she grasped them, pulled me close, and we kissed, once, lightly, forever.

Then I told her about Philip's visit, and she shattered her loveliness with a vicious scowl. "Relax," I said, rubbing at her arm. "The most he can do is swear a lot."

The floodlights dimmed twice.

"Time, great hunter," she said. "No more stalling."

There were dozens of gold guidelights hovering at the head of each aisle. I held up my tickets and one of them brightened and led us to our seats, seats in an auditorium that radiated back from a traditional stage. I mentally blessed poor Vivian's efforts, crossed my legs, and held Helena's hand. Waiting. Staring at the proscenium, which was studded with holovid representations of the solar system, each planet revolving in truncated orbit, the moon in its center, dotted with blue specks that marked the colonists' domes. I was impressed, and depressed. I was cold, unusually so, and I could not figure out just why this was so.

I tried concentrating on the curtains, on the flecks of crimson that flashed whenever a guidelight flitted too close.

I tried listening to the audience around me, its muffled laughter, gossip, scoldings, coughing.

Something.

Something.

I knew it was there, but when I tried to drive it away so I could enjoy the show, it balked as if yanking on my arm to tell me something far more important.

Music, then, and I was distracted.

And three quarters of the way through the first act, it all fell into place, solidly, painfully, so that with some mumbled excuse to Helena, I crept up the aisle and hurried outside.

Walked. Paced, rather, in a large circle around the lightpost. There was no doubt that the performance was something I would never forget—if novelties are things from which memories are

spun. The company was expert, the same I had seen those long months ago, and this particular oarkdome had been reconstructed to approximate and give semblance to the absense of gravity the players were accustomed to on their own home satellite.

It was, in one dark sense, beautiful.

On the stage they were in all manner of costume. Free. Floating. Swimming. A free-form exercise complete with sets and speeches. The women were pale snowflakes drifting around men who were the same. I hadn't been able to follow the story very well—something about a starship lost around Andromeda—but many times there were long pauses in the action and in the flow of words, and the children in the audience grew restless and whispered. As did the adults by the time I had left. I could see, then, that before it was done, few would be listening to the dialogue magnified and booming. They would be watching only—and for that they all could have just as easily attended a joyhall show.

The play was a circus.

The Lunars were freaks.

That was why the people came. And that, I finally understood, was why they went to other plays, in theaters, on stages. I was a freak. A freak who happened to be around when volcanoes erupted or a ceilingstorm thundered or the sets changed so rapidly it gave one a headache. There was no longer any discipline, either in players or audience, no feel for words, because the words were instantaneous.

It was stupid. I should have seen it before. It was obvious, so obvious that I had overlooked it in search of something far more complicated, far less damning.

What did the man say? The man who broke the unicorn of my dreams and who tries now to blow out my candles? A world something by lightning. Well, I was struck.

And I was . . . I was mad.

The night wind chilled suddenly. An arthritic attendant with a small pouch at his side shambled around the area looking for

debris to justify his pension. But the apron was clean and he vanished without once looking up at me, disappearing around the theater dome curve. A clock figure, I thought, with no hours to chime.

I scowled then, and shook myself like a drenched dog. I was falling too quickly into a self-pitying morbid mood that would do me no good if I wanted to devise some way to reverse the trend I had so belatedly discovered. I decided to get Helena and take us home, and had already started for the entrance when I stopped, a peculiar whining bothering my ears. I rubbed lightly at my temples, and the whining grew louder. Familiar. Another step, and I glanced up and saw the spiderleg spotlights walking a WatchDog toward the place where I was standing.

Frozen for a moment, I stood like an idiot until I realized they'd be landing not far from where I stood. I bolted into the theater and pressed myself against the door frame, watching as the sleek black-and-gold police machine settled onto the heart of the mosaic like a bloated dragonfly. A Blue leaped out, steadied himself, and reached up a hand to assist the others following. There were only eight that I could see, standing around in a curious display of alert watchfulness and indecisiveness. Then my nails dug unfelt into my legs. Philip lumbered from the exit, disdainfully brushing away an offer of assistance. I must have lost my temper, and a good part of my reason, because I found myself standing just outside then, and when a pinlight suddenly flared and caught me, Philip pointed.

A bell, small and unobtrusive, sounded behind me. Intermission had begun.

The Blues had already taken their stuntons from their waists, and I could see by the glowing tips that they were going to kill me if they had to.

Ah, you fat-bellied Judas, I thought, and spun back inside, fighting my way through the people seeking exit, grabbing at Helena's wrist when I saw her. I dragged her several meters before she tried to pull back, but all I had to do was yell "Blues" into her ear and she was with me, running down the aisle toward the

curtains. Without bothering to stop and think, I vaulted onto the stage, hauled her after me, and raced into the wings and along the narrow corridor I knew would run the length of the theater's rear wall. There was a great deal of commotion back in the auditorium, and though I wanted just a moment to think things out, to ask Helena for advice, I slammed up against the fire exit and went through without stopping. A handful of Blues darted around the corner, yelling when they spotted us, but before they could set their stuntons for a firing charge, we were through the trees and into the underbrush so thoughtfully managed to make our flight easier.

Suddenly I stopped and Helena yelped. Except for the faint glow of the theater's lights, the darkness here was complete and, falsely or not, I felt a momentary safety.

"What?" she whispered as we heard the Dog's whining pitch as it lifted from the clearing.

The darkness was complete, I thought, and if we continued headlong as we were, we would be bound for injury that would make a mockery of our trying. I slapped impatiently at my thigh, then took her hand and made my way back, angling in a crouch toward the front of the dome.

The WatchDog whine screamed.

Handheld spotlights shattered through leaves and branches.

With only eight Blues immediately available, I knew my chances of at least getting to the park gates were fairly good. But it had to be done quickly, before reinforcements were summoned. I whispered all this to Helena as we moved, the words snapping singly, like those of a sprinter out of breath. Twice we had to duck out of the way of the thinly spread cordon, but soon enough we were at the clearing. The playgoers had already been herded back inside, and only Philip remained, talking quietly with an officer who was holding a comunit circuit in his hand. Instinctively, I took a step toward them, but Helena jerked me back.

"Later," she hissed in my ear. "And save a piece for me."

It was pleasantly obvious from the dour expression on the

officer's face that we weren't going to be easily caught—if at all. Emboldened, then, I made my way through the trees to the pathway I had taken only a brief hour earlier. A minute's waiting that seemed twice a lifetime, and we broke from the cover and into a steady trot. We ran on our toes to keep the echoes from betraying us, and left the path only when we came to a bend too acute to enable us clear sight ahead, or to skirt the now unfortunately well-lighted gardens.

I thought of Philip, wondering how, until I remembered the mailer with dates and names scribbled on it.

I thought of him again, and wondered why, until I remembered his pride and the beating I had given it. Well, at least he would have the reward, I thought with a grin, though how much good it would do him was moot, since I had every intention of getting away.

I grinned even wider. Intentions. I had intended so many, perhaps too many things in these first thirty-seven years. And this was the first time I had actually been driven to action, to do something, to move. I almost felt good, I almost felt joyous.

And the feeling lasted until, only twenty or so meters from the gate, we had to veer sharply into the brush. A Blue had suddenly come from streetside and planted himself directly in front of the only way we had now of leaving the park. Dropping to the ground, I ground knuckles into my cheekbone, trying to force through the pain something I could use to eliminate that man before he was doubled, tripled, made unassailable.

We crept closer. The shouts behind us had separated, nearly vanished. Once, the WatchDog sailed above us, above us and beyond, back into the park. Then Helena jabbed me on the arm with a finger and pointed at the Blue. At herself. She made a steadying motion with her palm and rose to her feet before I could stop her. I tried a lunge, but it was too late. She was already in the middle of the path and walking toward the gates, her legs affecting a slightly drunken gait, one hand brushing through her hair, the other angled out from her side as if providing balance.

As she moved, then, so did I. Staying within the boundary of the hedging along the path, I made it to within five meters of the Blue before I had to stop—and watch—my hands pressed to the ground, ignoring the sharp digging of pebbles cutting into my skin.

Listening to the Dog still circling above.

Helena began an off-key whistling, and the Blue almost dropped into an offensive crouch, then saw her and straightened. She giggled, hiccuped—I thought she was overdoing it more than a little—and reached with one finger to unseam her tunic. The Blue raised a warning hand, cautioning her to remain where she was. She giggled again, lurched forward, and swayed. The Blue—a young man who should have known better, but didn't because he was young—took that first important step toward her. She swayed again, then allowed her knees to buckle. The Blue moved instinctively, catching her around the waist, allowing her weight to carry him around and down, his knees not quite touching the ground.

Immediately he moved, however, so did I again, this time racing from the brush to get behind him, and before he had completed his dipping motion, I had his stunton in hand. Fumbling with the studs on the handgrip of the cylinder, I tried to set the electric charge as low as I could. Then I lay the tip alongside the Blue's head. He jerked as Helena wriggled out of his grasp. He jerked, his arms snapping back, his hands almost touching at the base of his spine. Jerked, his tongue protruding and his breath inhaling in one explosive wheeze.

A silent dance while I was too dumbfounded to run.

Ending.

"Come on," I said more harshly than I had intended, and with Helena's assistance I dragged him into the bushes.

"Into the breach, isn't that what they say?" she asked me as we clasped hands once more and raced for the nearest Walkway.

"Who says?"

"Who cares?"

"You're not making sense."

It was apparent that neither of our lofts would be safe for us any

longer. I had no doubt that Philip had also told the police about Helena's involvement with me. They'd be looking for her, too, once they'd discovered she wasn't coming home. But the Walkway had its terminus at the edge of the cityplex, and from there it was only normal highways for landcars and hovercats. They were only sparsely used, of course, for the villages and towns not linked into a plex, but walking them was unthinkable, especially at night.

So it was less a coincidence than has been reported that we ended up at Vivian's place less than an hour later.

"I'm leaving," I told her after we'd barged in and cornered her on a chair near her bedroom. "Sorry about the dream-tapes and all, but we're in rather a hurry."

She was too surprised to do more than blink, then quickly gathered her dignity about her like the gold-and-green robe she wore to cover her weight. "I heard on that"—she nodded toward the comunit—"that you were wanted. God, Gordy, what made you do a thing like that?"

"I don't know. I wanted to be a star."

"There aren't any anymore, but you're too thick to know it."

"I know one thing, Viv," I said, "and that's *why.*"

"So? Tell me."

"Viv," I said when Helena coughed, "one last favor. The keys to your landcar."

"What will you do if I don't? Beat me to death?"

I shook my head, rose, and after a moment's long agony, she reached into a drawer in the table beside her and tossed me the keys as though they were hot. "I'll report the thing stolen, you know."

I laughed, moved as though to kiss her, then joined Helena, who was already in the hall.

"Listen," Viv shouted suddenly from the doorway, "if you get a job, remember you're still my client!"

The vehicle was an old one, but it got us through the plex tunnels to the outside, and once on the highway with no Dogs in our wake, I managed to slow down a bit. But we ran, through

valleys of trees that had no hand to arrange them, past dimly lighted villages where we dared not stop. Twice in four hours we passed other vehicles, all going in the opposite direction, and each time I felt as if I would strangle until the headlights glared by and we were in darkness again.

Helena sat quietly in the passenger seat keeping watch on the starred sky. She was pale, far more pale than I had ever seen her now that the excitement had given way to realization. I kept telling myself that she had done nothing wrong, that she could easily go back to Philayork and claim I had taken her by force, or some such nonsense. I kept telling myself that as though it were a prayer.

And finally her weariness caught up with me and I had to find a small clearing at the side of the road. When I did, I pulled over and, without so much as a kiss or a wink, I fell asleep.

This time, there were no dreams.

4

We rode for two days more, staying away from the main arteries, sticking to the tinier, less-traveled roads that webbed off the highway. It was difficult at first for several reasons. The hardest adjustment was to the continuing sky, the mountains, the sudden inducement of vertigo when the road would suddenly bend and drop and we were faced with a broad and green valley several kilometers wide. And now that we were running, we abruptly realized that we had no place to go. No friends. No contacts. Only the certain belief that should we attempt to enter a cityplex again, we would be trapped as fast as we walked into the first restaurant for something to eat.

Only Helena and I, then, and some half-formed hopes.

And finally, a small town called Eisentor, where we grabbed what courage we could and stopped. With what money we had we bought provisions, some clothes, and extra fuel for the car. No one asked us questions, no one paid us any more mind than they would

a taxman drifting through his rounds. When it became obvious that we weren't suddenly going to be jumped and shackled, we relaxed, found a small eatshop, and had us a decent meal. We said little, however, because the fear of the flight was still ghosting around our eyes. We ate, only, and drank what we could.

Then we walked awhile through narrow streets with wooden, brick, or clayboard houses. We sat on a bench and watched several children playing around a puddle left over from the previous night's rain.

Suddenly, without consulting Helena, I walked over to the children and asked them what their favorite shows on the comunit were. They didn't seem too eager to talk to a stranger, but they answered me anyway; and when I did a few lines from one of the plays Helena had given me, did a few lines and some comic strutting, they laughed. They were puzzled, to be sure, because they didn't really know why, but they laughed and asked for more.

I gave it to them, as much as I could, but when I saw their mother peering anxiously from behind a nearby house, I excused myself and hurried to get Helena.

"Did you see that?" I said excitedly as we made our way back to the car. "Did you see those kids?"

Helena kept nodding as I kept repeating the questions, and when she finally laid a hand across my chest to shut me up, I still couldn't stop grinning.

"Feels good, does it?" she asked smugly, as though she already knew the answer but was making me say it.

"Well, of course it does," I said. "But . . ."

"But what?"

"I don't know. It feels good, and it feels . . . funny." I scratched at my head, my throat, moved rapidly away from the edge of the sidewalk when a hovercat aired by, its skirts keeping down the blow of brown dust from its fans. "Things ought to be banned," I muttered as I brushed at my trousers.

"Progress," she said. "But what do you mean, 'funny'? You've acted before. What's . . . I don't know what's funny about it?"

When we reached the vehicle still parked in front of the eat-shop, I hadn't yet found an answer. I thought about it, thought about what I had learned from the lunar production, and from Philip and Vivian, trying right there in the middle of that town to squeeze in, in one way or another, the last piece.

To put together, as Helena said much later, years later, the last fragile piece of a broken unicorn.

And when I did I hustled her into her seat, slid quickly behind the wheel, and drove off much faster than I thought I was going. A few heads turned, a few faces frowned as we sped through Eisentor and back into the hills, and as soon as I realized it I eased the acceleration. The one thing I didn't need now was to have our faces remembered.

"All right," I said as I turned onto another side road, "I have to find a place where I can do some thinking."

"Isn't there anything else you do but think?"

Her bitterness amazed me, so much so that I almost stopped right there.

"I mean, Gordy, aren't you getting tired? Didn't those people . . . didn't they do anything for you?"

I made excuses for her. She was overtired—we'd hardly gotten the best of rest, sleeping in the car or on the ground beside it. She was still overwrought from our flight. She had not yet been able to accept the status she had willingly, knowingly, adopted when she came with me.

I made excuses, but for the next two hours or so we argued. About little things, dumb things, sniping and picking until it was apparent one of us was going to leap from the car if we didn't calm down.

By nightfall, I knew she was ready to give up. Maybe she had thought I had a meticulous plan already worked out; maybe she thought there was still some vestige of romance in weariness and hunger, dirt and thirst. Whatever it was, it angered me, and I was just about ready to turn around from wherever we were and take her back to Philayork when I realized that if I did, if I gave her

up without some sort of trying, I would be no better than Philip and his incredible paunch.

I slowed and began to talk, ignoring her gibes as best I could, noticing after a while that they grew fewer and less acid. I talked, roughing out the idea I had had when prompted by the children. Her skepticism fed on it for nearly an hour, but I refused to give it up. And when I was done, with all her objections buried in the darkness around us, she was silent.

Shortly afterward, we came upon a solitary abandoned house, one of many that belonged to those who, having no direct contact with any of the smaller towns, decided that perhaps the plexes weren't so bad after all. Those we had come across before had been done in by the weather or vandals or a brutal combination of both, but this one had recently been vacated, and it didn't take me long to force my way in. There were scant provisions left in the ovenwall, but they were enough to fill us. The comunit still worked and, while I made some effort to hide the car, Helena watched the news for some sign of our escapade, and much later, years later, we both admitted that our egos were blunted sorely when nothing was broadcast. We were minor criminals then, it seemed, not worth the airtime.

We slept in the tiny bedroom. Apart. Alone.

I began to have doubts.

"We'll have to stay here for a few days," I said the next morning. "Just to be sure. I want to be completely sure before we go on."

"It happened too fast, Gordy," she said. We were sitting opposite each other in the living room. Her eyes were swollen and red, her hair in uncaring disarray. "Everything was moving just nicely, slowly. I guess that's what I mean. Then you showed up, and all of a sudden I couldn't blink without something happening. You know, we didn't even have time to say—"

"We had no one to say it to, really, you know."

"There was Vivian, I suppose. I guess we said good-bye to her. In a way."

"But she fired you!"

"She was still someone I knew."

"Well, for all that, so am I."

"Yes, but you're here."

"You really think we can get away with it, don't you?"

"Why not? We won't have some thirty-room loft overlooking the ocean, but we'll manage. It all depends on your priorities."

"We'll have to change, then, won't we?"

"I'm afraid so. Not radically, mind you, but enough to confuse anyone we might happen to meet that knew us."

"Now what are the odds of that, Mr. Anderson?"

"Fantastically small."

"Do you have any idea how many years it took for this hair to get this long? You're asking an awful lot of me."

"That, too, depends on your priorities."

"If you're not careful, Gordon Anderson, you're going to get as pompous as Philip. Hand me that knife."

"The food's running out. They must have disconnected the supply when they moved. Must have? Of course they did. I must be getting stir crazy or something. It's all that practicing you're making me do."

"Well, if the food's running out, then we might as well start planning to make our first move. You know, Philip said he was starving. I wish he'd walk through that door right now. I'd tie him permanently to a chair and face him to the ovenwall. Then I'd smash the thing and let him watch the food rot while he shriveled."

"You're vicious."

"I have a sense of the dramatic."

"Do you like the color of my hair? Black sets off my skin rather nicely, don't you think?"

"Do you like my beard? Vivian kept telling me I had an agreeably weak chin."

"Helena!"

"What's the matter, don't you like it?"

"Where . . . where did you get it?"

"There's a storage room upstairs. I was looking for some clothes, those over there, and I found this little chest. I think there must have been children here sometime. A long time ago. Anyway, I opened it, and there were all these baubles and things. This one was at the bottom."

"I can't . . . it would look better on you."

"No. It's yours. See? It has a chain around its neck, just like a halter. You can wear it around yours. For luck."

"It's too small, Helena. I'll break it."

"I'm not going to argue with you. You'll wear it and like it. If someone asks you, you can tell them you have a fetish for horses."

"They'll know it's not a horse."

"I wouldn't bet on it. Besides, you and I are the only ones it'll matter to, anyway."

"It matters to you?"

"If it doesn't, I've learned all those parts for nothing, haven't I? You know something, Gordy, you really can be dense sometimes. You really can. Now put it on."

"I feel funny."

"Don't. Just wear it."

"It's so small, it's buried in my palm."

"Wear it! It'll keep the beasts away."

It did.

5

I stood at the rear wall of the meetinghouse. I think, that year, it was somewhere in Michigan. In front of me were several rows of

static chairs dragged in by volunteers from the attics and storerooms that had been opened to us when we arrived. Already there was a fair crowd waiting. Talking. Nudging with elbows. Pointing with only halfhearted disdain at the crudely painted backdrop on the far wall. It depicted, rather impressionistically, a forest none of them believed existed, but a forest nevertheless. They drifted in and smiled when handing me their admission, but promptly forgot I was there once the money had changed hands. Which was perfectly all right with me. I had worked toward that end. Now I could watch them without fear of being rude—gauging, searching their faces, estimating their average age and income, style, and education.

Most of the time my conclusions were correct, and the material that would be presented to the audience, numbering just under fifty, would be geared to whatever imagination I thought they possessed. It was a skill, and a necessary one, that I had developed over the years after we nearly landed in the clutches of the local Blues the first time we tried our little show. We had hoped that anything in those scripts Helena had stolen would be sufficient to enthrall. Sadly, and realistically, it didn't work out that way. Luckily, however, we'd been given a second chance, and after I had had an opportunity to talk with those who had come to see us that night, I knew which of our plays they would enjoy the most.

We did it.

And they did.

It was simple, actually, once I understood that even in the towns the audiences had been . . . not spoiled, but despoiled.

We worked out a routine then, which grew into a science. A week or so in each community. The first night an informal education. The second a performance with intermittent explanation. The third through the fifth or sixth something done in earnest.

No gimmicks.

Just words.

And that crudely painted backdrop became a forest indeed.

We grew. A boy here, a young woman there, an elderly couple with young stars in their eyes. But it was, as always at the last, Helena and I—and our children when they grew.

Philip came to see us one evening, trailing behind a representative of some official or other who, having heard of our little troupe, had come to see. I had been nervous throughout the entire performance, thinking that fat and now enfeebled old man had pursued his idiot revenge to the extreme. But when we were done, Helena and I were given some papers in which, with much legal phrasing and hyperbole almost sickening, we were granted our pardons. Artistic merit had rehabilitated us, I gathered. The only catch: we were not allowed back in a cityplex, for any reason, at any time. And I think Philip was truly enraged when both Helena and I accepted the terms. Laughing.

I sighed silently. I waited until I was sure there would be no latecomers, then lifted a finger, which dimmed the lights. Working swiftly and carefully then, I adjusted the makeshift spots that had been bolted for us over the lintel of the meetingroom door. And once lighted, the forest became natural, and once populated, it lost what was artificial in the words of the players.

There were no curtains, so we walked our exits.

There were no musicians, so we improvised our songs.

And the costumes we used were bits of rags, shards of cloaks, and sometimes only the clothes on our backs.

I watched from the back, waiting for my cue, and as I did, I took from beneath my shirt the gift Helena had given me when we had given birth to our dream. It sat in my palm, glowing, its eyes catching the light like two miniature candles.

And when my cue came from Helena, the laughter was real.

"When beggars die, there are no comets seen," Helena has said. It was her favorite line.

Helena.

Is dead.

Last year.

She was eighty.

But my favorite line . . . "I didn't go to the moon—I went much further —for time is the longest distance between two points."

She was eighty.

Prologues and epilogues.

I give them alone.

But no matter how often my world is lit by that lightning—I'll not now, nor will I ever, blow out my candles. When all is done, and done . . . and done, a tiny glass unicorn still sits on my palm.

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science Fiction: 1938

We asked two very special members of SFWA to give us a baseline for science fiction in this volume: Isaac Asimov, to tell us about the past when he was an ambitious and unlicked cub, and Norman Spinrad to look into the future and show us what the time forty years hence holds for us. It was an easy choice in both cases.

The author of our first essay is Isaac Asimov, who is not only a talented writer but someone who was actually there in that great Golden Age when John Campbell was reshaping science fiction and all the world was young. Also, he is the softest touch in science fiction. His work load is staggering. By rights he had no business taking time out to reminisce for us—but he did, and we're well pleased!

Science fiction in 1938, by modern standards, virtually did not exist. Suppose we call the roll—

There were three pulp magazines: *Astounding Stories, Amazing Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories.* The first two paid a cent a word, the last paid half a cent a word.

Only *Astounding* might be considered a quality magazine. *Thrilling Wonder Stories* featured action stories intended to appeal to younger and less sophisticated readers. *Amazing,* which passed under new management that year, was getting set to feature fringe nonsense. It was the oldest of the magazines, being fully thirteen years old.

There were a few comic books that might be classified as very simplistic science fiction. "Flash Gordon" was to be found in the newspaper strips.

There were a few books published that were science fiction, but they were put out by houses that were at best semi-professional; their sales were low and their earnings lower.

There were occasional movie serials that seemed to aspire to a science-fiction quality not quite as high as those of the comics. Even more occasional serious motion pictures appeared now and then that might be classified as honest science fiction. *The Shape of Things to Come* springs to mind.

Out of it all, almost nothing was at more than a childish level. What kept it from sinking through the sub-basement and into moronic oblivion was the unremitting labor of one quixotic and idiosyncratic man, John W. Campbell, Jr., who in 1938 took over full editorial responsibilities for *Astounding Stories* and promptly changed its name to *Astounding Science Fiction.*

It was in that year, 1938, that I sold my first science-fiction story and broke into the field. Why on earth did I bother?

Science-fiction fans of today, accustomed to multimillion-dollar extravaganzas in the movies and on television, to novels that earn blockbusting advances in six figures, to endless racks of paperbacks, may think of the impoverished era of the 1930s with disbelief, and pity those of "First Fandom" who grew up with science fiction in those days.

Don't! The pity is misplaced. What we had, the fans of today will never have.

In the first place, there were few fans, and in such cases, less can be more.

There were many readers, to be sure. The magazines had circulation figures that were as high then as they are now (though magazines were the entire field then and are only a small proportion of it now). Most of the readers were casuals, however, who came and went and were content to be silent. They contributed their dimes and that was the extent of their importance.

There were, however, a few fans—who not only bought the magazines but kept them; who not only read the stories, but discussed them; who not only enjoyed the stories but sought out others with whom to share the enjoyment.

So restricted was the experience of science fiction, so narrow were the limits within which it was familiar, so few were those who knew the language, the subject matter, the unending excitment of it, that it was as though we had a secret world that no one knew. We all lived in a tree house in a trackless forest, in a cave in an unapproachable cliff-wall, in a burrow in the hidden center

of a vast labyrinth. We had a universe of our own and the world was well lost.

We few—we happy few—we band of brothers—

Well, we weren't a band of brothers exactly, for discussions degenerated to arguments sometimes, and we were all young enough to know that we were right and that there was no such thing as compromise. We were also sufficiently articulate—all of us—to shake the walls of the cosmos with even our lesser adjectives. Those were the days when Hitler's speeches ruled the headlines, but for fervor and extremity of utterance he could have come for lessons to any of us.

The magazines cooperated. They ran pages and pages of letters in microscopic print in which every one of us could be a lordly critic—dismissing some stories with bluster, praising others with a hallelujah, spreading salvation and damnation at whim.

That was not enough, so some of us began fan clubs with memberships of five, six, even ten. There was the place where we developed our taste for *power.* There we competed for leadership and dreamed of political coups that would leave the club in our hands, and organized splinter groups of two or three to burrow from within.

There were many who felt, "Today, the Astoria Science Fiction Club; tomorrow, *all of fandom.*" I doubt that anyone dreamed that the day after tomorrow might bring the world itself to heel. If one could control fandom, the mere world would be an anticlimax.

Fans from different cities began to visit each other. They were all young, all virtually penniless; so getting from one place to another was an adventure and called for ingenuity.

No one could foresee in those happy infant days that in one more year the first World Convention would be held, that this would be followed by the hibernation of World War II and then the explosion of the atom bomb and the suffocating blanket of respectability. People out there would begin to take us seriously. The world would flood in and gone forever would be joy and innocence.

But in 1938, the last year of our delight, there was no hint of such a thing.

Remember, too, that aside from the fact that we fans had each other, we had the world of science fiction; the *whole* world. It was perfectly easy to read every issue of every science-fiction magazine and in that way stay abreast of all of science fiction. I mean *all* of it—every word.

The fan could know all the authors and everything each one of them wrote. For years, for instance, I kept a catalog in which I listed every story that was published. I don't mean lots of them. I mean *every* story. I listed them alphabetically by title and by author; I rated each one and gave my comments. I made lists of the better stories.

You could wake me up in the middle of the night and whisper a title to me and I could give you, without perceptible pause, the author, the plot, my opinion of the quality, and sometimes the exact issue of the exact magazine in which it appeared.

Try and do that now.

The most assiduous reader of science fiction must allow innumerable novels and short stories to get past him; must find that writers will win Hugos and Nebulas and that somehow he has never heard of them; occasionally discovers that his favorite author has written twenty items he has never read and cannot locate; finds something he considers wonderful and is lost in frustration because no one he knows has read it or heard of it.

You may read science fiction today but you can't *know* science fiction; no one can.

We could.

In those days, most fans dreamed of being writers, of selling stories to the professional magazines. I don't think we worried much about making money. Money was nice but it was not to be compared to the glory of seeing your byline in the magazine, of becoming a god in the tiny microcosm of science fiction. (Even your name on a letter in the back of the magazine was the equivalent of archangeldom.)

Seeing my name on a story in *Astounding* was my dream, too.

And we could make it, for standards weren't high. Anyone who could really write—*anyone*—would try for other markets that paid better and had greater opportunities for advancement. Only fanatics (of which "fan" is a short form) insisted on writing science fiction; and as long as the sentences hung together at least loosely, you might very well sell. Then, for a time, you could make a few hundred dollars a year in money; and a few million dollars a year in glory and adulation in the only place that counted—fandom.

Nowadays, the standards are enormously higher, the difficulties of breaking in massively greater. I couldn't possibly sell the equivalent of my early stories in today's market.

And the expectations are greater now, too. Having once sold a novel, if you sell your second for an advance of less than fifty thousand dollars, you fire your agent and take to drink.

In the old days, your story was off the stands and unavailable exactly one month after it appeared, and you had to write another one for another one-month stand. That was all there was. Nowadays, if your books go out of print, you fire the whole world and build a tent to retire to and sulk in.

—Well, how much of all this is nostalgia for vanished youth?

A lot of it, I suppose. I wouldn't want to go back; I'm spoiled. I can't bring myself to want to exchange wealth for poverty and celebrity for nonentity. I, too, have tried rich and poor; and I, too, find that rich is better.

And yet—

So much for the field as an abstract entity. What about the people who ran it in those days?

To begin with, there was the founding father, Hugo Gernsback. He invented magazine science fiction in 1926 when he published *Amazing Stories,* the first magazine to be devoted to science fiction exclusively.

He received the worshipful respect any founding father should get. The Hugo, fandom's award for the best of this and that, given

out at the World Science Fiction Conventions, is named in his honor.

He was, however, an irritating person. He had a constitutional aversion, it would seem, to paying his authors. Heaven knows he paid tiny sums and keeping them could not have improved his financial situation; but he kept them anyway as long as he could. It was his quirk.

He also persisted in imagining that the purpose of science fiction was to predict the gadgetry of the future and this led to his filling his magazines with science quizzes and to undervaluing writing quality.

He was forced to relinquish *Amazing* in 1929 and started *Science Wonder Stories* and *Air Wonder Stories* (later combined to *Wonder Stories*) instead. He finally passed from the scene of science-fiction publishing in 1936, but by that time his loss was little felt.

He tried to make a comeback in the early 1950s with *Science Fiction Plus,* a large-size magazine that pretended it was still 1929. Naturally, it didn't survive long.

I met him only twice and that was in the early 1960s. The first time was at a talk he gave at M.I.T. He handed out a paper before the talk and, having nothing better to do, I read it while waiting for him to begin. So did everyone else. It turned out to be the speech Gernsback was going to give. He painstakingly read the talk we had all just read.

The second time we had lunch together for some purpose that turned out to be of no importance. He walked me a mile to get to the dining place; but I walked eagerly, for I heard he was fond of gourmet food and I expected he would take me to some small and elegant dining place. He finally found a distant cafeteria and ordered a ham sandwich. I did the same. It was a mediocre ham sandwich. Gernsback was still a careful man with a dime.

Through the 1930s, after Gernsback left *Amazing,* the editor of that magazine was T. O'Conor Sloane, an elderly gentleman who

created a furor among the fans by stating in one of his editorials that he didn't believe in the possibility of space-travel. *Amazing* changed hands in 1938, and Sloane left the field at the age of 86. I had never had any opportunity to meet him.

Replacing Sloane was Raymond A. Palmer, a four-foot-tall hunchback who was only twenty-eight years old at the time. As soon as he became editor, he turned the magazine around with enormous energy. He pushed the quality of the stories down and the circulation up.

I remember reading the June, 1938, issue of *Amazing,* the first under Palmer (who had to work so quickly there was no time to get cover art, so that he was forced to use a photograph), and being heartsick over the comic-book quality of the stories.

Palmer, however, continued on his way and as the stories grew worse, the circulation continued to go up. In the 1940s, he published stories by a man called Shaver, pure nonsense, which took on the dimensions of a cult and briefly made *Amazing* more successful than any other science-fiction magazine before or since. Eventually, Palmer abandoned science fiction for flying saucers and the occult.

I began to submit stories to the science-fiction magazines in the very month Palmer became editor. It was Palmer who bought the very first story I sold, "Marooned Off Vesta," and it appeared in the March, 1939, *Amazing.* What's more, my second story to be published was "The Weapon Too Dreadful to Use," and that appeared in the May, 1939, *Amazing.*

The closest I ever came to meeting Palmer was in 1952 when I visited the offices of a magazine he was editing in Evanston, Illinois. He was not there. I saw his associate, Bea Mahaffey (incredibly better-looking), so I didn't feel too bad.

Editing *Wonder Stories* in the 1930s under Hugo Gernsback was Charles D. Hornig, who, like Palmer, was a fan before he was an editor. This is really not so unusual. In order to get someone

who has any judgment about science fiction, you have to get either a writer or a fan, and if you are anxious to pay five bucks a week, or thereabouts, it has to be a fan—and a young one, at that. Charles Hornig was nineteen when he took the job.

Hornig's great claim to fame was that he discovered Stanley G. Weinbaum, whose "A Martian Odyssey" appeared in the July, 1934, *Wonder Stories.* That one story virtually revolutionized science fiction, for it ushered in a period when writers were fascinated with invented extraterrestrial ecologies. For a year and a half, Weinbaum was the most popular writer in the field—and then died of cancer at the beginning of 1936.

When *Wonder Stories* came under new management in 1936 and reappeared as *Thrilling Wonder Stories,* men such as Leo Margulies and Mort Weisinger were in charge. I didn't meet either one at the time, but in the last few years of their lives, we were friendly. Indeed, Weisinger, a couple of years ago, made up the following story: "Isaac Asimov was asked how Superman could fly faster than the speed of light, which was supposed to be an absolute limit. To this, Asimov replied, 'That the speed of light is a limit is a theory; that Superman can travel faster than light is a fact.' "

I assure you it never happened and I never said it; but it will be repeated, I am quite certain, indefinitely; and it will probably be found in Bartlett's quotations a century from now, attributed to me, after all my writings have been forgotten.

Running *Astounding Stories* in the 1930s was F. Orlin Tremaine. Where Gernsback and Sloane tended to be stodgy, Tremaine was innovative. He did not care at all for the Gernsbackian notion of the "educational" value of science fiction, but was on the lookout for unusual plots.

He pioneered the "thought-variant" story, which was intended to be as far-out as possible and which caught the imagination of the science-fiction fans. The quintessential thought-variant story was Jack Williamson's "Born of the Sun," in the March, 1934, *Astound-*

ing. Williamson's classic tale dealt with the concept of the stars as living organisms and the planets as their eggs.

Under Tremaine, *Astounding* rapidly took the lead in circulation and quality. I personally worshiped Tremaine and his magazine; and in those days, in fact, I neglected *Amazing* and *Wonder;* for it seemed to me that all the science fiction worth reading was in *Astounding.* That was almost right, but not quite—it meant I missed "A Martian Odyssey" when it appeared.

I never met Tremaine when he was the most important man in the field. He left *Astounding* in 1938, and I met him some two years later when he was trying to make a comeback with a magazine called *Comet Stories* and didn't succeed.

The end of the decade of the 1930s saw a rash of new magazines, all of them on small budgets and almost all of them edited by young fans who were friends of mine.

Editing *Science Fiction* and *Future Fiction* on a tiny budget was Robert W. Lowndes, plump, smiling, mustached, soft-spoken and incredibly literary. He was the author of the first letter to an editor that praised my stories. I have never forgotten this.

He also bought two of my very early stories.

Editing *Astonishing Stories* and *Super Science Stories* on just as tiny a budget was Fred Pohl, who was my closest science-fiction friend in those days. He was skinny, solemn, smooth-shaven, soft-spoken and multitalented. As far as I could judge, he succeeded in every intellectual endeavor to which he turned. He was an editor before he was twenty, and though his magazines could not possibly succeed considering the small capital investment the publishers were willing to make, he turned out an amazingly good product.

He bought no less than seven of my early stories. He bought my first positronic-robot story after John Campbell had rejected it. He was the first to put my name on a cover and the first to publish a lead novel, with a cover illustration, by me.

Editing *Stirring Science Stories* and *Cosmic Stories* on no bud-

get at all (so that neither lasted more than a very few issues) was Donald A. Wollheim, tall, homely, loud-spoken, articulate, sardonic and very nearly as talented as Fred. He was forced to buy stories for nothing and published one of my early stories (paying me five dollars out of his own pocket—with a loud outcry—in order that he might use my name rather than a pseudonym).

Yes, those were exciting times. Penurious, but exciting.

I have mentioned John Campbell only briefly. He was not of that era. He created the era that followed.

NORMAN SPINRAD

The Future of Science Fiction

Just as Isaac Asimov was the obvious choice for reminding us of where science fiction was forty years ago, so Norman Spinrad was for telling us where it will be four decades hence. Norman Spinrad's credits are extensive, ranging from early script-writing for *Star Trek* to such individualistic and memorable novels as *Bug Jack Barron.* But for SFWA members, he has a special grace—he is the fellow who takes on the hard jobs. Spelling out the future for an audience of futurists is one of them and, as always, he does it commendably.

We are now at a peak in the Great Science Fiction Boom of the 1970s. The number of science-fiction titles being published each year is soaring; indeed, something like 20 percent of all fiction published in book form in the United States is now science fiction. Six-figure advances for science-fiction novels are no longer unheard of, and five-figure advances are no longer uncommon. Science-fiction hardcovers have made the national best-seller lists. *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* has in its brief existence seen its circulation top 100,000; and *Omni* in its even briefer existence is up over 1,000,000. Science fiction is currently the White Hope of Hollywood. Charles Brown of *Locus* has estimated that something like 75 percent of all science-fiction novels ever published are currently in print.

What's happening? Will this go on? Or will the bubble collapse as a smaller one did in the 1950s, bringing us all back down to earth, 5¢ a word, and $2,000 advances?

Well, the science-fiction community has never been without its Cassandras; and many people in the field, having grown up with grubbiness, penny-pinching, and the somewhat churlish self-satisfaction that comes with being grossly underpaid and knowing it, seem to be looking over their shoulders and waiting for the ax to fall once more.

In this negative scenario, the boom of the 1970s will turn out to have been mainly the product of the hype surrounding the super sf movies like *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters,* plus the lemming instincts of sf editors who found themselves caught up in bidding wars. When Hollywood goes on to its next fad, and the returns come pouring in on all the science-fiction novels which have gone for big advances, the air will whoosh out of the sf bubble, heads will roll, the ghetto walls will go up again, and we'll all be back in our nice little literary backwater.

Well, maybe.

But I don't think so.

The commercial phenomenon of the current science-fiction boom has historical, cultural, and even spiritual roots that go far deeper than million-dollar ad campaigns for movies or $100,000 advances for books. We are living through a long critical moment in the evolution of our species, and the movement of science fiction to the forefront of popular culture is part of a strong current that, in a sense, is beyond our control. These waters run deep, and if the tide should suddenly retreat, more than the economic well-being of science-fiction writers and publishers will be in grave jeopardy.

Hype, after all, cannot really work effectively for long in a cultural or psychological vaccuum. Effective hype involves the manipulation, enhancement, and displacement of imagery, mythic structures, and historical and psychic forces prevalent in the real-time mass consciousness that is its target. Maybe you *can* sell iceboxes to Eskimos, but not through endorsements by surfers.

So while the commercial aspect of the science-fiction boom of the 1970s may indeed have been supercharged by the expensive hype surrounding *Star Wars, Close Encounters, Superman, Star Trek, Battlestar Galactica* and company, such hype could never have been so successful unless it was keyed into powerful forces already existing in the collective psyche.

Consider the very mediocre—to be charitable—artistic attainment of those very blockbuster movies that blew up the Great

Science Fiction Balloon. Assuming that the mass audience is not composed of morons—admittedly a debatable assumption in certain circles—one must be drawn to conclude that these Hollywood science-fiction epics weren't socko at the box office because they were masterpieces of the cinematic art, but because they were science fiction at all.

True, hype has created a new mass audience for science fiction. True too that the major beneficiaries of much of this hype have been for the most part unworthy of their prominence in relative artistic terms, compared to the body of work produced by the collective membership of SFWA, or the award-winning fiction in this book. True also, alas, that this new mass audience is being weakened on schlock.

But thus be it ever. When the mass audience develops a new hunger, there is never a shortage of schlockmeisters eager to cash in on the latest fast-food craze by peddling Kentucky Fried Spaceships or Colonel Future's Fish and Chips. This is eternal; this is the nature of the commercial interface, time out of mind. Nothing new there.

What *is* new, though, is the hunger that has allowed mediocre product to make millionaires of owners of sf fast-food franchises.

It is the nature of this hunger that will mold the future of science fiction, and the relationship will to some extent be reciprocal.

What all the hype did was expose a vast new audience to a taste of something like science fiction—in the way that say a taco short-order restaurant might expose the tastebuds of the innocent to something like Mexican food. And they gobbled it up.

The operative question is why.

Obviously science fiction suddenly began feeding a hunger that wasn't being satisfied by any other fictional cuisine. The trip to Peking duck begins with chow mein. The significant thing about all the hype is not so much that it sold junk food for the mind as that it exposed many people to science fiction who had never thought to taste it before.

As a matter of fact, it exposed science fiction to people who

didn't even read, but who developed a hunger for some psychic experience they got from this stuff.

Why? What craving do we find ourselves feeding at this juncture in the evolution of popular culture?

Consider some collateral phenomena.

The science-fiction boom of the later 1970s was preceeded by a proliferation of new religious cults, indeed by a proliferation of new *kinds* of cults. It is a common modern truism that the onward rush of twentieth-century science and technology has done much to diminish the credibility of traditional religions. A truism too that the scientific world view has not provided a new source of spiritual nourishment to replace what it has discredited. A further truism that the human spirit seems to crave experience of the transcendental.

Thus, at the very time when science and technology have permeated culture most thoroughly, we have had both a renaissance of atavistic mysticism and a new looking to the East. And the birth of a new kind of religious cult—or more precisely, a totally new kind of phenomenon which has moved into the psychoecological niche vacated by traditional religion.

Organizations like est, Scientology, Arica, Silva Mind Control, etc., etc., ad infinitum, are attempts to meld the experimental mystical experience of the East with the scientific method and modern world view of the West. Typically, there is a guru or perfect master at the pinnacle of a structured hierarchy, a method or Way which is followed with quasi-religious belief, and a vision of the New Jerusalem at the end of the rainbow. But rather than a moral theology or a cookbook course on getting to heaven, these groups offer their followers a scientific or quasi-scientific method of achieving heightened awareness or a transcendant consciousness in the here and now. Of course Buddhism and Hinduism at their theoretical purest do much the same thing; what is new *in kind* about these modern psychoreligious cults is that they adapt not the imagery and hagiography of gods and demons but the methodology and trappings of science and pseudoscience. They

are attempts to reintroduce the transcendent mystical experience into modern culture *through* science, not in spite of it, to transcend the circumscribed spiritual parameters of the scientific world view, not by denying it, but by appropriating at least the semblance of its methodology for transcendent ends.

Twenty years ago and more, science-fiction fans were already calling what they were trying to recapture the "sense of wonder."

This hunger for the experience of flashes of transcendental consciousness through and not despite the onrushing advance of science and technology has always been central to what made those people who read science fiction read science fiction. Indeed, the predominant preoccupation of science fiction with space-travel, other worlds, aliens, and superbeings has always spoken directly to this scientific transcendentalism. Space itself *is* a literally unearthly plane of existence; other planets *are* unknown new worlds; alien creatures *are* sentient non-human beings like gods or demons; and mutated or technologically augmented humans *are* men who have transcended the parameters of our present definition of the humanly possible—not in myth or imagery, but with the plausible verisimilitude of the scientifically possible.

What has happened in the late 1970s is that history, hype, and the loss of logical credibility of the traditional sources of transcendent experience have combined to move science fiction and its central esthetic of "sense of wonder" into the same psychoreligious vacuum that the new modern cults are also speaking to.

The hunger on the part of the mass audience for what science fiction can deliver was a preexisting condition—the hype merely focused public awareness on what is, after all, inherently the most nourishing and credible source of scientifically credible transcendentalism in the second half of the twentieth century.

And if you doubt this, look at the kind of science fiction that has built the Great Boom, not in terms of relative literary merit, but in terms of content. *Star Trek,* which takes place entirely in outer space or on other worlds, and features the benevolent Mephistophelian figure of Mr. Spock. The exotic space opera *Star Wars,*

with its central metaphysical "Force." The loveable, godlike, benign aliens of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind.* Messiah figures like Michael Valentine Smith of *Stranger in a Strange Land* and Paul Atreides of *Dune.* Marvel superheroes. The collateral metaphysical fantasy of J. R. R. Tolkien.

Finally, emerging at the very same time as the Great Science Fiction Boom, we have the real-life science-fiction phenomenon of the L–5 movement. The concept of building a permanently inhabited, self-sustaining independent city in space is hardly new, nor did it arise full-blown from the brow of Gerard K. O'Neill. We all know that it has been a staple of science fiction for decades.

And that is the point. Fact is, the L–5 movement *did not* arise out of science-fiction fandom or even primarily out of the traditional well-established, extended science-fiction readership. It developed collaterally with the science-fiction boom but independent of the sf field—in fact, apparently largely ignorant of most of the science fiction concerning its very raison d'etre—out of the same historical evolutionary forces that produced the sf boom.

And make no mistake about it, this vision of a scientific and technological New Jerusalem in space *is* in the process of generating a mass movement. NASA is giving it quasi-covert support. Jerry Brown has come close to endorsing it. A grass-roots organization is in being. And Timothy Leary's precipitous jump onto the bandwagon is perhaps the clincher. For Leary, searching rather blatantly for a new messianic mission, has stated the appeal of the whole thing in words of one syllable—space colonization, extended life span, and scientifically enhanced consciousness as the next evolutionary stage in the spiritual growth of the human species.

Finally, this movement has invaded the writing of science fiction itself, bringing us full-circle round to the subject of this essay, the future of science fiction. There has been a flood of stories using O'Neill's L–5 colony in space as a setting—for perhaps the first time in its history, the genre has been picking up material from the real world and not the other way around. The L–5 lobby is forthrightly attempting to enlist science-fiction writers and fans

as allies. And there does seem to be some metaphysical common ground on a very deep level.

And what does all this mean for the future of science fiction?

For one thing, it means that science fiction is moving to the center of popular consciousness, or perhaps more precisely, popular consciousness is moving to where science fiction has always been, and for reasons that transcend a few hit films, a ton of hype, and the new spate of large advances for novels.

And that is why I am convinced that the bubble will not burst this time. Of course, inevitably, some superexpensive science-fiction films will flop at the box office, and some science-fiction novels will not earn their overgenerous advances. There will be dips and skips in the curve, but it will continue upwards. Science-fiction writers will at last get what they have longed for for two generations—the opportunity to get rich within the parameters of the genre, a potential vast new audience, a central role in popular culture, perhaps ultimately even literary respectability, whatever that may still mean in an era where science fiction itself will become perhaps the dominant fictional mode.

Two and a half cheers, please!

For, of course, there is a Catch–22; and some people are not going to like it, while others who do like it may in the end find their karma in jeopardy. The ghetto walls are coming down, dismantled not from within but from without. The new readership does not represent an expansion of science-fiction fandom. The hit science-fiction films are not being scripted, for the most part, by members of the SFWA club. People like Gore Vidal, Len Deighton, and Paddy Chayevsky are writing the stuff. Certain editors of low-paying sf novel lines are wishfully predicting the end of the boom because the major-league advances are making it hard for them to buy decent books at their customary bush-league prices. Bob Guccione, mastermind of *Omni,* a new mutant magazine with ten times the circulation of any previous sf-oriented magazine, never was a member of the tribe, and that too has been a cause for grumbling.

In the future, in the *near* future, indeed, to some extent in the

present, science fiction will no longer be the preserve of the people—writers and readers—who are deeply rooted in the history, subculture, and community within those cozy ghetto walls.

We—and we all know who we mean by we, don't we—no longer "own" the subject matter of science fiction. We never really did, but as long as the mundane world saw no great profit, commercial or artistic, to be reaped from our little field, we could clutch our poverty to our breasts like impoverished White Russian noblemen, warmed by the illusion of the secret knowledge cherished and preserved by We Chosen Few.

Now, however, science fiction is becoming big business, culturally central, and even politically significant. Science fiction is becoming part—and perhaps ultimately a dominant part—of the mainstream of popular and literary culture. It will never be a quiet little backwater again.

The golden opportunity for fame, fortune, and general cultural esteem now presents itself to all of us, but we're playing in the big leagues now, and it remains to be seen how many of our minor-league stars will be able to hit a major-league curveball. Soon calling oneself a science-fiction writer will be neither a profession of literary uniqueness nor a passport to judgment by relaxed standards, not when larger cultural forces are taking science-fiction writers out of the literary work force at large.

But in the short and medium term we are going to find ourselves in a somewhat unique and morally dangerous position, a position that some of us have had a taste of previously, with ambivalent results—we are prime candidates for guruhood on the current turn of the Great Wheel.

As fossil fuels run out and people are forced to face the fact that the future is not going to be like the present, as our fictional visions become objects of wishful worship, as we become prime guests for television talk shows, coveted allies of the space lobby, and trendy seers, we will be tempted, individually and collectively, to use our newfound prominence to mold reality closer to our hearts' desires. Several years ago, Michel Butor seriously suggested that science-

fiction writers get together, decide what the future should be like, and by setting their stories and novels in this collective utopia, call this millenium into being. It was a silly idea then, but it seems a little less fanciful now.

If we ever start to take it seriously, then we and the world are in trouble. Make no mistake about it, the temptation will be there. Let us hope we will not forget that propaganda is the death of art; let us hope that unlike Caesar, we will be able to turn down the crown proffered to us by the masses with sincerity, and if not with smarmy humility, then at least with the saving grace of a sense of humor.

VONDA N. MCINTYRE

✪ *An Excerpt from* Dreamsnake

Vonda McIntyre has been closing in on the Best Novel Nebula for some time, and just to make sure that we all noticed this one, she took not one but *two* Nebulas for it (the original novelette, of which the novel is an expansion, won half a dozen years ago).

I happened to be sitting next to her in Los Angeles when she took the prize for the short version; and I happened to be the one handing it out when she received it again for the novel. So I took a personal interest, and was personally delighted—and so, it was clear, was the membership, who gave her a standing ovation.

✪ Winner, Nebula, for Best Novel of 1978.

Snake awoke before Gabriel, at the very end of night. As dawn broke, the faint gray light illuminated the bedroom. Snake lay on her side, propped on her elbow, and watched Gabriel sleep. He was, if that were possible, even more beautiful asleep than awake.

Snake reached out, but stopped before she touched him. Usually she liked to make love in the morning. But she did not want Gabriel to wake up.

Frowning, she lay back and tried to trace her reaction. Last night had not been the most memorable sexual encounter of her life, for Gabriel was, though not exactly clumsy, still awkward with inexperience. Yet, though she had not been completely satisfied, neither had she found sleeping with Gabriel at all unpleasant.

Snake forced her thoughts deeper, and found that they disturbed her. They were all too much like fear. Certainly she did not fear Gabriel: the very idea was ridiculous. But she had never before been with a man who could not control his fertility. He made her uneasy, she could not deny it. Her own control was complete; she had confidence in herself on that matter. And even if by some freakish accident she did become pregnant, she could abort it without the overreaction that had nearly killed Gabriel's friend Leah. No, her uneasiness had little basis in the reality of what could happen. It was merely the knowledge of Gabriel's

incapability that made her hold back from him, for she had grown up knowing her lovers would be controlled, knowing they had exactly the same confidence in her. She could not give that confidence to Gabriel, even though his difficulties were not his fault.

For the first time she truly understood how lonely he had been for the last three years, how everyone must have reacted to him and how he must have felt about himself. She sighed in sadness for him and reached out to him, stroking his body with her fingertips, waking him gradually, leaving behind all her hesitation and uneasiness.

Carrying her serpent-case, Snake hiked down the cliff to get Swift. Several of her town patients needed looking at again, and she would spend the afternoon giving vaccinations. Gabriel remained in his father's house, packing and preparing for his trip.

Squirrel and Swift gleamed with brushing. The stablemaster, Ras, was nowhere in sight. Snake entered Squirrel's stall to inspect his newly shod feet. She scratched his ears and told him aloud that he needed exercise or he would founder. Above her, the loose hay in the loft rustled softly, but though Snake waited, she heard nothing more.

"I'll have to ask the stablemaster to chase you around the field," she said to her pony, and waited again.

"I'll ride him for you, mistress," the child whispered.

"How do I know you can ride?"

"I can ride."

"Please come down."

Slowly the child climbed through the hole in the ceiling, hung by her hands, and dropped to Snake's feet. She stood with her head down.

"What's your name?"

The little girl muttered something in two syllables. Snake went down on one knee and grasped her shoulders gently. "I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you."

She looked up, squinting through the terrible scar. The bruise

was fading. "M-Melissa." After the first hesitation she said the name defensively, as if daring Snake to deny it to her. Snake wondered what she had said the first time. "Melissa," the child said again, lingering over the sounds.

"My name is Snake, Melissa." Snake held out her hand and the child shook it watchfully. "Will you ride Squirrel for me?"

"Yes."

"He might buck a little."

Melissa grabbed the bars of the stall door's top half and chinned herself up. "See him over there?"

The horse across the way was a tremendous piebald, well over seventeen hands. Snake had noticed him before; he flattened his ears and bared his teeth whenever anyone passed.

"I ride him," Melissa said.

"Good lords," Snake said in honest admiration.

"I'm the only one can," Melissa said. "Except that other."

"Who, Ras?"

"No," Melissa said with contempt. "Not him. The one from the castle. With the yellow hair."

"Gabriel."

"I guess. But he doesn't come down much, so I ride his horse." Melissa jumped back to the floor. "He's fun. But your pony is nice."

In the face of the child's competence, Snake gave no more cautions. "Thank you, then. I'll be glad to have someone ride him who knows what they're doing."

Melissa climbed to the edge of the manger, about to hide herself in the hayloft again, before Snake could think of a way to interest her enough to talk some more. Then Melissa turned halfway toward her. "Mistress, you tell him I have permission?" All the confidence had crept from her voice.

"Of course I will," Snake said.

Melissa vanished.

Snake saddled Swift and led her outside, where she encountered the stablemaster.

"Melissa's going to exercise Squirrel for me," Snake told him. "I said she could."

"Who?"

"Melissa."

"Someone from town?"

"Your stable-hand," Snake said. "The redheaded child."

"You mean Ugly?" He laughed.

Snake felt herself flushing scarlet with shock, then anger.

"How dare you taunt a child that way?"

"Taunt her? How? By telling her the truth? No one wants to look at her and it's better she remembers it. Has she been bothering you?"

Snake mounted her horse and looked down at him. "You use your fists on someone nearer your size from now on." She pressed her heels to Swift's sides and the mare sprang forward, leaving the barn and Ras and the castle and the mayor behind.

The day slipped by more rapidly than Snake had expected. Hearing that a healer was in Mountainside, people from all the valley came to her, bringing young children for the protection she offered and older people with chronic ailments, some of whom, like Grum with her arthritis, she could not help. Her good fortune continued, for though she saw a few patients with bad infections, tumors, even a few contagious diseases, no one came who was dying. The people of Mountainside were nearly as healthy as they were beautiful.

She spent all afternoon working in a room on the ground floor of the inn where she had intended to lodge. It was a central spot in town, and the innkeeper made her welcome. In the evening, the last parent led the last weepy child from the room. Wishing Pauli had been here to tell them jokes and stories, Snake leaned back in her chair, stretching and yawning, and let herself relax, arms still raised, her head thrown back, eyes closed. She heard the door open, footsteps, the swish of a long garment, and smelled the warm fragrance of herb tea.

Snake sat up as Lainie, the innkeeper, placed a tray on the table nearby. Lainie was a handsome and pleasant woman of middle age, rather stout. She seated herself, poured two mugs of tea, and handed one to Snake.

"Thanks." Snake inhaled the steam.

After they sipped their tea for a few minutes, Lainie broke the silence. "I'm glad you came," she said. "We've not had a healer in Mountainside for too long."

"I know," Snake said. "We can't get this far south very often." She wondered if Lainie knew as well as she did that it was not the distance between Mountainside and the healers' station that was the problem.

"If a healer were to settle here," Lainie said, "I know the town would be liberal in its gratitude. I'm sure the mayor will speak to you about this when he's better. But I'm on the council and I can assure you his proposal would be supported."

"Thank you, Lainie. I'll remember that."

"Then you might stay?"

"Me?" She stared at her tea, surprised. It had not even occurred to her that Lainie meant the invitation to be direct. Mountainside, with its beautiful, healthy people, was a place for a healer to settle after a lifetime of hard work, a place to rest for someone who did not wish to teach. "No, I can't. I'm leaving in the morning. But when I go home I'll tell the other healers about your offer."

"Are you sure you don't wish to stay?"

"I can't. I haven't the seniority to accept such a position."

"And you must leave tomorrow?"

"Yes. There's really not much work in Mountainside. You're all entirely too healthy." Snake grinned.

Lainie smiled quickly, but her voice remained serious. "If you feel you must go because the place you are staying . . . because you need a place more convenient to your work," she said hesitantly, "my inn is always open to you."

"Thanks. If I were staying longer I'd move. I wouldn't want to . . . abuse the mayor's hospitality. But I really do have to go."

She glanced at Lainie, who smiled again. They understood each other.

"Will you stay the night?" Lainie asked. "You must be tired, and it's a long way."

"Oh, it's a pleasant ride," Snake said. "Relaxing."

Snake rode toward the mayor's residence through darkened streets, the rhythmic sound of Swift's hooves a background for her dreams. She dozed as the mare walked on. The clouds were high and thin tonight; the waning moon cast shadows on the stones.

Suddenly Snake heard the rasp of boot heels on pavement. Swift shied violently to the left. Losing her balance, Snake grabbed desperately for the pommel of the saddle and the horse's mane, trying to pull herself back up. Someone snatched at her shirt and hung on, dragging her down. She let go with one hand and struck at the attacker. Her fist glanced off rough cloth. She hit out again and connected. The man grunted and let her go. She dragged herself onto Swift's back and kicked the mare's sides. Swift leaped forward. The assailant was still holding onto the saddle. Snake could hear his boots scraping as he tried to keep up on foot. He was pulling the saddle toward him. Suddenly it righted with a lurch as the man lost his grip.

But a split second later Snake reined the mare in. The serpent case was gone.

Snake wheeled Swift around and galloped her after the fleeing man.

"Stop!" Snake cried. She did not want to run Swift into him, but he was not going to obey. He could duck into an alley too narrow for a horse and rider, and before she could get down and follow he could disappear.

Snake leaned down, grabbed his robe, and launched herself at him. They went down hard in a tangle. He turned as he fell, and Snake hit the cobbled street, slammed against it by his weight. Somehow she kept hold of him as he struggled to escape her and she fought for breath. She wanted to tell him to drop the case, but

she could not yet speak. He struck out at her and she felt a sharp pain across her forehead at the hairline. Snake hit back and they rolled and scuffled on the street. Snake heard the case scrape on stone: she lunged and grabbed it and so did the hooded man. As Sand rattled furiously inside, they played tug of war like children.

"Let it go!" Snake yelled. It seemed to be getting darker and she could hardly see. She knew she had not hit her head, she did not feel dizzy. She blinked her eyes and the world wavered around her. "There's nothing you can use!"

He pulled the case toward him, moaning in desperation. For an instant Snake yielded, then snatched the case back and freed it. She was so astonished when the obvious trick worked that she fell backward, landed on her hip and elbow, and yelped with the not-quite-pain of a bruised funny bone. Before she could get up again the attacker fled down the street.

Snake climbed to her feet, holding her elbow against her side and tightly clutching the handle of the case in her other hand. As fights went, that one had not amounted to much. She wiped her face, blinking, and her vision cleared. She had blood in her eyes from a scalp cut. Taking a step, she flinched; she had bruised her right knee. She limped toward the mare, who snorted skittishly but did not shy away. Snake patted her. She did not feel like chasing horses, or anything else, again tonight. Wanting to let Mist and Sand out to be sure they were all right, but knowing that would strain the mare's tolerance beyond its limit, Snake tied the case back on the saddle and remounted.

Snake halted the mare in front of the barn when it loomed up abruptly before them in the darkness. She felt high and dizzy. Though she had not lost much blood, and the attacker never hit her hard enough to give her a concussion, the adrenalin from the fight had worn off, leaving her totally drained of energy.

She drew in her breath. "Stablemaster!"

No one answered for a moment, then, five meters above her, the loft door rumbled open on its tracks.

"He's not here, mistress," Melissa said. "He sleeps up in the castle. Can I help?"

Snake looked up. Melissa remained in the shadows, out of the moonlight.

"I hoped I wouldn't wake you . . ."

"Mistress, what happened? You're bleeding all over!"

"No, it's stopped. I was in a fight. Would you mind going up the hill with me? You can sit behind me on the way up and ride Swift back down."

Melissa grabbed both sides of a pulley rope and lowered herself hand-over-hand to the ground. "I'd do anything you asked me to, mistress," she said softly.

Snake reached down and Melissa took her hand and swung up behind her. All children worked, in the world Snake knew, but the hand that grasped hers, a ten-year-old's hand, was as calloused and rough and hard as any adult manual laborer's.

Snake squeezed her legs against Swift's sides and the mare started up the trail. Melissa held the cantle of the saddle, an uncomfortable and awkward way of balancing. Snake reached back and drew the child's hands around her waist. Melissa was as stiff and withdrawn as Gabriel, and Snake wondered if Melissa had waited even longer than he for anyone to touch her with affection.

"What happened?" Melissa asked.

"Somebody tried to rob me."

"Mistress, that's awful. Nobody ever robs anybody in Mountainside."

"Someone tried to rob me. They tried to steal my serpents."

"It must have been a crazy," Melissa said.

Recognition shivered up Snake's spine. "Oh, gods," she said. She remembered the desert robe her attacker had worn, a garment seldom seen in Mountainside. "It was."

"What?"

"A crazy. No, not a crazy. A crazy wouldn't follow me this far. He's looking for something, but what is it? I haven't got anything anybody would want. Nobody but a healer can do anything with the serpents."

"Maybe it was Swift, mistress. She's a good horse and I've never seen such fancy tack."

"He tore up my camp, before Swift was given to me."

"A really crazy crazy, then," Melissa said. "Nobody would rob a healer."

"I wish people wouldn't keep telling me that," Snake said. "If he doesn't want to rob me, what does he want?"

Melissa tightened her grip around Snake's waist, and her arm brushed the handle of Snake's knife.

"Why didn't you kill him?" she asked. "Or stab him good, anyway."

Snake touched the smooth bone handle. "I never even thought of it," she said. "I've never used my knife against anyone." She wondered, in fact, if she could use it against anyone. Melissa did not reply.

Swift climbed the trail. Pebbles spun from her hooves and clattered down the sheer side of the cliff.

"Did Squirrel behave himself?" Snake finally asked.

"Yes, mistress. And he isn't lame at all now."

"That's good."

"He's fun to ride. I never saw a horse striped like him before."

"I had to do something original before I was accepted as a healer, so I made Squirrel," she said. "No one ever isolated that gene before." She realized Melissa would have no idea what she was talking about; she wondered if the fight had affected her more than she thought.

"You made him?"

"I made . . . a medicine . . . that would make him be born the color he is. I had to change a living creature without hurting it to prove I was good enough to work on changing the serpents. So we can cure more diseases."

"I wish I could do something like that."

"Melissa, you can ride horses I wouldn't go near."

Melissa said nothing.

"What's wrong?"

"I was going to be a jockey."

She was a small, thin child, and she could certainly ride anything. "Then why—" Snake cut herself off, for she realized why Melissa could not be a jockey in Mountainside.

Finally the child said, "The mayor wants jockeys as pretty as his horses."

Snake took Melissa's hand and squeezed it gently. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay here, mistress."

The lights of the courtyard reached toward them. Swift's hooves clattered on the stone. Melissa slipped from the mare's back.

"Melissa?"

"Don't worry, mistress, I'll put your horse away. Hey!" she called. "Open the door!"

Snake got down slowly and unfastened the serpent case from the saddle. She was already stiff, and her bad knee ached fiercely.

The residence door opened and a servant in nightclothes peered out. "Who's there?"

"It's Mistress Snake," Melissa said from the darkness. "She's hurt."

"I'm all right," Snake said, but with a shocked exclamation the servant turned away, calling for help, and then came running into the courtyard.

"Why didn't you bring her inside?" He reached out to support Snake. She gently held him away. Other people came running out and milled around her.

"Come get the horse, you foolish child!"

"Leave her alone!" Snake said sharply. "Thank you, Melissa."

"You're welcome, mistress."

As Snake entered the vaulted hallway, Gabriel came clattering down the huge curved staircase. "Snake, what's wrong?—Good lords, what happened?"

"I'm all right," she said again. "I just got in a fight with an incompetent thief." It was more than that, though. She knew it now.

She thanked the servants and went upstairs to the south tower with Gabriel. He stood uneasily and restlessly by while she

checked Mist and Sand, for he had urged her to take care of herself first. The two serpents had not been hurt, so Snake left them in their compartments and went into the bathroom.

She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror: her face was covered with blood and her hair was matted against her scalp. Her blue eyes stared out at her.

"You look like you've almost been murdered." He turned on the water and brought out washcloths and towels.

"I do, don't I?"

Gabriel dabbed at the gash across her forehead and up above the hairline. Snake could see its edges in the mirror: it was a shallow, thin cut that must have been made with the edge of a ring, not a knuckle.

"Maybe you should lie down."

"Scalp wounds always bleed like that," Snake said. "It isn't as bad as it looks." She glanced down at herself and laughed sadly. "New shirts are never very comfortable but this is a hard way to age one." The shoulder and elbow were ripped out, and the right knee of her pants, from her fall to the cobblestones; and dirt was ground into the fabric. Through the holes she could see bruises forming.

"I'll get you another," Gabriel said. "I can't believe this happened. There's hardly any robbery in Mountainside. And everybody knows you're a healer. Who would attack a healer?"

Snake took the cloth from him and finished washing the cut. Gabriel had cleaned it too gently; Snake did not much want it to heal over dirt and bits of gravel.

"I wasn't attacked by anyone from Mountainside," she said.

Gabriel sponged the knee of her pants to loosen the material where dry blood glued it to her skin. Snake told him about the crazy.

"At least it wasn't one of our people," Gabriel said. "And a stranger will be easier to find."

"Maybe so." But the crazy had escaped the search of the desert people; a town had many more hiding places.

She stood up. Her knee was getting sorer. She limped to the big tub and turned on the water, very hot. Gabriel helped her out of the rest of her clothes and sat nearby while she soaked the aches away. He fidgeted, angry at what had happened.

"Where were you when the crazy attacked you? I'm going to send the town guards out to search."

"Oh, Gabriel, leave it for tonight. It's been at least an hour—he'll be long gone. All you'll do is make people get up out of their warm beds to run around town and get other people up out of their warm beds."

"I want to do *something.*"

"I know. But there's nothing to be done for now." She lay back and closed her eyes.

"Gabriel," she said suddenly after several minutes of silence, "what happened to Melissa?"

She glanced over at him; he frowned.

"Who?"

"Melissa. The little stable-hand with burn scars. She's ten or eleven and she has red hair."

"I don't know—I don't think I've seen her."

"She rides your horse for you."

"Rides my horse! A ten-year-old child? That's ridiculous."

"She told me she rides him. She didn't sound like she was lying."

"Maybe she sits on my horse's back when Ras leads him out to pasture. I'm not even sure he'd stand for that, though. Ras can't ride him—how could a child?"

"Well, never mind," Snake said. Perhaps Melissa had simply wanted to impress her; she would not be surprised if the child lived in fantasies. But Snake found she could not dismiss Melissa's claim so lightly. "That doesn't matter," she said to Gabriel. "I just wondered how she got burned."

"I don't know."

Exhausted, feeling that if she stayed in the bath any longer she would fall asleep, Snake pushed herself out of the tub. Gabriel wrapped a big towel around her and helped her dry her back and her legs, for she was still very sore.

"There was a fire down at the stable," he said abruptly. "Four or five years ago. But I thought no one was hurt. Ras even got most of the horses out."

"Melissa hid from me," Snake said. "Could she have been hiding for four years?"

Gabriel remained silent for a moment. "If she's scarred . . ." He shrugged uneasily. "I don't like to think of it this way, but I've been hiding from almost everyone for three years. I guess it's possible."

He helped her back to the bedroom and stopped just inside the doorway, suddenly awkward. Snake realized all at once that she had been as good as teasing him again, without intending to. She wished she could offer him a place in her bed tonight; she would have liked the companionship. But she was not inexhaustible. Right now she had no energy for sex or even for sympathy, and she did not want to tease him even more by expecting him to lie chaste all night beside her.

"Good night, Gabriel," she said. "I wish we had last night to live over again."

He controlled disappointment well, disappointment and the embarrassment of realizing he was disappointed, though he knew she was hurt and tired. They merely kissed good night. Snake felt a sudden surge of desire. All that kept her from asking him to stay was the knowledge of how she would feel in the morning after tonight's physical and emotional stress. More exertion of body and mind, even pleasurable passion, would only make things worse.

"Damn," Snake said as Gabriel stepped back. "That crazy keeps adding to what he owes."

A sound roused Snake from deep, exhausted sleep. She thought Larril had come about the mayor, but no one spoke. Light from the hallway illuminated the room for an instant, then the door closed, leaving darkness again. Snake lay very still. She could hear her heart pounding as she readied herself for defense, remembering what Melissa had said about her knife. In a camp it was always

nearby, though she no more expected to be attacked while traveling than while sleeping in the mayor's castle. But tonight her belt and knife lay somewhere on the floor where she had dropped them, or perhaps even in the bathroom. She did not remember. Her head ached and her knee hurt.

What am I thinking of? she wondered. I don't even know how to fight with a knife.

"Mistress Snake?" The voice was so soft she could barely hear it.

Turning, Snake sat bolt upright, fully awake, her fist relaxing even as reflex had clenched it.

"What—Melissa?"

"Yes, mistress."

"Thank gods you spoke—I almost hit you."

"I'm sorry. I didn't really mean to wake you up. I just . . . I wanted to be sure . . ."

"Is anything wrong?"

"No, but I didn't know if you were all right. I always see lights up here and I thought nobody went to bed till way late. I thought maybe I could ask somebody. Only . . . I couldn't. I better go."

"No, wait." Snake's eyes were better accustomed to the darkness and she could see Melissa's form, the ghost of faint light on the sun-bleached streaks in her red hair; and she could smell the pleasant odor of hay and clean horses.

"It was sweet of you to come all this way to ask about me." She drew Melissa closer, leaned down, and kissed her forehead. The thick curly bangs could not completely hide the irregularity of scar tissue beneath them.

Melissa stiffened and pulled away. "How can you stand to touch me?"

"Melissa, dear—" Snake reached out and turned up the light before Melissa could stop her. The child turned away. Snake took her by the shoulder and gently brought her around until they were facing each other. Melissa would not look at her.

"I like you. I always touch the people I like. Other people would like you, too, if you gave them a chance."

"That's not what Ras says. He says nobody in Mountainside wants to look at uglies."

"Well, I say Ras is a hateful person, and I say he has other reasons for making you afraid of everyone. He takes credit for what you do, doesn't he? He pretends he's the one who gentles the horses and rides them."

Melissa shrugged, her head down so the scar was less visible.

"And the fire," Snake said. "What really happened? Gabriel said Ras saved the horses, but you're the one who got hurt."

"Everybody knows a little eight-year-old kid couldn't get horses out of a fire," Melissa said.

"Oh, Melissa . . ."

"I don't care!"

"Don't you?"

"I get a place to live. I get to eat. I get to stay with the horses, they don't mind . . ."

"Melissa, gods! Why do you stay here? People need more than food and somewhere to sleep!"

"I can't leave. I'm not fourteen."

"Did he tell you you're bound to him? Bonding isn't allowed in Mountainside."

"I'm not a bondservant," Melissa said irritably. "I'm twelve. How old did you think I was?"

"I thought you were about twelve," Snake said, not wanting to admit how much younger she had really thought Melissa was. "What difference does that make?"

"Could you go where you wanted when you were twelve?"

"Yes, of course I could. I was lucky enough to be in a place I didn't want to leave, but I could have gone."

Melissa blinked. "Oh," she said. "Well . . . here it's different. If you leave, your guardian comes after you. I did it once and that's what happened."

"But why?"

"Because I can't hide," Melissa said angrily. "You think people wouldn't mind, but they told Ras where I was so he'd take me back—"

Snake reached out and touched her hand. Melissa fell silent.

"I'm sorry," Snake said. "That isn't what I meant. I meant, what gives anyone the right to make you stay where you don't want to? Why did you have to hide? Couldn't you just take your pay and go where you wanted?"

Melissa laughed sharply. "My pay! Kids don't get paid. Ras is my guardian. I have to do what he says. I have to stay with him. That's law."

"It's a terrible law. I know he hurts you—the law wouldn't make you stay with someone like him. Let me talk to the mayor, maybe he can fix it so you can do what you want."

"Mistress, no!" Melissa flung herself down at the side of the bed, kneeling, clutching the sheets. "Who else would take me? Nobody! They'd leave me with him, but they would've made me say bad things about him. And then he'll just, he'll just be meaner. Please don't change anything!"

Snake drew her from her knees and put her arms around her, but Melissa huddled in on herself, pulling back from Snake's embrace, then, suddenly, flinching forward with a sharp gasp as Snake, releasing her, slid her hand across the child's shoulder blade.

"Melissa, what is it?"

"Nothing!"

Snake loosened Melissa's shirttail and looked at her back. She had been beaten with a piece of leather, or a switch: something that would hurt but not draw blood, not prevent Melissa from working.

"How—" She stopped. "Oh, damn. Ras was angry at me, wasn't he? I reprimanded him and just got you into trouble, didn't I?"

"Mistress Snake, when he wants to hit, he hits. He doesn't plan it. It's the same whether it's me or the horses." She stepped back, glancing at the door.

"Don't go. Stay here tonight. Tomorrow we can think of something to do."

"No, please, mistress, it's all right. Never mind. I've been here all my life. I know how to get along. Don't do anything. Please. I've got to go."

"Wait—"

But Melissa slipped out of the room. The door closed behind her. By the time Snake climbed out of bed and stumbled after her, she was halfway to the stairs. Snake supported herself against the doorjamb, leaning out into the hall. "We have to talk about this!" she called, but Melissa ran silently down the stairs and vanished.

Snake limped back to her luxurious bed, got under her warm blankets, and turned down the lamp, thinking of Melissa out in the dark, chilly night.

Awakening slowly, Snake lay very still, wishing she could sleep through the day and have it over. She was so seldom sick that she had difficulty making herself take it easy when she was ill. Considering the stern lectures she had given Gabriel's father, she would make quite a fool of herself if she did not follow her own advice now. Snake sighed. She could work hard all day; she could make long journeys on foot or on horseback, and she would be all right. But anger and adrenalin and the violence of a fight combined against her.

Gathering herself, she moved slowly. She caught her breath and froze. The ache in her right knee, where the arthritis was worst, turned sharp. Her knee was swollen and stiff and she ached in all her joints. She was used to the aches. But today, for the first time, the worst twinges had spread to her right shoulder. She lay back. If she forced herself to travel today, she would be laid up even longer soon, somewhere out on the desert. She could make herself ignore pain when that was necessary, but it took a great deal of energy and had to be paid for afterwards. Right now her body had no energy to spare.

She still could not remember where she had left her belt, nor,

now that she thought about it, why she had been looking for it during the night—Snake sat up abruptly, remembering Melissa, and almost cried out. But guilt was as strong as the protests of her body. She had to do something. Yet confronting Ras would not help her young friend. Snake had seen that already. She did not know what she could do. For the moment she did not even know if she could get herself into the bathroom.

That much, at least, she managed. And her belt pouch was there as well, neatly hung on a hook with her belt and knife. As far as she recalled she had left all her things where they fell. She was slightly embarrassed, for she was not ordinarily quite so untidy.

Her forehead was bruised and the long shallow cut thickly scabbed: nothing to be done about that. Snake got her aspirin from the belt pouch, took a heavy dose, and limped back to bed. Waiting for sleep, she wondered how much more frequent the arthritis attacks would get as she grew older. They were inevitable, but it was not inevitable that she would have such a comfortable place in which to recover.

The sun was high and scarlet beyond thin gray clouds when she woke again. Her ears rang faintly from the aspirin. She bent her right knee tentatively and felt relief when she found it more limber and less sore. The hesitant knock that had awakened her came again.

"Come in."

Gabriel opened the door and leaned inside.

"Snake, are you all right?"

"Yes, come on in."

Gabriel entered as she sat up.

"I'm sorry if I woke you but I looked in a couple of times and you never even moved."

Snake pulled aside the bedclothes and showed him her knee. Much of the swelling had gone down, but it was clearly not normal, and the bruises had turned black and purple.

"Good lords," Gabriel said.

"It'll be better by morning," Snake said. She moved over so he could sit beside her. "Could be worse, I guess."

"I sprained my knee once and it looked like a melon for a week. Tomorrow, you say? Healers must heal fast."

"I didn't sprain it last night, I only bruised it. The swelling's mostly arthritis."

"Arthritis! I thought you never get sick."

"I never catch contagious diseases. Healers always get arthritis, unless we get something worse." She shrugged. "It's because of the immunities I told you about. Sometimes they go a little wrong and attack the same body that formed them." She saw no reason to describe the really serious diseases healers were prone to. Gabriel offered to get her some breakfast and she found to her surprise that she was hungry.

Snake spent the day taking hot baths and lying in bed, asleep from so much aspirin. That was the effect it had on her, at least. Every so often Gabriel came in and sat with her for a while, or Larril brought a tray, or Brian reported on how the mayor was getting along. Gabriel's father had not needed Snake's care since the night he had tried to get up; Brian was a much better nurse than she.

She was anxious to leave, anxious to cross the valley and the next ridge of mountains, anxious to get started on her trip to the city. Its potentialities fascinated her. And she was anxious to leave the mayor's castle. She was as comfortable as she had ever been, even back home in the healers' station. Yet the residence was an unpleasant place in which to live: familiarity with it brought a clearer perception of the emotional strains between the people. There was too much building and not enough family; too much power and no protection against it. The mayor kept his strengths to himself, without passing them on, and Ras's strength was misused. As much as Snake wanted to leave, she did not know how she could without doing something for Melissa. Melissa . . .

The mayor had a library, and Larril had brought Snake some of its books. She tried to read. Ordinarily she would have absorbed

several in a day, reading much too fast, she knew, for proper appreciation. But this time she was bored and restless and distracted and disturbed.

Midafternoon. Snake got up and limped to a chair by the window where she could look out over the valley. Gabriel was not even here to talk to, for he had gone to Mountainside to give out the description of the crazy. She hoped someone would find the madman, and she hoped he could be helped. A long trip lay ahead of her and she did not relish the thought of having to worry about her pursuer the whole time. This season of the year she would find no caravans heading toward the city; she would travel alone or not at all.

Grum's invitation to stay the winter at her village was even more attractive now. But the idea of spending half a year crippled in her profession, without knowing whether she would ever be able to redeem herself, was unendurable. She would go to the city, or she would return to the healers' station and receive her teachers' judgment.

Grum. Perhaps Melissa could go to her, if Snake could free the child from Mountainside. Grum was neither beautiful nor obsessed with physical beauty; Melissa's scars would not repel her.

But it would take days to send a message to Grum and receive an answer, for her village lay far to the north. Snake had to admit to herself, too, that she did not know Grum well enough to ask her to take on a responsibility like this one. Snake sighed and combed her fingers through her hair, wishing the problem would submerge in her subconscious and reemerge solved, like a dream. She stared around the room as if something in it would tell her what to do.

The table by the window held a basket of fruit, a plate of cookies, cheese, and a tray of small meat pies. The mayor's staff was too generous in its treatment of invalids; during the long day Snake had not even had the diversion of waiting for and looking forward to meals. She had urged Gabriel, and Larril and Brian and the

other servants who had come to make the bed, polish the windows, brush away the crumbs (she still had no idea how many people worked to manage the residence and to serve Gabriel and his father; every time she learned another name a new face would appear) to help themselves to the treats, but most of the serving dishes were still almost full.

On impulse, Snake emptied the basket of all but the most succulent pieces of fruit, then refilled it with cookies and cheese and meat pies wrapped in napkins. She started to write a note, changed her mind, and drew a coiled serpent on a bit of paper. She folded the slip in among the bundles and tucked a napkin over everything, then rang the call-bell.

A young boy appeared—still another servant she had not encountered before—and she asked him to take the basket to the stable and put it in the loft above Squirrel's stall. The boy was only thirteen or fourteen, lanky with rapid growth, so she made him promise not to raid the basket. In turn she promised him all he wanted of what remained on the table. He did not look underfed, but Snake had never known a child undergoing a growth-spurt who was not always a little bit hungry.

"Is that a satisfactory bargain?" she asked.

The boy grinned. His teeth were large and white and very slightly crooked; he would be a handsome young man. Snake reflected that in Mountainside even adolescents had clear complexions.

"Yes, mistress," he said.

"Good. Be sure the stablemaster doesn't see you. He can hunt up his own meals as far as I'm concerned."

"Yes, mistress!" The boy grinned again, took the basket, and left the room. From his voice, Snake decided Melissa was not the only defenseless child to feel Ras's temper. But that was no help to Melissa. The servant boy was in no better position to speak against Ras than Melissa was.

She wanted to talk to the child, but the day passed and Melissa did not appear. Snake was afraid to send any more definite mes-

sage than the one in the basket; she did not want Melissa beaten again because of a stranger's meddling.

It was already dark when Gabriel returned to the castle and came to Snake's room. He was preoccupied, but he had not forgotten his promise to replace Snake's ruined shirt.

"Nothing," he said. "No one in desert robes. No one acting strangely."

Snake tried on the shirt, which fit surprisingly well. The one she had bought had been brown, a rough homespun weave. This one was of a much softer fabric, silky thin strong white material block-printed with intricate blue designs. Snake shrugged and held out her arms, brushing her fingertips over the rich color. "He buys new clothes—he's a different person. A room at an inn, and nobody sees him. He probably isn't any more unusual than any other stranger passing through."

"Most of the strangers came through weeks ago," Gabriel said, then sighed. "But you're right. Even now he wouldn't be remarked on."

Snake gazed out the window. She could see a few lights, those of valley farms, widely scattered.

"How's your knee?"

"It's all right now." The swelling was gone and the ache had subsided to what was normal during changeable weather. One thing she had liked about the black desert, despite the heat, was the constancy of its weather. There she had never awakened in the morning feeling like some infirm centenarian.

"That's good," Gabriel said, with a hopeful, questioning, tentative note in his voice.

"Healers *do* heal fast," Snake said. "When we have good reason to." She thrust aside her worries, grinned, and was rewarded with Gabriel's radiant smile.

This time the sound of the door opening did not frighten Snake. She awakened easily and pushed herself up on her elbow.

"Melissa?" She turned the lamp up just enough for them to see each other, for she did not want to disturb Gabriel.

"I got the basket," Melissa said. "The things were good. Squirrel likes cheese but Swift doesn't."

Snake laughed. "I'm glad you came up here. I wanted to talk."

"Yeah." Melissa let her breath out slowly. "Where would I go? If I could."

"I don't know if you can believe this, after all Ras has said. You could be a jockey, if that's what you want, almost anyplace but Mountainside. You might have to work a little harder at first, but people would value you for who you are and what you can do." The words sounded hollow even to Snake: You fool, she thought, you're telling a frightened child to go out in the world and succeed all alone. She searched for something better to say.

Lying beside her, one hand flung over her hip, Gabriel shifted and muttered. Snake glanced over her shoulder and put her hand on his. "It's all right, Gabriel," she said. "Go back to sleep." He sighed and the instant of wakefulness passed.

Snake turned back to Melissa. For a moment the child stared at her, ghostly pale in the dim light. Suddenly she spun away and fled.

Snake jumped out of bed and followed her. Sobbing, Melissa fumbled at the door and got it open just as Snake reached her. The child plunged into the hallway, but Snake caught up to her and stopped her.

"Melissa, what's wrong?"

Melissa hunched away, crying uncontrollably. Snake knelt and hugged her, drawing her slowly around, stroking her hair.

"It's all right, it's all right," Snake murmured, just to have something to say.

"I didn't know, I didn't understand . . ." Melissa jerked away from her. "I thought you were stronger—I thought you could do what you want, but you're just like me."

Snake would not let go of Melissa's hand. She led her into one of the other guest rooms and turned up the light. Here the floor

was not heated, and the stone seemed to pull the warmth out through the soles of Snake's bare feet. She dragged a blanket off the neat bed and wrapped it around her shoulders as she took Melissa to the window seat. They sat down, Melissa reluctantly.

"Now. Tell me what's wrong."

With her head down, Melissa hugged her knees to her chest. "You have to do what they want, too."

"I don't *have* to do what anybody wants."

Melissa looked up. From her right eye, the tears slid straight down her cheek. From the left, the ridges of scar tissue led tear-tracks sideways. She put her head down again. Snake moved nearer and put an arm around her shoulders.

"Just relax. There's no hurry."

"They . . . they do things . . ."

Snake frowned, totally confounded. "What things? Who's 'they'?"

"Him."

"Who? Not Gabriel!"

Melissa nodded quickly without meeting her gaze.

Snake could not imagine Gabriel hurting anyone deliberately. "What happened? If he hurt you, I'm sure it was an accident."

Melissa stared at her. "He didn't do anything to *me.*" Her voice was contemptuous.

"Melissa, dear, I haven't understood a word you've said. If Gabriel didn't do anything to you, why were you so upset when you saw him? He's really very nice." Perhaps Melissa had heard about Leah and was afraid for Snake.

"He makes you get in his bed."

"That's my bed."

"It doesn't matter whose bed! Ras can't find where I sleep, but sometimes . . ."

"Ras?"

"Me and him. You and the other."

"Wait," Snake said. "Ras makes you get in his bed? When you don't want to?" That was a stupid question, she thought, but she could not think of a better one.

"Want to!" Melissa said with disgust.

With the calmness of disbelief, Snake said carefully, "Does he make you do anything else?"

"He said it would stop hurting, but it never did . . ." She hid her face against her knees.

What Melissa had been trying to say came clear to Snake in a rush of pity and disgust. Snake hugged Melissa, patting her and stroking her hair until gradually, as if afraid someone would notice and make her stop, Melissa slipped her arms around Snake and cried against her shoulder.

"You don't have to tell me any more," Snake said. "I didn't understand, but now I do. Oh, Melissa, it's not supposed to be like that. Didn't anybody ever tell you?"

"He said I was lucky," Melissa whispered. "He said I should be grateful he would touch me." She shuddered violently.

Snake rocked her back and forth. "He was lucky," she said. "He's been lucky no one knew."

The door opened and Gabriel looked in. "Snake—? Oh, there you are." He came toward her, the light glinting off his golden body. Startled, Melissa glanced toward him. Gabriel froze, shock and horror spreading over his face. Melissa ducked her head again and held Snake tighter, shaking with the effort of controlling her sobs.

"What—?"

"Go back to bed," Snake said, even more harshly than she had meant to but less harshly than she felt toward him right now.

"What's going on?" he asked plaintively. Frowning, he looked at Melissa.

"Go away! I'll talk to you tomorrow."

He started to protest, saw Snake's expression change, cut off his words, and left the room. Snake and Melissa sat together in silence for a long time. Melissa's breathing slowly grew quieter and more regular.

"You see how people look at me?"

"Yes, dear. I see." After Gabriel's reaction Snake hardly felt she could paint any more rosy pictures of people's tolerance. Yet now

Snake hoped even more that Melissa would decide to leave this place. Anything would be better. Anything.

Snake's anger rose in a slow, dangerous, inexorable way. A scarred and hurt and frightened child had as much right to a gentle sexual initiation as any beautiful, confident one, perhaps a greater right. But Melissa had only been scarred and hurt and frightened more. And humiliated. Snake held her and rocked her. Melissa clung contentedly to her like a much younger child.

"Melissa . . ."

"Yes, mistress."

"Ras is an evil man. He's hurt you in ways no one who wasn't evil would ever hurt anyone. I promise you he'll never hurt you again."

"What does it matter if it's him or somebody else?"

"Remember how surprised you were that someone tried to rob me?"

"But that was a crazy. Ras isn't a crazy."

"There are more crazies like that than people like Ras."

"That other one is like Ras. You had to be with him."

"No, I didn't. I invited him to stay with me. There are things people can do for each other—"

Melissa glanced up. Snake could not tell if her expression was curiosity or concern, her face was so stiff with the terrible scars of burning. For the first time Snake could see that the scars extended beneath the collar of the child's shirt. Snake felt the blood drain from her face.

"Mistress, what's wrong?"

"Tell me something, dear. How badly were you burned? Where are the scars?"

Melissa's right eye narrowed; that was all she could make of a frown. "My face." She drew back and touched her collarbone, just to the left of her throat. "Here." Her hand moved down her chest to the bottom of her rib cage, then to her side. "To here."

"No farther down?"

"No. My arm was stiff for a long time." She rotated her left

shoulder: it was not as limber as it should have been. "I was lucky. If it was worse and I couldn't ride, then I wouldn't be worth keeping alive to anybody."

Snake released her breath slowly with great relief. She had seen people burned so badly they had no sex left at all, neither external organs nor capacity for pleasurable sensation. Snake thanked all the gods of all the people of the world for what Melissa had told her. Ras had hurt her, but the pain was because she was a child and he was a large and brutal adult, not because the fire had destroyed all other feeling except pain.

"People can do things for each other that give them both pleasure," Snake said. "That's why Gabriel and I were together. I wanted him to touch me and he wanted me to touch him. But when someone touches another person without caring how they feel—against their wishes!" She stopped, for she could not understand anyone twisted enough to turn sexuality into assault. "Ras is an evil man," she said again.

"The other one didn't hurt you?"

"No. We were having fun."

"All right," Melissa said reluctantly.

"I can show you."

"No! Please don't."

"Don't worry," Snake said. "Don't worry. From now on nobody will do anything to you that you don't want."

"Mistress Snake, you can't stop him. I can't stop him. You have to go away, and I have to stay here."

Anything would be better than staying here, Snake had thought. Anything. Even exile. Like the dream she had been searching for, the answers slipped up into Snake's mind, and she laughed and cried at herself for not seeing them sooner.

"Would you come with me, if you could?"

"Come with *you?*"

"Yes."

"Mistress Snake—!"

"Healers adopt their children, did you know that? I didn't real-

ize it before, but I've been looking for someone for a long time."

"But you could have anybody."

"I want you, if you'll have me as your parent."

Melissa huddled against her. "They'll never let me go," she whispered. "I'm scared."

Snake stroked Melissa's hair and stared out the window at the darkness and the scattered lights of wealthy, beautiful Mountainside. Some time later, just on the edge of sleep, Melissa whispered, "I'm scared."

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

Little Green Men from Afar

Four of the authors represented in this volume are here because their stories were judged the best in their class for the year in which they were published. Sprague de Camp's award is something else. It isn't for a story. It is for a life. The Grand Master Nebula goes only to those who are judged to have made such significant contributions to the field of science fiction that no temporally limited award will suffice. Only four have ever been given—Robert A. Heinlein, Jack Williamson and Clifford D. Simak are the previous winners. To commemorate it for this volume, we asked Sprague de Camp to let us publish the text of an address: "Little Green Men from Afar."

Winner, Grand Master Nebula of 1978.

In 1950, when the flying-saucer craze was enjoying its first boom, Francis F. Broman, an instructor in general science at the University of Denver, staged an experiment to test his students' judgment of evidence. He presented to his class a self-styled flying-saucer expert. Broman told his students to judge this man's tale by five criteria: that the report be first-hand; that the teller show no obvious bias or prejudice; that he be a trained observer; that the data be available for checking; and that the teller be clearly identified.

The class met on March 8. Students invited friends, so the classroom was crowded with strange and eager faces. The speaker was one Silas Newton.

He had, Newton said, learned from government officials that three unidentified flying objects, containing a total of thirty-four extraterrestrials, had crashed, killing all their occupants. These were little blond, beardless men, around three and a half feet tall. They became green only in later versions of the story.

A fourth saucer landed unharmed, and the little men got out. But they fled when officials approached them, and their vehicle vanished.

Broman's class unanimously flunked Newton's story on all five criteria. He had, for instance, shown a bias against the U.S. Air

Force. The tale, however, appeared in the Denver newspapers. Reporters flocked to interview Newton, who, it appeared, was promoting an alleged magnetic method of prospecting for oil. Newton repeated his story with embellishments. The vehicles, he said, were powered by magnetic lines of force, and those that crashed had run into something he called a "magnetic fault." This is pseudoscientific gobbledygook, signifying nothing. Also, he said, the government was trying to suppress all news of this visitation.

Even if Broman's students did not believe the story, many others did. Newton sold several articles about his saucerians. His friend Frank Scully, a theatrical journalist living in Hollywood, California, published a book, *Behind the Flying Saucers.* This puffed up Newton's claims and denounced the government for suppressing the truth about the saucerians.

Such circular logic is commonly used by pseudoscientists. You start by assuming what you wish to prove. If you assume that saucers have landed, why haven't they been exposed to view? Obviously, because the government has censored the news, and the fact that the government has squelched this information proves that the saucers exist. QED.

The tale of the shy saucerians has grown with retelling, so that the pygmy visitors are now firmly established in American folklore. Newton's tale has generated the usual imitations and elaborations. Recently, a pair of enterprising Texans, Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Lu Nettles, were traveling about calling themselves Bo and Peep, or simply the "Two." They have collected a gaggle of followers by promising to carry them all off in UFOs to a happier life on some other world. All the Two wanted was for their disciples to abandon all family ties and give the Two all their money.

In the history of cultism, one is always experiencing a feeling of *déjà vu.* Cultist beliefs have been confuted countless times but bob up again as lively as ever. The idea that the earth was once devastated by a comet began in the seventeenth century with a Cambridge professor, William Whiston. It was revived in the eigh-

teenth by Count Gian Rinaldo Carli. It was revived again in the nineteenth by Ignatius Donnelly, who also made popular cults out of earlier scholarly speculations about the lost Atlantis and the idea that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. In our own times, the cometary-collision hypothesis has been revived with stunning success by Immanuel Velikovsky.

The story of the Two seems like a replay, with modern embellishments, of the Millerite agitation of 1843. William Miller, an upstate New York farmer, became convinced by his biblical studies that the world was about to end. When a shower of meteors and a passing comet aroused excitement, Miller gathered a following, who sold or gave away all their property in anticipation of the End. Their logic is hard to follow, since after the End nobody would have any use for property anyway.

On the appointed night, Millerites in white robes gathered on hilltops, the more easily to be caught up to Heaven with the rest of the righteous. Needless to say, nothing happened, and the dupes were obliged to go back to scratching a living as best they could.

The Newton episode and its sequels form but one thread in the long and tangled web of pseudoscientific belief. Beginning a decade ago, a Swiss bank employee named Erich von Däniken widely popularized the notion that no mere human beings could have built the pyramids of Egypt, the statues on Easter Island, and similar feats of pre-industrial engineering. These must, therefore, have been constructed by extraterrestrial visitors. The fact that von Däniken's books are solid masses of misstatements, errors, and wild guesses presented as fact, unsupported by anything resembling scientific data, has not stopped them from earning their author a much better living than he ever made back in Switzerland.

The idea of enlighteners from afar was not new when von Däniken took it up. It formed part of the teachings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the founder of Theosophy, and her successors. Madame Blavatsky was a big, fat Russian adventuress who, when

she launched her cult in the 1870s, had already led a colorful career. She had lived in Europe, Egypt, and the United States. She had been a circus bareback rider, a professional pianist, a businesswoman, and a spiritualist medium. She had also been the mistress of, among others, a Slovenian singer, a Russian baron, and an English businessman.

In 1878 she moved to India, where her organization took final form. In 1885, she left India for good, after exposure of some of her magical tricks by a pair of disgruntled accomplices. Three years later, she published her *chef-d'oeuvre, The Secret Doctrine,* in which her credo took permanent if wildly confused shape. This work, in six volumes, is a mass of plagiarism and fakery, based upon contemporary scientific, pseudoscientific, mythological, and occult works, cribbed without credit and used in a blundering way that shows only skin-deep acquaintance with the topics discussed.

In addition to the gaudy Theosophical cosmos of multiple planes of existence and chains of planets, following each other in cycles from plane to plane, we are told that life on earth has evolved through seven cycles or Rounds. Man develops through seven Root Races, each comprising seven sub-races.

The First Root Race, we learn, was a kind of invisible astral jellyfish, dwelling in the polar Imperishable Sacred Land. The Second Root Race, a little more substantial, lived in the arctic continent of Hyperborea (derived, like Atlantis, from Greek myths and speculations). The Third Root Race were the gigantic, green, apelike, hermaphroditic, egg-laying Lemurians, with four arms, and eyes in the backs of their heads. Edgar Rice Burroughs probably used Madame Blavatsky's Lemurians as models for his Martian green men.

The downfall of the Lemurians came with their discovery of sex. Madame Blavatsky took a dim view of sex, at least after she got too old to be interested in it herself. Lemuria, like Hyperborea before it, broke up by the subsidence of its parts, while Atlantis took shape. The Fourth Root Race were the wholly human Atlantians; we are the Fifth; the Sixth and Seventh are yet to come.

After Madame Blavatsky died in 1891, her successors clothed her skeletal account of lost continents and prehistoric races with a substantial body of detail. Her associate A. P. Sinnett, in *The Growth of the Soul* (1896) wrote:

> From Venus, as all students of esoteric teaching will be aware, the guardians of our infant humanity in the later third and early fourth race of this world period descended to stimulate in our family the growth of the mânistic principle [P. 277]

Madame's successor as head of the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant, said in *The Pedigree of Man* (1908):

> The third class of Mânasaputras consists of Beings who come to our earth from another planetary chain. They . . . come from outside, from the Chain wherein the planet Venus, [or] Shûkra, is Globe D. [P. 96]

Not even Madame Blavatsky originated the idea of the enlighteners from afar. The concept belongs to a class of myths and legends of culture heroes, who taught mankind what it needed to know in order to thrive. In Greece, the culture hero was Prometheus, who stole fire from Heaven and gave it to mankind against the orders of Zeus. In Egypt, he was Osiris. Among the North American Indians, he was often called the Coyote.

In the naïve old days when the earth was flat, the culture hero used to come down from Heaven. Astronomy, by showing that Heaven was mostly empty space, scotched this idea. Then the discovery that the planets were worlds provided a substitute. The idea that such worlds might be inhabited was broached in the second century by the Syrian satirist Loukianos, or Lucian of Samosata. In his *True History,* Lucian told how a boatload of adventurers, snatched up into the heavens by a whirlwind, got involved in a war between the king of the sun and the king of the moon over the colonization of Venus.

Voltaire, in his *Micromegas* (1752), brought to earth an eight-mile-high visitor from Sirius and a slightly smaller native of Saturn. Because of their size, these beings have a hard time deciding

whether there is intelligent life on earth. Some of us have trouble deciding that, too.

The reason for this persistent desire to credit the early advances of mankind to superior beings—angels, demigods, or extraterrestrials—is simple. The vast majority never have a new idea that is at once original, practicable, and a significant contribution to human progress. For this majority, to admit that some human beings do have such ideas is to admit that such people are more intelligent than they. Nobody likes to confess that he is stupider than someone else.

This is especially true now, when the world is high on an equality kick. It is fashionable in some circles to believe that all men are created literally equal. If they are not, it is unfair and undemocratic, and we should pretend that they are. To think otherwise is called elitism, and you know what a wicked thing that is said to be.

So the enlighteners from afar, whether green or some other color, will be with us for some time to come. No explanation of how the little brown men of the Nile Valley actually built the pyramids will banish these exotic pedagogues, because belief in them panders to human vanity. Most people want reassurance, consolation, and flattery more than they want scientific facts.

The story of pseudoscientific cultism, of which the enlighteners in UFOs form but one small part, is depressing to believers in human rationality. Some cultist ideas, such as Cyrus Teed's notion of the 1890s that the earth is a hollow sphere with us inside, or the more recent one that fluoridation of drinking water is a Communist conspiracy by those notorious red-plotters Dwight Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, and Earl Warren, are so absurd that they beguile few followers and soon fade away. Others attract huge followings and persist for generations.

During the past century, hundreds of thousands of such credophiles (as I like to call them) have believed, despite clear evidence to the contrary—

that Plato's Atlantis not only existed but also gave rise to all other civilizations;

that the descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel are the British, the Irish, the Japanese, the American Indians, or some other modern folk;

that the Great Pyramid of King Khufu at Giza embodies in its measurements a revelation of the wisdom of the ages and a prophecy of the future of man;

that in early historic times, a comet hit the earth, reversing its rotation and changing the length of its day;

that creatures from some other planet are keeping us under surveillance from spacecraft;

that visitors from another fictitious continent—Lemuria, in the Pacific—still dwell on Mount Shasta, in California, where they perform mystic rites with magical fireworks;

that William Shakespeare's plays were written by Sir Francis Bacon, or the Earl of Oxford, or some other Elizabethan worthy;

that the ancient Babylonian superstition of astrology is an effective means of analyzing a personality and predicting the vicissitudes of the one possessing it;

and that in various parts of the world lurk large, picturesque animals left over from some prehistoric era, such as dinosaurs, ape-men, or the plesiosaur of Loch Ness.

As all good monster-fanciers know, the story of Nessie started with a tale of Saint Columba, a sixth-century Irish priest who went to Scotland and converted some of the Picts to Christianity. According to his biographer, another Irish cleric named Adomnan, about the year A.D. 565:

> . . . when the blessed man was for a number of days in the province of the Picts, he had to cross the river Nes. When he reached its bank, he saw a poor fellow being buried by other inhabitants; and the buriers said that, while swimming not long before, he had been seized and most savagely bitten by a water beast. Some men, going to his rescue in a wooden boat, though too late, had put out hooks and caught hold of his wretched corpse. When the blessed man heard this, he ordered notwithstanding that one

of his companions should swim out and bring back to him, by sailing, a boat that stood on the opposite bank. Hearing this order of the holy and memorable man, Lugne mocu-Min obeyed without delay, and putting off his clothes, excepting his tunic, plunged into the water. But the monster, whose appetite had earlier been not so much sated as whetted for prey, lurked in the depth of the river. Feeling the water above disturbed by Lugne's swimming, it suddenly swam up to the surface, and with gaping mouth and with great roaring rushed towards the man swimming in the middle of the stream. While all that were there, barbarians and even the brothers, were struck down with extreme terror, the blessed man, who was watching, raised his holy hand and drew the saving sign of the cross in the empty air; and then, invoking the name of God, he commanded the savage beast, and said: "You will go no further. Do not touch the man; turn backward speedily." Then, hearing this command of the saint, the beast, as if pulled back with ropes, fled terrified in swift retreat; although it had before approached so close to Lugne as he swam that there was no more than the length of one short pole between man and beast.

Then, seeing that the beast had withdrawn and that their fellow-soldier Lugne had returned to them unharmed and safe, in the boat, the brothers with great amazement glorified God in the blessed man. And also the pagan barbarians who were there at the time, impelled by the magnitude of this miracle that they themselves had seen, magnified the God of the Christians.

According to Adomnan, Columba also, with God's help, saw events taking place far away or in the future, cast out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, controlled the winds, calmed storms at sea, summoned water from a rock, turned water into wine, and destroyed evil-doers by his curses. If you believe these marvels, there is no reason why you should not believe in Nessie, too.

It is true that new species of animals are discovered from time to time. Only last year, a supposedly extinct species of peccary turned up alive in the Gran Chaco of Paraguay. It seems increasingly unlikely, however, that any more large air-breathers remain to be found. So to discover new species, the most promising fields are either the deep-sea or very small organisms. The likeliest of all

is the largest single order, in number of species, of all animals: the Coleoptera, or beetles. Of the million-odd known species of animals, about one fifth are beetles. So, if you itch to discover a new species, a new kind of beetle is your best bet.

Nowadays, however, instead of hunting for new species, it is more to the point to try to keep the species we already know from being exterminated, as many are in danger of being.

Why do such cults and their dogmas survive endless exposures, discreditings, and confutations? What gives them the regenerative powers of the Lernaean Hydra, which grew two new heads for every one that Herakles knocked off?

Well, men have always had a voracious appetite for tall tales of colorful, exciting wonders. They accept them and pass them along, often with embellishments, because it is *fun.* Nearly all histories, before modern times, were full of marvels. Thus the skeptical Roman historian Titus Livius collected hundreds of stories of portents. During Hannibal's invasion of Italy, he wrote:

> . . . many portents occurred in Rome or in the neighborhood, or at all events, many were reported and easily gained credence, for when men's minds have been excited by superstitious fears they easily believe these things. A six-months-old child, of freeborn parents, is said to have shouted *"Io Triumphe"* in the vegetable market, whilst in the Forum Boarum, an ox is reported to have climbed up of its own accord to the third story of a house, and then, frightened by the noisy crowd which gathered, it threw itself down. A phantom navy was seen shining in the sky; the temple of Hope in the vegetable market was struck by lightening; at Lanuvium Juno's spear moved of itself, and a crow had flown down to the temple and settled on her couch; in the territory of Amiternum beings in human shape and clothed in white were seen at a distance. [*The Annals of the Roman People* XXI, xlii, 1]

Some of these events may have been natural, if unusual. But to show how these things grow, Livy gave a later list, in which the child spoke in its mother's womb, the ox talked in a human voice, and the beings in white stood around an altar in the sky.

For a later example, the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Njal's Saga* tells how, before the battle of Clontarf in 1014, which enabled the Irish to throw the Vikings out of Ireland, on three successive nights, one of the Norse contingents suffered first a rain of blood from the sky, then the men's own weapons leaped into the air and attacked them, and finally they were assailed by flocks of fierce ravens. One could go on like this all day.

Another factor in the ebullient recent growth of pseudoscience is the weakening of traditional religions as sources of facts about man and the universe. As science advances, it finds the true explanations for many questions that have long puzzled men. These explanations often contradict those given in the sacred books.

Thus the authors of the Bible obviously believed the world to be flat, but it's round. We are not descended from Adam and Eve but from a hairy ground-ape living in Africa twenty million years ago. Plagues are not sent by God to punish disobedient peoples but are caused by bacterial infections. Hence the traditional religions are less and less relied upon for material facts. Increasingly, they have been relegated to being teachers of morals and social-service organizations.

This decline has left a blank in the human psyche. Efforts to substitute some secular philosophy, such as Stoicism, Confucianism, or Marxism, for religion, as a guide and comforter to sinful man, have not been spectacularly successful. Science does not offer a very comforting substitute. It is the best way of finding out what is what, but it makes men neither better nor worse; and the impersonal universe it reveals is bleakly indifferent to human hopes and desires.

Further, by its very nature, science becomes more complex, specialized, and difficult as time goes on. It thus becomes progressively harder for an ordinary mind to keep abreast of scientific discovery. Pseudoscientific cults, on the other hand, give the believer the feeling of being in the "modern" scientific swim, or of

knowing things hidden from the unenlightened mass, without compelling him to master anything really hard.

Furthermore, the ease of transportation and communication has fostered the multiplication of cults. When people were more closely tied to their birthplaces, their kin, and the social milieux into which they were born, they were compelled to associate with a variety of people, many of them uncongenial, with whom they were connected by accidents of birth or geography. But at least they had to face other viewpoints, and obvious foolishness was hooted down.

Of course, new ideas that turned out to be right were also hooted down. With the dizzy speed of change in the present-day world, however, many people have developed minds that are not merely open but gaping. They swallow any new idea, no matter how fantastic, if it is forcefully presented by a charismatic leader.

Also, more and more find it possible, by easy travel and communication, to confine their social lives to those who share their own outlooks and prejudices. Wherever they go, they seek out others of their own peculiar views, since most folk prefer having their existing beliefs confirmed to having them refuted. In such a limited milieu, the most bizarre ideas can be solemnly embraced, because the cultists, seeing only one another outside of working hours, are never forced to consider other points of view. Hence a leader, if he can isolate his followers long enough, can convince them that the moon is made of green cheese. Since they never hear him contradicted, they believe it indefinitely.

Thus contemporary society tends to become more and more subdivided into small, exclusive, mentally self-isolated groups. Each has its own version of the True Faith and never listens to any other.

What can be done about this? Something, but not a great deal. If one is in academe, one can drill one's students in the criteria for judging a statement, as Instructor Broman did at the University of Denver. He seems to have made it work; at least, *his* students

were not fooled by Newton's tale. One can warn one's students against the stigmata of the charlatan: arrogance, garrulity, appeals to emotion, authoritarianism, incomprehensible language, conviction of his own grandeur and persecution, and certainty that those who reject his ideas are scoundrels or madmen.

Few, however, seem able to examine new ideas with the calm, evenhanded intelligence, and the unemotional balance of receptivity and skepticism, needed correctly to evaluate such ideas every time. Pseudoscientific cultism, therefore, seems destined for a long and prosperous career.

Its endurance would be assured, if by nothing else, by the fact that there is money in it. Donald Menzel wrote a book effectively debunking flying saucers, and more recently Lawrence Kusche has published one debunking the Bermuda Triangle. You may be sure that the sales of these books have been only a tiny fraction of the sales of books promoting the original vagaries. If I undertook a thorough analysis of one of von Däniken's books, the result would be a book several times the size of the original. It would take years of my time; and if I were mad enough to write it, who would then read it?

Nor should we expect help from the government. When the government gets into such a dispute, its weight is thrown to the beliefs of its leaders, and they can be as wrong as anyone else. Governmental intervention resulted in the compulsory Aryanism of Hitler's Germany and the rule of Lysenko's pseudogenetics in Stalin's Russia. In the United States, the Fundamentalist crusade of the 1920s, led by the eminent William Jennings Bryan, sought a constitutional amendment against the teaching of evolution. Luckily, that effort petered out. In recent years, however, it has been revived, especially in California. There it had the blessing of the then governor Ronald Reagan. Goodness knows what might happen if a real, red-hot Fundamentalist were to become President of the United States.

Still, this is no reason for not knocking a head off this particular hydra whenever we can. The scientific debunker's job may be

compared to that of the trash collector. The fact that the garbage truck comes by today does not mean that there won't be another load tomorrow. But if the garbage were not collected at all, the results would be worse, as some cities have found when the sanitation workers struck.

So let us do our best to get rid of this ideological garbage, lest it inundate the earth. Our work will never be decisive, since old cults are almost unkillable and new ones keep springing up; but that is no reason for not doing what we can. If we can save even a few from the lure of the higher nonsense, our efforts will have been worthwhile.

To close on a lighter note, I dabble in light verse and have composed a jingle called "The Little Green Men." It runs like this:

Ah, little green fellows from Venus
  Or some other planet afar:
From Mars or Calypso or, maybe,
  A world of an alien star!

According to best-selling authors—
  Blavatsky to von Däniken—
They taught us the skills that were needed
  To make super-apes into men.

They guided our faltering footsteps
  From savagery into the dawns
Of burgeoning civilization
  With cities and writing and bronze.

By them were the Pyramids builded;
  They reared the first temples in Hind;
Drew lines at Peruvian Nazca
  To uplift the poor Amerind.

With all of these wonders they gave us
  It's sad these divine astronauts
Revealed not the answers to questions
  That foil our most rational thoughts.

Such puzzles as riches and paupers,
  The problems of peace and of war,
Relations between the two sexes,
  Or crime and chastisement therefore.

So when we feel dim and defeated
  By problems immune to attack,
Let's send out a prayer electronic:
  "O little green fellows, come back!"

C. J. CHERRYH

Cassandra[*]

Introducing a female writer as "the lovely and talented Whatever-her-name-may-be" is enough to get a person lynched in some circles—and, when you come to think of it, rightly so. (Does anyone ever introduce a male writer as "the debonair and talented Isaac Asimov"? Only in dreams.) But what do you do when the person is certifiably handsome, and uncommonly so, and female to boot? And uncommonly intelligent, amiable and gifted as well? No further description is necessary. I have just introduced C. J. Cherryh, and need only add that not only was she runner-up for a Nebula in the short-story category; but she was runner-up as well in the novel category with her fine *The Faded Sun: Kesrith.*

[*] Runner-up for Nebula, for Best Short Story of 1978.

Fires.

They grew unbearable here.

Alis felt for the door of the flat and knew that it would be solid. She could feel the cool metal of the knob amid the flames . . . saw the shadow-stairs through the roiling smoke outside, clearly enough to feel her way down them, convincing her senses that they would bear her weight.

Crazy Alis. She made no haste. The fires burned steadily. She passed through them, descended the insubstantial steps to the solid ground—she could not abide the elevator, that closed space with the shadow-floor, that plummeted down and down; she made the ground floor, averted her eyes from the red, heatless flames.

A ghost said good morning to her . . . old man Willis, thin and transparent against the leaping flames. She blinked, bade it good morning in return—did not miss old Willis' shake of the head as she opened the door and left. Noon traffic passed, heedless of the flames, the hulks that blazed in the street, the tumbling brick.

The apartment caved in—black bricks falling into the inferno, Hell amid the green, ghostly trees. Old Willis fled, burning, fell—turned to jerking, blackened flesh—died, daily. Alis no longer cried, hardly flinched. She ignored the horror spilling about her,

forced her way through crumbling brick that held no substance, past busy ghosts that could not be troubled in their haste.

Kingsley's Cafe stood, whole, more so than the rest. It was refuge for the afternoon, a feeling of safety. She pushed open the door, heard the tinkle of a lost bell. Shadowy patrons looked, whispered.

Crazy Alis.

The whispers troubled her. She avoided their eyes and their presence, settled in a booth in the corner that bore only traces of the fire.

WAR, the headline in the vender said in heavy type. She shivered, looked up into Sam Kingsley's wraithlike face.

"Coffee," she said. "Ham sandwich." It was constantly the same. She varied not even the order. Mad Alis. Her affliction supported her. A check came each month, since the hospital had turned her out. Weekly she returned to the clinic, to doctors who now faded like the others. The building burned about them. Smoke rolled down the blue, antiseptic halls. Last week a patient ran—burning—

A rattle of china. Sam set the coffee on the table, came back shortly and brought the sandwich. She bent her head and ate, transparent food on half-broken china, a cracked, fire-smudged cup with a transparent handle. She ate, hungry enough to overcome the horror that had become ordinary. A hundred times seen, the most terrible sights lost their power over her: she no longer cried at shadows. She talked to ghosts and touched them, ate the food that somehow stilled the ache in her belly, wore the same too-large black sweater and worn blue shirt and grey slacks because they were all she had that seemed solid. Nightly she washed them and dried them and put them on the next day, letting others hang in the closet. They were the only solid ones.

She did not tell the doctors these things. A lifetime in and out of hospitals had made her wary of confidences. She knew what to say. Her half-vision let her smile at ghost-faces, cannily manipulate their charts and cards, sitting in the ruins that had begun to smol-

der by late afternoon. A blackened corpse lay in the hall. She did not flinch when she smiled good-naturedly at the doctor.

They gave her medicines. The medicines stopped the dreams, the siren screams, the running steps in the night past her apartment. They let her sleep in the ghostly bed, high above ruin, with the flames crackling and the voices screaming. She did not speak of these things. Years in hospitals had taught her. She complained only of nightmares, and restlessness, and they let her have more of the red pills.

WAR, the headline blazoned.

The cup rattled and trembled against the saucer as she picked it up. She swallowed the last bit of bread and washed it down with coffee, tried not to look beyond the broken front window, where twisted metal hulks smoked on the street. She stayed, as she did each day, and Sam grudgingly refilled her cup, that she would nurse as far as she could and then order another one. She lifted it, savoring the feel of it, stopping the trembling of her hands.

The bell jingled faintly. A man closed the door, settled at the counter.

Whole, clear in her eyes. She stared at him, startled, heart pounding. He ordered coffee, moved to buy a paper from the vender, settled again and let the coffee grow cold while he read the news. She had view only of his back while he read—scuffed brown leather coat, brown hair a little over his collar. At last he drank the cooled coffee all at one draught, shoved money onto the counter and left the paper lying, headlines turned face down.

A young face, flesh and bone among the ghosts. He ignored them all and went for the door.

Alis thrust herself from her booth.

"Hey!" Sam called at her.

She rummaged in her purse as the bell jingled, flung a bill onto the counter, heedless that it was a five. Fear was coppery in her mouth; he was gone. She fled the cafe, edged round debris without thinking of it, saw his back disappearing among the ghosts.

She ran, shouldering them, braving the flames—cried out as debris showered painlessly on her, and kept running.

Ghosts turned and stared, shocked—*he* did likewise, and she ran to him, stunned to see the same shock on his face, regarding her.

"What is it?" he asked.

She blinked, dazed to realize he saw her no differently than the others. She could not answer. In irritation he started walking again, and she followed. Tears slid down her face, her breath hard in her throat. People stared. He noticed her presence and walked the faster, through debris, through fires. A wall began to fall and she cried out despite herself.

He jerked about. The dust and the soot rose up as a cloud behind him. His face was distraught and angry. He stared at her as the others did. Mothers drew children away from the scene. A band of youths stared, cold-eyed and laughing.

"Wait," she said. He opened his mouth as if he would curse her; she flinched, and the tears were cold in the heatless wind of the fires. His face twisted in an embarrassed pity. He thrust a hand into his pocket and began to pull out money, hastily, tried to give it to her. She shook her head furiously, trying to stop the tears—stared upward, flinching, as another building fell into flames.

"What's wrong?" he asked her. "What's wrong with you?"

"Please," she said. He looked about at the staring ghosts, then began to walk slowly. She walked with him, nerving herself not to cry out at the ruin, the pale moving figures that wandered through burned shells of buildings, the twisted corpses in the street, where traffic moved.

"What's your name?" he asked. She told him. He gazed at her from time to time as they walked, a frown creasing his brow. He had a face well-worn for youth, a tiny scar beside the mouth. He looked older than she. She felt uncomfortable in the way his eyes traveled over her: she decided to accept it—to bear with anything that gave her this one solid presence. Against every inclination she reached her hand into the bend of his arm, tightened her fingers on the worn leather. He accepted it.

And after a time he slid his arm behind her and about her waist, and they walked like lovers.

WAR, the headline at the newsstand cried.

He started to turn into a street by Tenn's Hardware. She balked at what she saw there. He paused when he felt it, faced her with his back to the fires of that burning.

"Don't go," she said.

"Where do you want to go?"

She shrugged helplessly, indicated the main street, the other direction.

He talked to her then, as he might talk to a child, humoring her fear. It was pity. Some treated her that way. She recognized it, and took even that.

His name was Jim. He had come into the city yesterday, hitched rides. He was looking for work. He knew no one in the city. She listened to his rambling awkwardness, reading through it. When he was done, she stared at him still, and saw his face contract in dismay at her.

"I'm not crazy," she told him, which was a lie that everyone in Sudbury would have known, only *he* would not, knowing no one. His face was true and solid, and the tiny scar by the mouth made it hard when he was thinking; at another time she would have been terrified of him. Now she was terrified of losing him amid the ghosts.

"It's the war," he said.

She nodded, trying to look at him and not at the fires. His fingers touched her arm, gently. "It's the war," he said again. "It's all crazy. Everyone's crazy."

And then he put his hand on her shoulder and turned her back the other way, toward the park, where green leaves waved over black, skeletal limbs. They walked along the lake, and for the first time in a long time she drew breath and felt a whole, sane presence beside her.

They bought corn, and sat on the grass by the lake, and flung it to the spectral swans. Wraiths of passersby were few, only enough

to keep a feeling of occupancy about the place—old people, mostly, tottering about the deliberate tranquillity of their routine despite the headlines.

"Do you see them," she ventured to ask him finally, "all thin and grey?"

He did not understand, did not take her literally, only shrugged. Warily, she abandoned that questioning at once. She rose to her feet and stared at the horizon, where the smoke bannered on the wind.

"Buy you supper?" he asked.

She turned, prepared for this, and managed a shy, desperate smile. "Yes," she said, knowing what else he reckoned to buy with that—willing, and hating herself, and desperately afraid that he would walk away, tonight, tomorrow. She did not know men. She had no idea what she could say or do to prevent his leaving, only that he would when someday he realized her madness.

Even her parents had not been able to bear with that—visited her only at first in the hospitals, and then only on holidays, and then not at all. She did not know where they were.

There was a neighbor boy who drowned. She had said he would. She had cried for it. All the town said it was she who pushed him.

Crazy Alis.

Fantasizes, the doctors said. Not dangerous.

They let her out. There were special schools, state schools.

And from time to time—hospitals.

Tranquilizers.

She had left the red pills at home. The realization brought sweat to her palms. They gave sleep. They stopped the dreams. She clamped her lips against the panic and made up her mind that she would not need them—not while she was not alone. She slipped her hand into his arm and walked with him, secure and strange, up the steps from the park to the streets.

And stopped.

The fires were out.

Ghost-buildings rose above their jagged and windowless shells.

Wraiths moved through masses of debris, almost obscured at times. He tugged her on, but her step faltered, made him look at her strangely and put his arm about her.

"You're shivering," he said. "Cold?"

She shook her head, tried to smile. The fires were out. She tried to take it for a good omen. The nightmare was over. She looked up into his solid, concerned face, and her smile almost became a wild laugh.

"I'm hungry," she said.

They lingered long over a dinner in Graben's—he in his battered jacket, she in her sweater that hung at the tails and elbows: the spectral patrons were in far better clothes, and stared at them, and they were set in a corner nearest the door, where they would be less visible. There was cracked crystal and broken china on insubstantial tables, and the stars winked coldly in gaping ruin above the wan glittering of the broken chandeliers.

Ruins, cold, peaceful ruin.

Alis looked about her calmly. One could live in ruins, only so the fires were gone.

And there was Jim, who smiled at her without any touch of pity, only a wild, fey desperation that she understood—who spent more than he could afford in Graben's, the inside of which she had never hoped to see—and told her—predictably—that she was beautiful. Others had said it. Vaguely she resented such triteness from him, from him whom she had decided to trust. She smiled sadly, when he said it, and gave it up for a frown and, fearful of offending him with her melancholies, made it a smile again.

Crazy Alis. He would learn and leave tonight if she were not careful. She tried to put on gaiety, tried to laugh.

And then the music stopped in the restaurant, and the noise of the other diners went dead, and the speaker was giving an inane announcement.

Shelters . . . shelters . . . shelters.

Screams broke out. Chairs overturned.

Alis went limp in her chair, felt Jim's cold, solid hand tugging at hers, saw his frightened face mouthing her name as he took her up into his arms, pulled her with him, started running.

The cold air outside hit her, shocked her into sight of the ruins again, wraith figures pelting toward that chaos where the fires had been worst.

And she knew.

"No!" she cried, pulling at his arm. "No!" she insisted, and bodies half-seen buffeted them in a rush to destruction. He yielded to her sudden certainty, gripped her hand and fled with her against the crowds as the sirens wailed madness through the night—fled with her as she ran her sighted way through the ruin.

And into Kingsley's, where cafe tables stood abandoned with food still on them, doors ajar, chairs overturned. Back they went into the kitchens and down and down into the cellar, the dark, the cold safety from the flames.

No others found them there. At last the earth shook, too deep for sound. The sirens ceased and did not come on again.

They lay in the dark and clutched each other and shivered, and above them for hours raged the sound of fire, smoke sometimes drifting in to sting their eyes and noses. There was the distant crash of brick, rumblings that shook the ground, that came near, but never touched their refuge.

And in the morning, with the scent of fire still in the air, they crept up into the murky daylight.

The ruins were still and hushed. The ghost-buildings were solid now, mere shells. The wraiths were gone. It was the fires themselves that were strange, some true, some not, playing above dark, cold brick, and most were fading.

Jim swore softly, over and over again, and wept.

When she looked at him she was dry-eyed, for she had done her crying already.

And she listened as he began to talk about food, about leaving the city, the two of them. "All right," she said.

Then clamped her lips, shut her eyes against what she saw in his

face. When she opened them it was still true, the sudden transparency, the wash of blood. She trembled, and he shook at her, his ghost-face distraught.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "What's wrong?"

She could not tell him, would not. She remembered the boy who had drowned, remembered the other ghosts. Of a sudden she tore from his hands and ran, dodging the maze of debris that, this morning, was solid.

"Alis!" he cried and came after her.

"No!" she cried suddenly, turning, seeing the unstable wall, the cascading brick. She started back and stopped, unable to force herself. She held out her hands to warn him back, saw them solid.

The brick rumbled, fell. Dust came up, thick for a moment, obscuring everything.

She stood still, hands at her sides, then wiped her sooty face and turned and started walking, keeping to the center of the dead streets.

Overhead, clouds gathered, heavy with rain.

She wandered at peace now, seeing the rain spot the pavement, not yet feeling it.

In time the rain did fall, and the ruins became chill and cold. She visited the dead lake and the burned trees, the ruin of Graben's, out of which she gathered a string of crystal to wear.

She smiled when, a day later, a looter drove her from her food supply. He had a wraith's look, and she laughed from a place he did not dare to climb and told him so.

And recovered her cache later when it came true, and settled among the ruined shells that held no further threat, no other nightmares, with her crystal necklace and tomorrows that were the same as today.

One could live in ruins, only so the fires were gone.

And the ghosts were all in the past, invisible.

GENE WOLFE

Seven American Nights[*]

Gene Wolfe is a solid and substantial Midwesterner who is easy to like as a person, and impossible to fault as a writer. He has one flaw. He doesn't write enough. Particularly, he doesn't write enough novellas—a form which, some would hold, is the ideal length for a science-fiction story, and which few persons have performed in more successfully than Gene Wolfe. His "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" proved that a few years ago, and the statement is reconfirmed with the present example, "Seven American Nights."

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[*] Runner-up for Nebula, for Best Novella of 1978.

ESTEEMED AND LEARNED MADAME:

As I last wrote you, it appears to me likely that your son Nadan (may Allah preserve him!) has left the old capital and traveled—of his own will or another's—north into the region about the Bay of Delaware. My conjecture is now confirmed by the discovery in those regions of the notebook I enclose. It is not of American manufacture, as you see; and though it holds only the records of a single week, several suggestive items therein provide us new reason to hope.

I have photocopied the contents to guide me in my investigations; but I am alert to the probability that you, madame, with your superior knowledge of the young man we seek, may discover implications I have overlooked. Should that be the case, I urge you to write me at once.

Though I hesitate to mention it in connection with so encouraging a finding, your most recently due remission has not yet arrived. I assume that this tardiness results from the procrastination of the mails, which is here truly abominable. I must warn you, however, that I shall be forced to discontinue the search unless funds sufficient for my expenses are forthcoming before the advent of winter.

With inexpressible respect,
HASSAN KERBELAI

Here I am at last! After twelve mortal days aboard the *Princess Fatimah*—twelve days of cold and ennui—twelve days of bad food

and throbbing engines—the joy of being on land again is like the delight a condemned man must feel when a letter from the shah snatches him from beneath the very blade of death. America! America! Dull days are no more! They say that everyone who comes here either loves or hates you, America—by Allah I love you now!

Having begun this record at last, I find I do not know where to begin. I had been reading travel diaries before I left home; and so when I saw you, O Book, lying so square and thick in your stall in the bazaar—why should I not have adventures too, and write a book like Osman Aga's? Few come to this sad country at the world's edge, after all, and most who do land farther up the coast.

And that gives me the clue I was looking for—how to begin. America began for me as colored water. When I went out on deck yesterday morning, the ocean had changed from green to yellow. I had never heard of such a thing before, neither in my reading, nor in my talks with Uncle Mirza, who was here thirty years ago. I am afraid I behaved like the greatest fool imaginable, running about the ship babbling, and looking over the side every few minutes to make certain the rich mustard color was still there and would not vanish the way things do in dreams when we try to point them out to someone else. The steward told me he knew. Golam Gassem the grain merchant (whom I had tried to avoid meeting for the entire trip until that moment) said, "Yes, yes," and turned away in a fashion that showed he had been avoiding me too, and that it was going to take more of a miracle than yellow water to change his feelings.

One of the few native Americans in first class came out just then: Mister—as the style is here—Tallman, husband of the lovely Madam Tallman, who really deserves such a tall man as myself. (Whether her husband chose that name in self-derision, or in the hope that it would erase others' memory of his infirmity; or whether it was his father's, and is merely one of the countless ironies of fate, I do not know. There was something wrong with his back.) As if I had not made enough spectacle of myself already,

I took this Mr. Tallman by the sleeve and told him to look over the side, explaining that the sea had turned yellow. I am afraid Mr. Tallman turned white himself instead, and turned something else too—his back—looking as though he would have struck me if he dared. It was comic enough, I suppose—I heard some of the other passengers chuckling about it afterward—but I don't believe I have seen such hatred in a human face before. Just then the captain came strolling up, and I—considerably deflated but not flattened yet, and thinking that he had not overheard Mr. Tallman and me—mentioned for the final time that day that the water had turned yellow. "I know," the captain said. "It's his country" (here he jerked his head in the direction of the pitiful Mr. Tallman), "bleeding to death."

Here it is evening again, and I see that I stopped writing last night before I had so much as described my first sight of the coast. Well, so be it. At home it is midnight, or nearly, and the life of the cafés is at its height. How I wish that I were there now, with you, Yasmin, not webbed among these red- and purple-clad strangers, who mob their own streets like an invading army, and duck into their houses like rats into their holes. But you, Yasmin, or Mother, or whoever may read this, will want to know of my day—only you are sometimes to think of me as I am now, bent over an old, scarred table in a decayed room with two beds, listening to the hastening feet in the streets outside.

I slept late this morning; I suppose I was more tired from the voyage than I realized. By the time I woke, the whole of the city was alive around me, with vendors crying fish and fruits under my shuttered window, and the great wooden wains the Americans call *trucks* rumbling over the broken concrete on their wide iron wheels, bringing up goods from the ships in the Potomac anchorage. One sees very odd teams here, Yasmin. When I went to get my breakfast (one must go outside to reach the lobby and dining room in these American hotels, which I would think would be very inconvenient in bad weather) I saw one of these *trucks* with two

oxen, a horse, and a mule in the traces, which would have made you laugh. The drivers crack their whips all the time.

The first impression one gets of America is that it is not as poor as one has been told. It is only later that it becomes apparent how much has been handed down from the previous century. The streets here are paved, but they are old and broken. There are fine, though decayed, buildings everywhere (this hotel is one—the Inn of Holidays, it is called), more modern in appearance than the ones we see at home, where for so long traditional architecture was enforced by law. We are on Maine Street, and when I had finished my breakfast (it was very good, and very cheap by our standards, though I am told it is impossible to get anything out of season here) I asked the manager where I should go to see the sights of the city. He is a short and phenomenally ugly man, something of a hunchback as so many of them are. "There are no tours," he said. "Not any more."

I told him that I simply wanted to wander about by myself, and perhaps sketch a bit.

"You can do that. North for the buildings, south for the theater, west for the park. Do you plan to go to the park, Mr. Jaffarzadeh?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"You should hire at least two securities if you go to the park—I can recommend an agency."

"I have my pistol."

"You'll need more than that, sir."

Naturally, I decided then and there that I would go to the park, and alone. But I have determined not to spend this, the sole, small coin of adventure this land has provided me so far, before I discover what else it may offer to enrich my existence.

Accordingly, I set off for the north when I left the hotel. I have not, thus far, seen this city, or any American city, by night. What they might be like if these people thronged the streets then, as we do, I cannot imagine. Even by clearest day, there is the impression of a carnival, of some mad circus whose performance began a hundred or more years ago and has not ended yet.

At first it seemed that only every fourth or fifth person suffered some trace of the genetic damage that destroyed the old America, but as I grew more accustomed to the streets, and thus less quick to dismiss as Americans and no more the unhappy old woman who wanted me to buy flowers and the boy who dashed shrieking between the wheels of a *truck*, and began instead to look at them as human beings—in other words, just as I would look at some chance-met person on one of our own streets—I saw that there was hardly a soul not marked in some way. These deformities, though they are individually hideous, in combination with the bright, ragged clothing so common here, give the meanest assemblage the character of a pageant. I sauntered along, hardly out of earshot of one group of street musicians before encountering another, and in a few strides passed a man so tall that he was taller seated on a low step than I standing; a bearded dwarf with a withered arm; and a woman whose face had been divided by some devil into halves, one large-eyed and idiotically despairing, the other squinting and sneering.

There can be no question about it—Yasmin must not read this. I have been sitting here for an hour at least, staring at the flame of the candle. Sitting and listening to something that from time to time beats against the steel shutters that close the window of this room. The truth is that I am paralyzed by a fear that entered me —I do not know from whence—yesterday, and has been growing ever since.

Everyone knows that these Americans were once the most skilled creators of consciousness-altering substances the world has ever seen. The same knowledge that permitted them to forge the chemicals that destroyed them (so that they might have bread that never staled, innumerable poisons for vermin, and a host of unnatural materials for every purpose) also contrived synthetic alkaloids that produced endless feverish imaginings.

Surely some, at least, of these skills remain. Or if they do not, then some of the substances themselves, preserved for eighty or

a hundred years in hidden cabinets, and no doubt growing more dangerous as the world forgets them. I think that someone on the ship may have administered some such drug to me.

That is out at last! I felt so much better at having written it—it took a great deal of effort—that I took several turns about this room. Now that I have written it down, I do not believe it at all.

Still, last night I dreamed of that bread, of which I first read in the little schoolroom of Uncle Mirza's country house. It was no complex, towering "literary" dream such as I have sometimes had, and embroidered, and boasted of afterward over coffee. Just the vision of a loaf of soft white bread lying on a plate in the center of a small table: bread that retained the fragrance of the oven (surely one of the most delicious in the world) though it was smeared with gray mold. Why would the Americans wish such a thing? Yet all the historians agree that they did, just as they wished their own corpses to appear living forever.

It is only this country, with its colorful, fetid streets, deformed people, and harsh, alien language, that makes me feel as drugged and dreaming as I do. Praise Allah that I can speak Farsi to you, O Book. Will you believe that I have taken out every article of clothing I have, just to read the makers' labels? Will *I* believe it, for that matter, when I read this at home?

The public buildings to the north—once the great center, as I understand it, of political activity—offer a severe contrast to the streets of the still-occupied areas. In the latter, the old buildings are in the last stages of decay, or have been repaired by makeshift and inappropriate means; but they seethe with the life of those who depend upon such commercial activity as the port yet provides, and with those who depend on them, and so on. The monumental buildings, because they were constructed of the most imperishable materials, appear almost whole, though there are a few fallen columns and sagging porticos, and in several places small trees (mostly the sad *carpinus caroliniana,* I believe) have rooted

in the crevices of walls. Still, if it is true, as has been written, that Time's beard is gray not with the passage of years but with the dust of ruined cities, it is here that he trails it. These imposing shells are no more than that. They were built, it would seem, to be cooled and ventilated by machinery. Many are windowless, their interiors now no more than sunless caves, reeking of decay; into these I did not venture. Others had had fixed windows that once were mere walls of glass; and a few of these remained, so that I was able to sketch their construction. Most, however, are destroyed. Time's beard has swept away their very shards.

Though these old buildings (with one or two exceptions) are deserted, I encountered several beggars. They seemed to be Americans whose deformities preclude their doing useful work, and one cannot help but feel sorry for them, though their appearance is often as distasteful as their importunities. They offered to show me the former residence of their Padshah, and as an excuse to give them a few coins I accompanied them, making them first pledge to leave me when I had seen it.

The structure they pointed out to me was situated at the end of a long avenue lined with impressive buildings; so I suppose they must have been correct in thinking it once important. Hardly more than the foundation, some rubble, and one ruined wing remain now, and it cannot have been originally of an enduring construction. No doubt it was actually a summer palace or something of that kind. The beggars have now forgotten its very name, and call it merely "the white house."

When they had guided me to this relic, I pretended that I wanted to make drawings, and they left as they had promised. In five or ten minutes, however, one particularly enterprising fellow returned. He had no lower jaw, so that I had quite a bit of difficulty in understanding him at first; but after we had shouted back and forth a good deal—I telling him to depart and threatening to kill him on the spot, and he protesting—I realized that he was forced to make the sound of *d* for *b*, *n* for *m*, and *t* for *p*; and after that we got along better.

I will not attempt to render his speech phonetically, but he said that since I had been so generous, he wished to show me a great secret—something foreigners like myself did not even realize existed.

"Clean water," I suggested.

"No, no. A great, great secret, Captain. You think all this is dead." He waved a misshapen hand at the desolated structures that surrounded us.

"Indeed I do."

"One still lives. You would like to see it? I will guide. Don't worry about the others—they're afraid of me. I will drive them away."

"If you are leading me into some kind of ambush, I warn you, you will be the first to suffer."

He looked at me very seriously for a moment, and a man seemed to stare from the eyes in that ruined face, so that I felt a twinge of real sympathy. "See there? The big building to the south, on Pennsylvania? Captain, my father's father's father was chief of a department ('detartnent') there. I would not betray you."

From what I have read of this country's policies in the days of his father's father's father, that was little enough reassurance, but I followed him.

We went diagonally across several blocks, passing through two ruined buildings. There were human bones in both, and remembering his boast, I asked him if they had belonged to the workers there.

"No, no." He tapped his chest again—a habitual gesture, I suppose—and scooping up a skull from the floor held it beside his own head so that I could see that it exhibited cranial deformities much like his own. "We sleep here, to be shut behind strong walls from the things that come at night. We die here, mostly in wintertime. No one buries us."

"You should bury each other," I said.

He tossed down the skull, which shattered on the terrazzo floor,

waking a thousand dismal echoes. "No shovel, and few are strong. But come with me."

At first sight the building to which he led me looked more decayed than many of the ruins. One of its spires had fallen, and the bricks lay in the street. Yet when I looked again, I saw that there must be something in what he said. The broken windows had been closed with ironwork at least as well made as the shutters that protect my room here; and the door, though old and weathered, was tightly shut, and looked strong.

"This is the museum," my guide told me. "The only part left, almost, of the Silent City that still lives in the old way. Would you like to see inside?"

I told him that I doubted that we would be able to enter.

"Wonderful machines." He pulled at my sleeve. "You *see* in, Captain. Come."

We followed the building's walls around several corners, and at last entered a sort of alcove at the rear. Here there was a grill set in the weed-grown ground, and the beggar gestured toward it proudly. I made him stand some distance off, then knelt as he had indicated to look through the grill.

There was a window of unshattered glass beyond the grill. It was very soiled now, but I could see through into the basement of the building, and there, just as the beggar had said, stood an orderly array of complex mechanisms.

I stared for some time, trying to gain some notion of their purpose; and at length an old American appeared among them, peering at one and then another, and whisking the shining bars and gears with a rag.

The beggar had crept closer as I watched. He pointed at the old man, and said, "Still come from north and south to study here. Someday we are great again." Then I thought of my own lovely country, whose eclipse—though without genetic damage—lasted twenty-three hundred years. And I gave him money, and told him that, yes, I was certain America would be great again someday, and left him, and returned here.

I have opened the shutters so that I can look across the city to the obelisk and catch the light of the dying sun. Its fields and valleys of fire do not seem more alien to me, or more threatening, than this strange, despondent land. Yet I know that we are all one —the beggar, the old man moving among the machines of a dead age, those machines themselves, the sun, and I. A century ago, when this was a thriving city, the philosophers used to speculate on the reason that each neutron and proton and electron exhibited the same mass as all the others of its kind. Now we know that there is only one particle of each variety, moving backward and forward in time, an electron when it travels as we do, a positron when its temporal displacement is retrograde, the same few particles appearing billions of billions of times to make up a single object, and the same few particles forming all the objects, so that we are all the sketches, as it were, of the same set of pastels.

I have gone out to eat. There is a good restaurant not far from the hotel, better even than the dining room here. When I came back the manager told me that there is to be a play tonight at the theater, and assured me that because it is so close to his hotel (in truth, he is very proud of this theater, and no doubt its proximity to his hotel is the only circumstance that permits the hotel to remain open) I will be in no danger if I go without an escort. To tell the truth, I am a little ashamed that I did not hire a boat today to take me across the channel to the park; so now I will attend the play, and dare the night streets.

Here I am again, returned to this too-large, too-bare, uncarpeted room, which is already beginning to seem a second home, with no adventures to retail from the dangerous benighted streets. The truth is that the theater is hardly more than a hundred paces to the south. I kept my hand on the butt of my pistol and walked along with a great many other people (mostly Americans) who were also going to the theater, and felt something of a fool.

The building is as old as those in the Silent City, I should think; but it has been kept in some repair. There was more of a feeling

of gaiety (though to me it was largely an alien gaiety) among the audience than we have at home, and less of the atmosphere of what I may call the sacredness of Art. By that I knew that the drama really is sacred here, as the colorful clothes of the populace make clear in any case. An exaggerated and solemn respect always indicates a loss of faith.

Having recently come from my dinner, I ignored the stands in the lobby at which the Americans—who seem to eat constantly when they can afford it—were selecting various cold meats and pastries, and took my place in the theater proper. I was hardly in my seat before a pipe-puffing old gentleman, an American, desired me to move in order that he might reach his own. I stood up gladly, of course, and greeted him as "Grandfather," as our own politeness (if not theirs) demands. But while he was settling himself and I was still standing beside him, I caught a glimpse of his face from the exact angle at which I had seen it this afternoon, and recognized him as the old man I had watched through the grill.

Here was a difficult situation. I wanted very much to draw him into conversation, but I could not well confess that I had been spying on him. I puzzled over the question until the lights were extinguished and the play began.

It was Vidal's *Visit to a Small Planet,* one of the classics of the old American theater, a play I have often read about but never (until now) seen performed. I would have liked it much better if it had been done with the costumes and settings of its proper period; unhappily, the director had chosen to "modernize" the entire affair, just as we sometimes present *Rustam Beg* as if Rustam had been a hero of the war just past. General Powers was a contemporary American soldier with the mannerisms of a cowardly bandit; Spelding, a publisher of libelous broadsheets, and so on. The only characters that gave me much pleasure were the limping spaceman, Kreton, and the ingenue, Ellen Spelding, played as and by a radiantly beautiful American blonde.

All through the first act my mind had been returning (particularly during Spelding's speeches) to the problem of the old man

beside me. By the time the curtain fell, I had decided that the best way to start a conversation might be to offer to fetch him a kebab —or whatever he might want—from the lobby, since his threadbare appearance suggested that he might be ready enough to be treated, and the weakness of his legs would provide an admirable excuse. I tried the gambit as soon as the flambeaux were relit, and it worked as well as I could have wished. When I returned with a paper tray of sandwiches and bitter drinks, he remarked to me quite spontaneously that he had noticed me flexing my right hand during the performance.

"Yes," I said, "I had been writing a good deal before I came here."

That set him off, and he began to discourse, frequently with a great deal more detail than I could comprehend, on the topic of writing machines. At last I halted the flow with some question that must have revealed that I knew less of the subject than he had supposed. "Have you ever," he asked me, "carved a letter in a potato, and moistened it with a stamp pad, and used it to imprint paper?"

"As a child, yes. We use a turnip, but no doubt the principle is the same."

"Exactly; and the principle is that of extended abstraction. I ask you—on the lowest level, what is communication?"

"Talking, I suppose."

His shrill laugh rose above the hubbub of the audience. "Not at all! Smell" (here he gripped my arm), "smell is the essence of communication. Look at that word *essence* itself. When you smell another human being, you take chemicals from his body into your own, analyze them, and from the analysis you accurately deduce his emotional state. You do it so constantly and so automatically that you are largely unconscious of it, and say simply, 'He seemed frightened,' or 'He was angry.' You see?"

I nodded, interested in spite of myself.

"When you speak, you are telling another how you would smell if you smelled as you should and if he could smell you properly

from where he stands. It is almost certain that speech was not developed until the glaciations that terminated the Pliocene stimulated mankind to develop fire, and the frequent inhalation of wood smoke had dulled the olfactory organs."

"I see."

"No, you hear—unless you are by chance reading my lips, which in this din would be a useful accomplishment." He took an enormous bite of his sandwich, spilling pink meat that had surely come from no natural animal. "When you write, you are telling the other how you would speak if he could hear you, and when you print with your turnip, you are telling him how you would write. You will notice that we have already reached the third level of abstraction."

I nodded again.

"It used to be believed that only a limited number K of levels of abstraction were possible before the original matter disappeared altogether—some very interesting mathematical work was done about seventy years ago in an attempt to derive a generalized expression for K for various systems. Now we know that the number can be infinite if the array represents an open curve, and that closed curves are also possible."

"I don't understand."

"You are young and handsome—very fine looking, with your wide shoulders and black mustache; let us suppose a young woman loves you. If you and I and she were crouched now on the limb of a tree, you would scent her desire. Today, perhaps she tells you of that desire. But it is also possible, is it not, that she may write you of her desire?"

Remembering Yasmin's letters, I assented.

"But suppose those letters are perfumed—a musky, sweet perfume. You understand? A closed curve—the perfume is not the odor of her body, but an artificial simulation of it. It may not be what she feels, but it is what she tells you she feels. Your real love is for a whale, a male deer, and a bed of roses." He was about to say more, but the curtain went up for the second act.

I found that act both more enjoyable, and more painful, than the first. The opening scene, in which Kreton (soon joined by Ellen) reads the mind of the family cat, was exceptionally effective. The concealed orchestra furnished music to indicate cat thoughts; I wish I knew the identity of the composer, but my playbill does not provide the information. The bedroom wall became a shadow screen, where we saw silhouettes of cats catching birds, and then, when Ellen tickled the real cat's belly, making love. As I have said, Kreton and Ellen were the play's best characters. The juxtaposition of Ellen's willowy beauty and high-spirited naiveté, and Kreton's clear desire for her, illuminated perfectly the Paphian difficulties that would confront a powerful telepath, were such persons to exist.

On the other hand, Kreton's summoning of the presidents, which closes the act, was as objectionable as it could possibly have been made. The foreign ruler conjured up by error was played as a Turk, and as broadly as possible. I confess to feeling some prejudice against that bloodthirsty race myself, but what was done was indefensible. When the president of the World Council appeared, he was portrayed as an American.

By the end of that scene I was in no very good mood. I think that I have not yet shaken off the fatigues of the crossing; and they, combined with a fairly strenuous day spent prowling around the ruins of the Silent City, had left me now in that state in which the smallest irritation takes on the dimensions of a mortal insult. The old curator beside me discerned my irascibility, but mistook the reason for it, and began to apologize for the state of the American stage, saying that all the performers of talent emigrated as soon as they gained recognition, and returned only when they had failed on the eastern shore of the Atlantic.

"No, no," I said. "Kreton and the girl are very fine, and the rest of the cast is at least adequate."

He seemed not to have heard me. "They pick them up wherever they can—they choose them for their faces. When they have appeared in three plays, they call themselves actors. At the Smith-

sonian—I am employed there, perhaps I've already mentioned it —we have tapes of real theater: Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Katharine Cornell. Spelding is a barber, or at least he was. He used to put his chair under the old Kennedy statue and shave the passersby. Ellen is a trollop, and Powers a drayman. That lame fellow Kreton used to snare sailors for a singing house on Portland Street."

His disparagement of his own national culture embarrassed me, though it put me in a better mood. (I have noticed that the two often go together—perhaps I am secretly humiliated to find that people of no great importance can affect my interior state with a few words or some mean service.) I took my leave of him and went to the confectioner's stand in the lobby. The Americans have a very pretty custom of duplicating the speckled eggs of wild birds in marzipan, and I bought a box of these—not only because I wanted to try them myself, but because I felt certain they would prove a treat for the old man, who must seldom have enough money to afford luxuries of that kind. I was quite correct—he ate them eagerly. But when I sampled one, I found its odor (as though I were eating artificial violets) so unpleasant that I did not take another.

"We were speaking of writing," the old man said. "The closed curve and the open curve. I did not have time to make the point that both could be achieved mechanically; but the monograph I am now developing turns upon that very question, and it happens that I have examples with me. First the closed curve. In the days when our president was among the world's ten most powerful men—the reality of the Paul Laurent you see on the stage there —each president received hundreds of requests every day for his signature. To have granted them would have taken hours of his time. To have refused them would have raised a brigade of enemies."

"What did they do?"

"They called upon the resources of science. That science devised the machine that wrote this."

From within his clean, worn coat he drew a folded sheet of paper. I opened it and saw that it was covered with the text of what appeared to be a public address, written in a childish scrawl. Mentally attempting to review the list of the American presidents I had seen in some digest of world history long ago, I asked whose hand it was.

"The machine's. Whose hand is being imitated here is one of the things I am attempting to discover."

In the dim light of the theater it was almost impossible to make out the faded script, but I caught the word *Sardinia.* "Surely, by correlating the contents to historical events it should be possible to date it quite accurately."

The old man shook his head. "The text itself was composed by another machine to achieve some national psychological effect. It is not probable that it bears any real relationship to the issues of its day. But now look here." He drew out a second sheet, and unfolded it for me. So far as I could see, it was completely blank. I was still staring at it when the curtain went up.

As Kreton moved his toy aircraft across the stage, the old man took a final egg and turned away to watch the play. There was still half a carton left, and I, thinking that he might want more later, and afraid that they might be spilled from my lap and lost underfoot, closed the box and slipped it into the side pocket of my jacket.

The special effects for the landing of the second spaceship were well done; but there was something else in the third act that gave me as much pleasure as the cat scene in the second. The final curtain hinges on the device our poets call the *Peri's asphodel,* a trick so shopworn now that it is acceptable only if it can be presented in some new light. The one used here was to have John—Ellen's lover—find Kreton's handkerchief and, remarking that it seemed perfumed, bury his nose in it. For an instant, the shadow wall used at the beginning of the second act was illuminated again to graphically (or I should say, pornographically) present Ellen's desire, conveying to the audience that John had, for that moment,

shared the telepathic abilities of Kreton, whom all of them had now entirely forgotten.

The device was extremely effective, and left me feeling that I had by no means wasted my evening. I joined the general applause as the cast appeared to take their bows; then, as I was turning to leave, I noticed that the old man appeared very ill. I asked if he were all right, and he confessed ruefully that he had eaten too much, and thanked me again for my kindness—which must at that time have taken a great deal of resolution.

I helped him out of the theater, and when I saw that he had no transportation but his feet, told him I would take him home. He thanked me again, and informed me that he had a room at the museum.

Thus the half-block walk from the theater to my hotel was transformed into a journey of three or four kilometers, taken by moonlight, much of it through rubble-strewn avenues of the deserted parts of the city.

During the day I had hardly glanced at the stark skeleton of the old highway. Tonight, when we walked beneath its ruined overpasses, they seemed inexpressibly ancient and sinister. It occurred to me then that there may be a time-flaw, such as astronomers report from space, somewhere in the Atlantic. How is it that this western shore is more antiquated in the remains of a civilization not yet a century dead than we are in the shadow of Darius? May it not be that every ship that plows that sea moves through ten thousand years?

For the past hour—I find I cannot sleep—I have been debating whether to make this entry. But what good is a travel journal, if one does not enter everything? I will revise it on the trip home, and present a cleansed copy for my mother and Yasmin to read.

It appears that the scholars at the museum have no income but that derived from the sale of treasures gleaned from the past; and I bought a vial of what is supposed to be the greatest creation of the old hallucinatory chemists from the woman who helped me

get the old man into bed. It is—it was—about half the height of my smallest finger. Very probably it was alcohol and nothing more, though I paid a substantial price.

I was sorry I had bought it before I left, and still more sorry when I arrived here; but at the time it seemed that this would be my only opportunity, and I could think of nothing but to seize the adventure. After I have swallowed the drug I will be able to speak with authority about these things for the remainder of my life.

Here is what I have done. I have soaked the porous sugar of one of the eggs with the fluid. The moisture will soon dry up. The drug —if there is a drug—will remain. Then I will rattle the eggs together in an empty drawer, and each day, beginning tomorrow night, I will eat one egg.

I am writing today before I go down to breakfast, partly because I suspect that the hotel does not serve so early. Today I intend to visit the park on the other side of the channel. If it is as dangerous as they say, it is very likely I will not return to make an entry tonight. If I do return—well, I will plan for that when I am here again.

After I had blown out my candle last night I could not sleep, though I was tired to the bone. Perhaps it was only the excitement of the long walk back from the museum; but I could not free my mind from the image of Ellen. My wandering thoughts associated her with the eggs, and I imagined myself Kreton, sitting up in bed with the cat on my lap. In my daydream (I was not asleep) Ellen brought me my breakfast on a tray, and the breakfast consisted of the six candy eggs.

When my mind had exhausted itself with this kind of imagery, I decided to have the manager procure a girl for me so that I could rid myself of the accumulated tensions of the voyage. After about an hour during which I sat up reading, he arrived with three; and when he had given me a glimpse of them through the half-open door, he slipped inside and shut it behind him, leaving them standing in the corridor. I told him I had only asked for one.

"I know, Mr. Jaffarzadeh, I know. But I thought you might like to have a choice."

None of them—from the glimpse I had had—resembled Ellen; but I thanked him for his thoughtfulness and suggested that he bring them in.

"I wanted to tell you first, sir, that you must allow me to set the price with them—I can get them for much less than you, sir, because they know they cannot deceive me, and they must depend on me to bring them to my guests in the future." He named a sum that was in fact quite trivial.

"That will be fine," I said. "Bring them in."

He bowed and smiled, making his pinched and miserly face as pleasant as possible and reminding me very much of a picture I had once seen of an imp summoned before the court of Suleiman. "But first, sir, I wished to inform you that if you would like all three —together—you may have them for the price of two. And should you desire only two of the three, you may have them for one and one half the price of one. All are very lovely, and I thought you might want to consider it."

"Very well, I have considered it. Show them in."

"I will light another candle," he said, bustling about the room. "There is no charge, sir, for candles at the rate you're paying. I can put the girls on your bill as well. They'll be down as room service —you understand, I'm sure."

When the second candle was burning and he had positioned it to his liking on the nightstand between the two beds, he opened the door and waved in the girls, saying, "I'll go now. Take what you like and send out the others." (I feel certain this was a stratagem—he felt I would have difficulty in getting any to leave, and so would have to pay for all three.)

Yasmin must never see this—that is decided. It is not just that this entire incident would disturb her greatly, but because of what happened next. I was sitting on the bed nearest the door, hoping to decide quickly which of the three most resembled the girl who had played Ellen. The first was too short, with a wan, pinched face.

The second was tall and blond, but plump. The third, who seemed to stumble as she entered, exactly resembled Yasmin.

For a few seconds I actually believed it was she. Science has so accustomed us to devising and accepting theories to account for the facts we observe, however fantastic, that our minds must begin their manufacture before we are aware of it. Yasmin had grown lonely for me. She had booked passage a few days after my own departure, or perhaps had flown, daring the notorious American landing facilities. Arriving here, she had made inquiries at the consulate, and was approaching my door as the manager lit his candle, and not knowing what was taking place had entered with prostitutes he had engaged.

It was all moonshine, of course. I jumped to my feet and held up the candle, and saw that the third girl, though she had Yasmin's large, dark eyes and rounded little chin, was not she. For all her night-black hair and delicate features, she was indisputably an American; and as she came toward me (encouraged, no doubt, because she had attracted my attention) I saw that like Kreton in the play she had a club foot.

As you see, I returned alive from the park after all. Tonight before I retire I will eat an egg; but first I will briefly set down my experiences.

The park lies on the opposite side of the Washington Channel, between the city and the river. It can be reached by land only at the north end. Not choosing to walk so far and return, I hired a little boat with a tattered red sail to carry me to the southern tip, which is called Hains Point. Here there was a fountain, I am told, in the old times; but nothing remains of it now.

We had clear, sunny spring weather, and made our way over exhilarating swells of wave with nothing of the deadly wallowing that oppressed me so much aboard the *Princess Fatimah.* I sat in the bow and watched the rolling greenery of the park on one side of the channel and the ruins of the old fort on the other, while an elderly man handled the tiller, and his thin, sun-browned granddaughter, aged about eleven, worked the sail.

When we rounded the point, the old man told me that for very little more he would take me across to Arlington to see the remains of what is supposed to be the largest building of the country's antiquity. I refused, determined to save that experience for another time, and we landed where a part of the ancient concrete coping remained intact.

The tracks of old roads run up either shore; but I decided to avoid them, and made my way up the center, keeping to the highest ground in so far as I could. Once, no doubt, the whole area was devoted to pleasure. Very little remains, however, of the pavilions and statuary that must have dotted the ground. There are little, worn-away hills that may once have been rockeries but are now covered with soil, and many stagnant pools. In a score of places I saw the burrows of the famous giant American rats, though I never saw the animals themselves. To judge from the holes, their size has not been exaggerated—there were several I could have entered with ease.

The wild dogs, against which I had been warned by both the hotel manager and the old boatman, began to follow me after I had walked about a kilometer north. They are short-haired, and typically blotched with black and brown flecked with white. I would say their average weight was about twenty-five kilos. With their erect ears and alert, intelligent faces they did not seem particularly dangerous; but I soon noticed that whichever way I turned, the ones in back of me edged nearer. I sat on a stone with my back to a pool and made several quick sketches of them, then decided to try my pistol. They did not seem to know what it was, so I was able to center the red aiming laser very nicely on one big fellow's chest before I pressed the stud for a high energy pulse.

For a long time afterward, I heard the melancholy howling of these dogs behind me. Perhaps they were mourning their fallen leader. Twice I came across rusting machines that may have been used to take invalids through the gardens in such fair weather as I myself experienced today. Uncle Mirza says I am a good colorist, but I despair of ever matching the green-haunted blacks with which the declining sun painted the park.

I met no one until I had almost reached the piers of the abandoned railway bridge. Then four or five Americans who pretended to beg surrounded me. The dogs, who as I understand it live mostly upon the refuse cast up by the river, were more honest in their intentions and cleaner in their persons. If these people had been like the pitiful creatures I had met in the Silent City, I would have thrown them a few coins; but they were more or less able-bodied men and women who could have worked, and chose instead to rob. I told them that I had been forced to kill a fellow countryman of theirs (not mentioning that he was a dog) who had assaulted me; and asked where I could report the matter to the police. At that they backed off, and permitted me to walk around the northern end of the channel in peace, though not without a thousand savage looks. I returned here without further incident, tired and very well satisfied with my day.

I have eaten one of the eggs! I confess I found it difficult to take the first taste; but marshaling my resolution was like pushing at a wall of glass—all at once the resistance snapped, and I picked the thing up and swallowed it in a few bites. It was piercingly sweet, but there was no other flavor. Now we will see. This is more frightening than the park by far.

Nothing seemed to be happening, so I went out to dinner. It was twilight, and the carnival spirit of the streets was more marked than ever—colored lights above all the shops, and music from the rooftops where the wealthier natives have private gardens. I have been eating mostly at the hotel, but was told of a "good" American-style restaurant not too far south on Maine Street.

It was just as described—people sitting on padded benches in alcoves. The table tops are of a substance like fine-grained, greasy, artificial stone. They looked very old. I had the Number One Dinner—buff-colored fish soup with the pasty American bread on the side, followed by a sandwich of ground meat and raw vegetables doused with a tomato sauce and served on a soft, oily roll. To

tell the truth, I did not much enjoy the meal; but it seems a sort of duty to sample more of the American food than I have thus far.

I am very tempted to end the account of my day here, and in fact I laid down this pen when I had written *thus far,* and made myself ready for bed. Still, what good is a dishonest record? I will let no one see this—just keep it to read over after I get home.

Returning to the hotel from the restaurant, I passed the theater. The thought of seeing Ellen again was irresistible; I bought a ticket and went inside. It was not until I was in my seat that I realized that the bill had changed.

The new play was *Mary Rose.* I saw it done by an English company several years ago, with great authenticity; and it struck me that (like Mary herself) it had far outlived its time. The American production was as inauthentic as the other had been correct. For that reason, it retained—or I should have said it had acquired —a good deal of interest.

Americans are superstitious about the interior of their country, not its coasts, so Mary Rose's island had been shifted to one of the huge central lakes. The highlander, Cameron, had accordingly become a Canadian, played by General Powers' former aide. The Speldings had become the Morelands, and the Morelands had become Americans. Kreton was Harry, the knife-throwing wounded soldier; and my Ellen had become Mary Rose.

The role suited her so well that I imagined the play had been selected as a vehicle for her. Her height emphasized the character's unnatural immaturity, and her slenderness, and the vulnerability of her pale complexion, would have told us, I think, if the play had not, that she had been victimized unaware. More important than any of these things was a wild and innocent affinity for the supernatural, which she projected to perfection. It was that quality alone (as I now understood) that had made us believe on the preceding night that Kreton's spaceship might land in the Speldings' rose garden—he would have been drawn to Ellen, though he had never seen her. Now it made Mary Rose's disappearances and reappearances plausible and even likely; it was as

likely that unseen spirits lusted for Mary Rose as that Lieutenant Blake (previously John Randolf) loved her.

Indeed it was more likely. And I had no sooner realized that, than the whole mystery of *Mary Rose*—which had seemed at once inexplicable and banal when I had seen it well played in Teheran—lay clear before me. We of the audience were the envious and greedy spirits. If the Morelands could not see that one wall of their comfortable drawing room was but a sea of dark faces, if Cameron had never noticed that we were the backdrop of his island, the fault was theirs. By rights then, Mary Rose should have been drawn to us when she vanished. At the end of the second act I began to look for her, and in the beginning of the third I found her, standing silent and unobserved behind the last row of seats. I was only four rows from the stage, but I slipped out of my place as unobtrusively as I could, and crept up the aisle toward her.

I was too late. Before I had gone halfway, it was nearly time for her entrance at the end of the scene. I watched the rest of the play from the back of the theater, but she never returned.

Same night. I am having a good deal of trouble sleeping, though while I was on the ship I slept nine hours a night, and was off as soon as my head touched the pillow.

The truth is that while I lay in bed tonight I recalled the old curator's remark that the actresses were all prostitutes. If it is true and not simply an expression of hatred for younger people whose bodies are still attractive, then I have been a fool to moan over the thought of Mary Rose and Ellen when I might have had the girl herself.

Her name is Ardis Dahl—I just looked it up in the playbill. I am going to the manager's office to consult the city directory there.

Writing before breakfast. Found the manager's office locked last night. It was after two. I put my shoulder against the door and got it open easily enough. (There was no metal socket for the bolt such as we have at home—just a hole mortised in the frame.) The directory listed several Dahls in the city, but since it was nearly

eight years out of date it did not inspire a great deal of confidence. I reflected, however, that in a backwater like this people were not likely to move about so much as we do at home, and that if it were not still of some utility, the manager would not be likely to retain it; so I selected the one that appeared from its address to be nearest the theater, and set out.

The streets were completely deserted. I remember thinking that I was now doing what I had previously been so afraid to do, having been frightened of the city by reading. How ridiculous to suppose that robbers would be afoot now, when no one else was. What would they do, stand for hours at the empty corners?

The moon was full and high in the southern sky, showering the street with the lambent white fluid of its light. If it had not been for the sharp, unclean odor so characteristic of American residential areas, I might have thought myself walking through an illustration from some old book of wonder tales, or an actor in a children's pantomime, so bewitched by the scenery that he has forgotten the audience.

(In writing that—which to tell the truth I did not think of at the time, but only now, as I sat here at my table—I realized that that is in fact what must happen to the American girl I have been in the habit of calling Ellen but must now learn to call Ardis. She could never perform as she does if it were not that in some part of her mind her stage became her reality.)

The shadows about my feet were a century old, tracing faithfully the courses they had determined long before New Tabriz came to jewel the lunar face with its sapphire. Webbed with thoughts of her—my Ellen, my Mary Rose, my Ardis!—and with the magic of that pale light that commands all the tides, I was elevated to a degree I cannot well describe.

Then I was seized by the thought that everything I felt might be no more than the effect of the drug.

At once, like someone who falls from a tower and clutches at the very wisps of air, I tried to return myself to reality. I bit the interiors of my cheeks until the blood filled my mouth, and struck

the unfeeling wall of the nearest building with my fist. In a moment the pain sobered me. For a quarter hour or more I stood at the curbside, spitting into the gutter and trying to clean and bandage my knuckles with strips torn from my handkerchief. A thousand times I thought what a sight I would be if I did in fact succeed in seeing Ellen, and I comforted myself with the thought that if she were indeed a prostitute it would not matter to her—I could offer her a few additional rials and all would be well.

Yet that thought was not really much comfort. Even when a woman sells her body, a man flatters himself that she would not do so quite so readily were he not who he is. At the very moment I drooled blood into the street, I was congratulating myself on the strong, square face so many have admired; and wondering how I should apologize if in kissing her I smeared her mouth with red.

Perhaps it was some faint sound that brought me to myself; perhaps it was only the consciousness of being watched. I drew my pistol and turned this way and that, but saw nothing.

Yet the feeling endured. I began to walk again; and if there was any sense of unreality remaining, it was no longer the unearthly exultation I had felt earlier. After a few steps I stopped and listened. A dry sound of rattling and scraping had followed me. It too stopped now.

I was nearing the address I had taken from the directory. I confess my mind was filled with fancies in which I was rescued by Ellen herself, who in the end should be more frightened than I, but who would risk her lovely person to save mine. Yet I knew these *were* but fancies, and the thing pursuing me was not, though it crossed my mind more than once that it might be some *druj* made to seem visible and palpable to me.

Another block, and I had reached the address. It was a house no different from those on either side—built of the rubble of buildings that were older still, three-storied, heavy-doored, and almost without windows. There was a bookshop on the ground floor (to judge by an old sign) with living quarters above it. I crossed the street to see it better, and stood, wrapped again in my dreams,

staring at the single thread of yellow light that showed between the shutters of a gable window.

As I watched that light, the feeling of being watched myself grew upon me. Time passed, slipping through the waist of the universe's great hourglass like the eroded soil of this continent slipping down her rivers to the seas. At last my fear and desire—desire for Ellen, fear of whatever it was that glared at me with invisible eyes—drove me to the door of the house. I hammered the wood with the butt of my pistol, though I knew how unlikely it was that any American would answer a knock at such a time of night, and when I had knocked several times, I heard slow steps from within.

The door creaked open until it was caught by a chain. I saw a gray-haired man, fully dressed, holding an old-fashioned, long-barreled gun. Behind him a woman lifted a stub of smoking candle to let him see; and though she was clearly much older than Ellen, and was marked, moreover, by the deformities so prevalent here, there was a certain nobility in her features and a certain beauty as well, so that I was reminded of the fallen statue that is said to have stood on an island farther north, and which I have seen pictured.

I told the man that I was a traveler—true enough!—and that I had just arrived by boat from Arlington and had no place to stay, and so had walked into the city until I had noticed the light of his window. I would pay, I said, a silver rial if they would only give me a bed for the night and breakfast in the morning, and I showed them the coin. My plan was to become a guest in the house so that I might discover whether Ellen was indeed one of the inhabitants; if she were, it would have been an easy matter to prolong my stay.

The woman tried to whisper in her husband's ear, but save for a look of nervous irritation he ignored her. "I don't dare let a stranger in." From his voice I might have been a lion, and his gun a trainer's chair. "Not with no one here but my wife and myself."

"I see," I told him. "I quite understand your position."

"You might try the house on the corner," he said, shutting the

door, "but don't tell them Dahl sent you." I heard the heavy bar dropped into place at the final word.

I turned away—and then by the mercy of Allah who is indeed compassionate happened to glance back one last time at the thread of yellow between the shutters of that high window. A flicker of scarlet higher still caught my attention, perhaps only because the light of the setting moon now bathed the rooftop from a new angle. I think the creature I glimpsed there had been waiting to leap upon me from behind, but when our eyes met it launched itself toward me. I had barely time to lift my pistol before it struck me and slammed me to the broken pavement of the street.

For a brief period I think I lost consciousness. If my shot had not killed the thing as it fell, I would not be sitting here writing this journal this morning. After half a minute or so I came to myself enough to thrust its weight away, stand up, and rub my bruises. No one had come to my aid; but neither had anyone rushed from the surrounding houses to kill and rob me. I was as alone with the creature that lay dead at my feet as I had been when I only stood watching the window in the house from which it had sprung.

After I found my pistol and assured myself that it was still in working order, I dragged the thing to a spot of moonlight. When I glimpsed it on the roof, it had seemed a feral dog, like the one I had shot in the park. When it lay dead before me, I had thought it a human being. In the moonlight I saw it was neither, or perhaps both. There was a blunt muzzle; and the height of the skull above the eyes, which anthropologists say is the surest badge of humanity and speech, had been stunted until it was not greater than I have seen in a macaque. Yet the arms and shoulders and pelvis—even a few filthy rags of clothing—all bespoke mankind. It was a female, with small, flattened breasts still apparent on either side of the burn channel.

At least ten years ago I read about such things in Osman Aga's *Mystery Beyond the Sun's Setting;* but it was very different to stand shivering on a deserted street corner of the old capital and

examine the thing in the flesh. By Osman Aga's account (which no one, I think, but a few old women has ever believed) these creatures were in truth human beings—or at least the descendants of human beings. In the last century, when the famine gripped their country and the irreversible damage done to the chromosomal structures of the people had already become apparent, some few turned to the eating of human flesh. No doubt the corpses of the famine supplied their food at first; and no doubt those who ate of them congratulated themselves that by so doing they had escaped the effects of the enzymes that were then still used to bring slaughter animals to maturity in a matter of months. What they failed to realize was that the bodies of the human beings they ate had accumulated far more of these unnatural substances than were ever found in the flesh of the short-lived cattle. From them, according to *Mystery Beyond the Sun's Setting,* rose such creatures as the thing I had killed.

But Osman Aga has never been believed. So far as I know, he is a mere popular writer, with a reputation for glorifying Caspian resorts in recompense for free lodging, and for indulging in absurd expeditions to breed more books and publicize the ones he has already written—crossing the desert on a camel and the Alps on an elephant—and no one else has ever, to my knowledge, reported such things from this continent. The ruined cities filled with rats and rabid bats, and the terrible whirling dust storms of the interior, have been enough for other travel writers. Now I am sorry I did not contrive a way to cut off the thing's head; I feel sure its skull would have been of interest to science.

As soon as I had written the preceding paragraph, I realized that there might still be a chance to do what I had failed to do last night. I went to the kitchen, and for a small bribe was able to secure a large, sharp knife, which I concealed beneath my jacket.

It was still early as I ran down the street, and for a few minutes I had high hopes that the thing's body might still be lying where I had left it; but my efforts were all for nothing. It was gone, and

there was no sign of its presence—no blood, no scar from my beam on the house. I poked into alleys and waste cans. Nothing. At last I came back to the hotel for breakfast, and I have now (it is mid-morning) returned to my room to make my plans for the day.

Very well. I failed to meet Ellen last night—I shall not fail today. I am going to buy another ticket for the play, and tonight I will not take my seat, but wait behind the last row where I saw her standing. If she comes to watch at the end of the second act as she did last night, I will be there to compliment her on her performance and present her with some gift. If she does not come, I will make my way backstage—from what I have seen of these Americans, a quarter rial should get me anywhere, but I am willing to loosen a few teeth if I must.

What absurd creatures we are! I have just reread what I wrote this morning, and I might as well have been writing of the philosophic speculations of the Congress of Birds or the affairs of the demons in Domdaniel, or any other subject on which neither I nor anyone else knows or can know a thing. O Book, you have heard what I supposed would occur, now let me tell you what actually took place.

I set out as I had planned to procure a gift for Ellen. On the advice of the hotel manager, I followed Maine Street north until I reached the wide avenue that passes close by the obelisk. Around the base of this still imposing monument is held a perpetual fair in which the merchants use the stone blocks fallen from the upper part of the structure as tables. What remains of the shaft is still, I should say, upwards of one hundred meters high; but it is said to have formerly stood three or four times that height. Much of the fallen material has been carted away to build private homes.

There seems to be no logic to the prices in this country, save for the general rule that foodstuffs are cheap and imported machinery —cameras and the like—costly. Textiles are expensive, which no doubt explains why so many of the people wear ragged clothes that they mend and dye in an effort to make them look new.

Certain kinds of jewelry are quite reasonable; others sell for much higher prices than they would in Teheran. Rings of silver or white gold set, usually, with a single modest diamond, may be had in great numbers for such low prices that I was tempted into buying a few to take home as an investment. Yet I saw bracelets that would have sold at home for no more than half a rial, for which the seller asked ten times that much. There were many interesting antiques, all of which are alleged to have been dug from the ruined cities of the interior at the cost of someone's life. When I had talked to five or six vendors of such items, I was able to believe that I knew how the country was depopulated.

After a good deal of this pleasant, wordy shopping, during which I spent very little, I selected a bracelet made of old coins—many of them silver—as my gift to Ellen. I reasoned that women always like jewelry, and that such a showy piece might be of service to an actress in playing some part or other, and that the coins must have a good deal of intrinsic value. Whether she will like it or not —if she ever receives it—I do not know; it is still in the pocket of my jacket.

When the shadow of the obelisk had grown long, I returned here to the hotel and had a good dinner of lamb and rice, and retired to groom myself for the evening. The five remaining candy eggs stood staring at me from the top of my dresser. I remembered my resolve, and took one. Quite suddenly I was struck by the conviction that the demon I believed I had killed the night before had been no more than a phantom engendered by the action of the drug.

What if I had been firing my pistol at mere empty air? That seemed a terrible thought—indeed it seems so to me still. A worse one is that the drug really may have rendered visible—as some say those ancient preparations were intended to—a real but spiritual being. If such things in fact walk what we take to be unoccupied rooms and rooftops, and the empty streets of night, it would explain many sudden deaths and diseases, and perhaps the sudden changes for the worse we sometimes see in others and others in

us, and even the birth of evil men. This morning I called the thing a *druj;* it may be true.

Yet if the drug had been in the egg I ate last night, then the egg I held was harmless. Concentrating on that thought, I forced myself to eat it all, then stretched myself upon the bed to wait.

Very briefly I slept and dreamed. Ellen was bending over me, caressing me with a soft, long-fingered hand. It was only for an instant, but sufficient to make me hope that dreams are prophecies.

If the drug was in the egg I consumed, that dream was its only result. I got up and washed, and changed my clothes, sprinkling my fresh shirt liberally with our Pamir rosewater, which I have observed the Americans hold in high regard. Making certain my ticket and pistol were both in place, I left for the theater.

The play was still *Mary Rose.* I intentionally entered late (after Harry and Mrs. Otery had been talking for several minutes), then lingered at the back of the last row as though I were too polite to disturb the audience by taking my seat. Mrs. Otery made her exit; Harry pulled his knife from the wood of the packing case and threw it again, and when the mists of the past had marched across the stage, Harry was gone, and Moreland and the parson were chatting to the tune of Mrs. Moreland's knitting needles. Mary Rose would be on stage soon. My hope that she would come out to watch the opening scene had come to nothing; I would have to wait until she vanished at the end of Act II before I could expect to see her.

I was looking for a vacant seat when I became conscious of someone standing near me. In the dim light I could tell little except that he was rather slender, and a few centimeters shorter than I.

Finding no seat, I moved back a step or two. The newcomer touched my arm and asked in a whisper if I could light his cigarette. I had already seen that it was customary to smoke in the theaters here, and I had fallen into the habit of carrying matches to light the candles in my room. The flare of the flame showed the

narrow eyes and high cheekbones of Harry—or as I preferred to think of him, Kreton. Taken somewhat aback, I murmured some inane remark about the excellence of his performance.

"Did you like it? It is the least of all parts—I pull the curtain to open the show, then pull it again to tell everyone it's time to go home."

Several people in the audience were looking angrily at us, so we retreated to a point at the head of the aisle that was at least legally in the lobby, where I told him I had seen him in *Visit to a Small Planet* as well.

"Now *there* is a play. The character—as I am sure you saw—is good and bad at once. He is benign, he is mischievous, he is hellish."

"You carried it off wonderfully well, I thought."

"Thank you. This turkey here—do you know how many roles it has?"

"Well, there's yourself, Mrs. Otery, Mr. Amy—"

"No, no." He touched my arm to stop me. "I mean *roles,* parts that require real acting. There's one—the girl. She gets to skip about the stage as an eighteen-year-old whose brain atrophied at ten; and at least half what she does is wasted on the audience because they don't realize what's wrong with her until Act I is almost over."

"She's wonderful," I said. "I mean Mademoiselle Dahl."

Kreton nodded and drew on his cigarette. "She is a very competent ingenue, though it would be better if she weren't quite so tall."

"Do you think there's any chance that she might come out here—as you did?"

"Ah," he said, and looked me up and down.

For a moment I could have sworn that the telepathic ability he was credited with in *Visit to a Small Planet* was no fiction; nevertheless, I repeated my question: "Is it probable or not?"

"There's no reason to get angry—no, it's not likely. Is that enough payment for your match?"

"She vanishes at the end of the second act, and doesn't come on stage again until near the close of the third."

Kreton smiled. "You've read the play?"

"I was here last night. She must be off for nearly forty minutes, including the intermission."

"That's right. But she won't be here. It's true she goes out front sometimes—as I did myself tonight—but I happen to know she has company backstage."

"Might I ask who?"

"You might. It's even possible I might answer. You're Moslem, I suppose—do you drink?"

"I'm not a *strict* Moslem; but no, I don't. I'll buy you a drink gladly though, if you want one, and have coffee with you while you drink it."

We left by a side door and elbowed our way through the crowd in the street. A flight of narrow and dirty steps descending from the sidewalk led us to a cellar tavern that had all the atmosphere of a private club. There was a bar with a picture (now much dimmed by dirt and smoke) of the cast of a play I did not recognize behind it, three tables, and a few alcoves. Kreton and I slipped into one of these and ordered from a barman with a misshapen head. I suppose I must have stared at him, because Kreton said, "I sprained my ankle stepping out of a saucer, and now I am a convalescent soldier. Should we make up something for him too? Can't we just say the potter is angry sometimes?"

"The potter?" I asked.

" 'None answered this; but after Silence spake/A Vessel of a more ungainly Make:/They sneer at me for leaning all awry;/ What! Did the Hand then of the Potter shake?' "

I shook my head. "I've never heard that; but you're right, he looks as though his head had been shaped in clay, then knocked in on one side while it was still wet."

"This is a republic of hideousness, as you have no doubt already seen. Our national symbol is supposed to be an extinct eagle; it is in fact the nightmare."

"I find it a very beautiful country," I said. "Though I confess that many of your people are unsightly. Still, there are the ruins, and you have such skies as we never see at home."

"Our chimneys have been filled with wind for a long time."

"That may be for the best. Blue skies are better than most of the things made in factories."

"And not all our people are unsightly," Kreton murmured.

"Oh no. Mademoiselle Dahl—"

"I had myself in mind."

I saw that he was baiting me, but I said, "No, you aren't hideous—in fact, I would call you handsome in an exotic way. Unfortunately, my tastes run more toward Mademoiselle Dahl."

"Call her Ardis—she won't mind."

The barman brought Kreton a glass of green liqueur, and me a cup of the weak, bitter American coffee.

"You were going to tell me who she is entertaining."

"Behind the scenes." Kreton smiled. "I just thought of that—I've used the phrase a thousand times, as I suppose everyone has. This time it happens to be literally correct, and its birth is suddenly made plain, like Oedipus's. No, I don't think I promised I would tell you that—though I suppose I said I might. Aren't there other things you would really rather know? The secret hidden beneath Mount Rushmore, or how you might meet her yourself?"

"I will give you twenty rials to introduce me to her, with some assurance that something will come of the introduction. No one need ever find out."

Kreton laughed. "Believe me, I would be more likely to boast of my profit than keep it secret—though I would probably have to divide my fee with the lady to fulfill the guarantee."

"You'll do it then?"

He shook his head, still laughing. "I only pretend to be corrupt; it goes with this face. Come backstage after the show tonight, and I'll see that you meet Ardis. You're very wealthy, I presume, and if you're not, we'll say you are anyway. What are you doing here?"

"Studying your art and architecture."

"Great reputation in your own country, no doubt?"

"I am a pupil of Akhon Mirza Ahmak; he has a great reputation, surely. He even came here, thirty years ago, to examine the miniatures in your National Gallery of Art."

"Pupil of Akhon Mirza Ahmak, pupil of Akhon Mirza Ahmak," Kreton muttered to himself. "That is very good—I must remember it. But now"—he glanced at the old clock behind the bar—"it's time we got back. I'll have to freshen my makeup before I go on in the last act. Would you prefer to wait in the theater, or just come around to the stage door when the play's over? I'll give you a card that will get you in."

"I'll wait in the theater," I said, feeling that would offer less chance for mishap; also because I wanted to see Ellen play the ghost again.

"Come along then—I have a key for that side door."

I rose to go with him, and he threw an arm about my shoulder that I felt it would be impolite to thrust away. I could feel his hand, as cold as a dead man's, through my clothing, and was reminded unpleasantly of the twisted hands of the beggar in the Silent City.

We were going up the narrow stairs when I felt a gentle touch inside my jacket. My first thought was that he had seen the outline of my pistol, and meant to take it and shoot me. I gripped his wrist and shouted something—I do not remember what. Bound together and struggling, we staggered up the steps and into the street.

In a few seconds we were the center of a mob—some taking his side, some mine, most only urging us to fight, or asking each other what the disturbance was. My pocket sketchpad, which he must have thought held money, fell to the ground between us. Just then the American police arrived—not by air as the police would have come at home, but astride shaggy, hulking horses, and swinging whips. The crowd scattered at the first crackling arc from the lashes, and in a few seconds they had beaten Kreton to the ground. Even at the time I could not help thinking what a terrible thing it must be to be one of these people, whose police are so quick to

prefer any prosperous-looking foreigner to one of their own citizens.

They asked me what had happened (my questioner even dismounted to show his respect for me), and I explained that Kreton had tried to rob me, but that I did not want him punished. The truth was that seeing him sprawled unconscious with a burn across his face had put an end to any resentment I might have felt toward him; out of pity, I would gladly have given him the few rials I carried. They told me that if he had attempted to rob me he must be charged, and that if I would not accuse him they would do so themselves.

I then said that Kreton was a friend; and that on reflection I felt certain that what he had attempted had been intended as a prank. (In maintaining this I was considerably handicapped by not knowing his real name, which I had read on the playbill but forgotten, so that I was forced to refer to him as "this poor man.")

At last the policeman said, "We can't leave him in the street, so we'll have to bring him in. How will it look if there's no complaint?"

Then I understood that they were afraid of what their superiors might say if it became known that they had beaten him unconscious when no charge was made against him; and when I became aware that if I would not press charges, the charges they would bring themselves would be far more serious—assault or attempted murder—I agreed to do what they wished, and signed a form alleging the theft of my sketchbook.

When they had gone at last, carrying the unfortunate Kreton across a saddlebow, I tried to reenter the theater. The side door through which we had left was locked, and though I would gladly have paid the price of another ticket, the box office was closed. Seeing that there was nothing further to be done, I returned here, telling myself that my introduction to Ellen, if it ever came, would have to wait for another day.

Very truly it is written that we walk by paths that are always turning. In recording these several pages I have managed to re-

strain my enthusiasm, though when I described my waiting at the back of the theater for Ardis, and again when I recounted how Kreton had promised to introduce me to her, I was forced for minutes at a time to lay down my pen and walk about the room singing and whistling, and—to reveal everything—jumping over the beds! But now I can conceal no longer. I have seen her! I have touched her hand; I am to see her again tomorrow; and there is every hope that she will become my mistress!

I had undressed and laid myself on the bed (thinking to bring this journal up to date in the morning) and had even fallen into the first doze of sleep, when there was a knock at the door. I slipped into my robe and pressed the release.

It was the only time in my life that for even an instant I thought I might be dreaming—actually asleep—when in truth I was up and awake.

How feeble it is to write that she is more beautiful in person than she appears on the stage. It is true, and yet it is a supreme irrelevance. I have seen more beautiful women—indeed Yasmin is, I suppose, by the formal standards of art, more lovely. It is not Ardis' beauty that draws me to her—the hair like gold, the translucent skin that then still showed traces of the bluish makeup she had worn as a ghost, the flashing eyes like the clear, clean skies of America. It is something deeper than that; something that would remain if all that were somehow taken away. No doubt she has habits that would disgust me in someone else, and the vanity that is said to be so common in her profession, and yet I would do anything to possess her.

Enough of this. What is it but empty boasting, now that I am on the point of winning her?

She stood in my doorway. I have been trying to think how I can express what I felt then. It was as though some tall flower, a lily perhaps, had left the garden and come to tap at my door, a thing that had never happened before in all the history of the world, and would never happen again.

"You are Nadan Jaffarzadeh?"

I admitted that I was, and shamefacedly, twenty seconds too late, moved out of her way.

She entered, but instead of taking the chair I indicated, turned to face me; her blue eyes seemed as large as the colored eggs on the dresser, and they were filled with a melting hope. "You are the man, then, that Bobby O'Keene tried to rob tonight."

I nodded.

"I know you—I mean, I know your face. This is insane. You came to *Visit* on the last night and brought your father, and then to *Mary Rose* on the first night, and sat in the third or fourth row. I thought you were an American, and when the police told me your name I imagined some greasy fat man with gestures. Why on earth would Bobby want to steal from *you?*"

"Perhaps he needed the money."

She threw back her head and laughed. I had heard her laugh in *Mary Rose* when Simon was asking her father for her hand; but that had held a note of childishness that (however well suited to the part) detracted from its beauty. This laugh was the merriment of houris sliding down a rainbow. "I'm sure he did. He always needs money. You're sure, though, that he meant to rob you? You couldn't have . . ."

She saw my expression and let the question trail away. The truth is that I was disappointed that I could not oblige her, and at last I said, "If you want me to be mistaken, Ardis, then I was mistaken. He only bumped against me on the steps, perhaps, and tried to catch my sketchbook when it fell."

She smiled, and her face was the sun smiling upon roses. "You would say that for me? And you know my name?"

"From the program. I came to the theater to see you—and that was not my father, who it grieves me to say is long dead, but only an old man, an American, whom I had met that day."

"You brought him sandwiches at the first intermission—I was watching you through the peephole in the curtain. You must be a very thoughtful person."

"Do you watch everyone in the audience so carefully?"

She blushed at that, and for a moment could not meet my eyes.

"But you will forgive Bobby, and tell the police that you want them to let him go? You must love the theater, Mr. Jef—Jaff—"

"You've forgotten my name already. It is Jaffarzadeh, a very commonplace name in my country."

"I hadn't forgotten it—only how to pronounce it. You see, when I came here I had learned it without knowing who you were, and so I had no trouble with it. Now you're a real person to me and I can't say it as an actress should." She seemed to notice the chair behind her for the first time, and sat down.

I sat opposite her. "I'm afraid I know very little about the theater."

"We are trying to keep it alive here, Mr. Jaffar, and—"

"Jaffarzadeh. Call me Nadan—then you won't have so many syllables to trip over."

She took my hand in hers, and I knew quite well that the gesture was as studied as a salaam and that she felt she was playing me like a fish; but I was beside myself with delight. To be played by *her!* To have *her* eager to cultivate my affection! And the fish will pull her in yet—wait and see!

"I will," she said, "Nadan. And though you may know little of the theater, you feel as I do—as we do—or you would not come. It has been such a long struggle; all the history of the stage is a struggle, the gasping of a beautiful child born at the point of death. The moralists, censorship and oppression, technology, and now poverty have all tried to destroy her. Only we, the actors and audiences, have kept her alive. We have been doing well here in Washington, Nadan."

"Very well indeed," I said. "Both the productions I have seen have been excellent."

"But only for the past two seasons. When I joined the company it had nearly fallen apart. We revived it—Bobby and Paul and I. We could do it because we cared, and because we were able to find a few naturally talented people who can take direction. Bobby is

the best of us—he can walk away with any part that calls for a touch of the sinister . . ."

She seemed to run out of breath. I said, "I don't think there will be any trouble about getting him free."

"Thank God. We're getting the theater on its feet again now. We're attracting new people, and we've built up a following—people who come to see every production. There's even some money ahead at last. But *Mary Rose* is supposed to run another two weeks, and after that we're doing *Faust,* with Bobby as Mephistopheles. We've simply no one who can take his place, no one who can come close to him."

"I'm sure the police will release him if I ask them to."

"They *must.* We have to have him tomorrow night. Bill—someone you don't know—tried to go on for him in the third act tonight. It was just ghastly. In Iran you're very polite; that's what I've heard."

"We enjoy thinking so."

"We're not. We never were; and as . . ."

Her voice trailed away, but a wave of one slender arm evoked everything—the cracked plaster walls became as air, and the decayed city, the ruined continent, entered the room with us. "I understand," I said.

"They—we—were betrayed. In our souls we have never been sure by whom. When we feel cheated we are ready to kill; and maybe we feel cheated all the time."

She slumped in her chair, and I realized, as I should have long before, how exhausted she was. She had given a performance that had ended in disaster, then had been forced to plead with the police for my name and address, and at last had come here from the station house, very probably on foot. I asked when I could obtain O'Keene's release.

"We can go tomorrow morning, if you'll do it."

"You wish to come too?"

She nodded, smoothed her skirt, and stood. "I'll have to know. I'll come for you about nine, if that's all right."

"If you'll wait outside for me to dress, I'll take you home."

"That's not necessary."

"It will only take a moment," I said.

The blue eyes held something pleading again. "You're going to come in with me—that's what you're thinking, I know. You have two beds here—bigger, cleaner beds than the one I have in my little apartment; if I were to ask you to push them together, would you still take me home afterward?"

It was as though I were dreaming indeed—a dream in which everything I wanted—the cosmos purified—delivered itself to me. I said, "You won't have to leave at all—you can spend the night with me. Then we can breakfast together before we go to release your friend."

She laughed again, lifting that exquisite head. "There are a hundred things at home I need. Do you think I'd have breakfast with you without my cosmetics, and in these dirty clothes?"

"Then I will take you home—yes, though you lived in Kazvin. Or on Mount Kaf."

She smiled. "Get dressed, then. I'll wait outside, and I'll show you my apartment; perhaps you won't want to come back here afterward."

She went out, her wooden-soled American shoes clicking on the bare floor, and I threw on trousers, shirt, and jacket, and jammed my feet into my boots. When I opened the door, she was gone. I rushed to the barred window at the end of the corridor, and was in time to see her disappear down a side street. A last swirl of her skirt in a gust of night wind, and she had vanished into the velvet dark.

For a long time I stood there looking out over the ruinous buildings. I was not angry—I do not think I could be angry with her. I was, though here it is hard to tell the truth, in some way glad. Not because I feared the embrace of love—I have no doubt of my ability to suffice any woman who can be sated by man—but because an easy exchange of my cooperation for her person would have failed to satisfy my need for romance, for adventure of a

certain type, in which danger and love are twined like coupling serpents. Ardis, my Ellen, will provide that, surely, as neither Yasmin nor the pitiful wanton who was her double could. I sense that the world is opening for me only now; that I am being born; that that corridor was the birth canal, and that Ardis in leaving me was drawing me out toward her.

When I returned to my own door, I noticed a bit of paper on the floor before it. I transcribe it exactly here, though I cannot transmit its scent of lilacs.

> You are a most attractive man and I want very much to stretch the truth and tell you you can have me freely when Bobby is free but I won't sell myself etc. Really I *will* sell myself for Bobby but I have other fish to fry tonight. I'll see you in the morning and if you can get Bobby out or even try hard you'll have (real) love from the vanishing
>
> Mary Rose

Morning. Woke early and ate here at the hotel as usual, finishing about eight. Writing this journal will give me something to do while I wait for Ardis. Had an American breakfast today, the first time I have risked one. Flakes of pastry dough toasted crisp and drenched with cream, and with it strudel and the usual American coffee. Most natives have spiced pork in one form or another, which I cannot bring myself to try; but several of the people around me were having egg dishes and oven-warmed bread, which I will sample tomorrow.

I had a very unpleasant dream last night; I have been trying to put it out of my mind ever since I woke. It was dark, and I was under an open sky with Ardis, walking over ground much rougher than anything I saw in the park on the farther side of the channel. One of the hideous creatures I shot night before last was pursuing us—or rather, lurking about us, for it appeared first to the left of us, then to the right, silhouetted against the night sky. Each time we saw it, Ardis grasped my arm and urged me to shoot, but the little indicator light on my pistol was glowing red to show that there was not enough charge left for a shot. All very silly, of course,

but I am going to buy a fresh powerpack as soon as I have the opportunity.

It is late afternoon—after six—but we have not had dinner yet. I am just out of the tub, and sit here naked, with today's candy egg laid (pinker even than I) beside this book on my table. Ardis and I had a sorry, weary time of it, and I have come back here to make myself presentable. At seven we will meet for dinner; the curtain goes up at eight, so it can't be a long one, but I am going backstage to watch the play from the wings, where I will be able to talk to her when she isn't performing.

I just took a bite of the egg—no unusual taste, nothing but an unpleasant sweetness. The more I reflect on it, the more inclined I am to believe that the drug was in the first I ate. No doubt the monster I saw had been lurking in my brain since I read *Mysteries,* and the drug freed it. True, there were bloodstains on my clothes (the Peri's asphodel!) but they could as easily have come from my cheek, which is still sore. I have had my experience, and all I have left is my candy. I am almost tempted to throw out the rest. Another bite.

Still twenty minutes before I must dress and go for Ardis—she showed me where she lives, only a few doors from the theater. To work then.

Ardis was a trifle late this morning, but came as she had promised. I asked where we were to go to free Kreton, and when she told me—a still-living building at the eastern end of the Silent City —I hired one of the rickety American caleches to drive us there. Like most of them, it was drawn by a starved horse; but we made good time.

The American police are organized on a peculiar system. The national secret police (officially, the Federated Enquiry Divisions) are in a tutorial position to all the others, having power to review their decisions, promote, demote, and discipline, and as the ultimate reward, enroll personnel from the other organizations. In addition they maintain a uniformed force of their own. Thus when

an American has been arrested by uniformed police, his friends can seldom learn whether he has been taken by the local police, by the F.E.D. uniformed national force, or by members of the F.E.D. secret police posing as either of the foregoing.

Since I had known nothing of these distinctions previously, I had no way of guessing which of the three had O'Keene; but the local police to whom Ardis had spoken the night before had given her to understand that he had been taken by them. She explained all this to me as we rattled along, then added that we were now going to the F.E.D. building to secure his release. I must have looked as confused as I felt at this, because she added, "Part of it is a station for the Washington Police Department—they rent the space from the F.E.D."

My own impression (when we arrived) was that they did no such thing—that the entire apparatus was no more real than one of the scenes in Ardis's theater, and that all the men and women to whom we spoke were in fact agents of the secret police, wielding ten times the authority they pretended to possess, and going through a solemn ritual of deception. As Ardis and I moved from office to office, explaining our simple errand, I came to think that she felt as I did, and that she had refrained from expressing these feelings to me in the cab not only because of the danger, the fear that I might betray her or the driver be a spy, but because she was ashamed of her nation, and eager to make it appear to me, a foreigner, that her government was less devious and meretricious than is actually the case.

If this is so—and in that windowless warren of stone I was certain it was—then the very explanation she proffered in the cab (which I have given in its proper place) differentiating clearly between local police, uniformed F.E.D. police, and secret police, was no more than a children's fable, concealing an actuality less forthright and more convoluted.

Our questioners were courteous to me, much less so to Ardis, and (so it seemed to me) obsessed by the idea that something more lay behind the simple incident we described over and over again

—so much so in fact that I came to believe it myself. I have neither time nor patience enough to describe all these interviews, but I will attempt to give a sample of one.

We went into a small, windowless office crowded between two others that appeared empty. A middle-aged American woman was seated behind a metal desk. She appeared normal and reasonably attractive until she spoke; then her scarred gums showed that she had once had two or three times the proper number of teeth—forty or fifty, I suppose, in each jaw—and that the dental surgeon who had extracted the supernumerary ones had not always, perhaps, selected those he suffered to remain as wisely as he might. She asked, "How is it outside? The weather? You see, I don't know, sitting in here all day."

Ardis said, "Very nice."

"Do you like it, *Hajji?* Have you had a pleasant stay in our great country?"

"I don't think it has rained since I've been here."

She seemed to take the remark as a covert accusation. "You came too late for the rains, I'm afraid. This is a very fertile area, however. Some of our oldest coins show heads of wheat. Have you seen them?" She pushed a small copper coin across the desk, and I pretended to examine it. There are one or two like it in the bracelet I bought for Ardis, and which I still have not presented to her. "I must apologize on behalf of the District for what happened to you," the woman continued. "We are making every effort to control crime. You have not been victimized before this?"

I shook my head, half suffocated in that airless office, and said I had not been.

"And now you are here." She shuffled the papers she held, then pretended to read from one of them. "You are here to secure the release of the thief who assaulted you. A very commendable act of magnanimity. May I ask why you brought this young woman with you? She does not seem to be mentioned in any of these reports."

I explained that Ardis was a coworker of O'Keene's, and that she had interceded for him.

"Then it is you, Ms. Dahl, who are really interested in securing this prisoner's release. Are you related to him?"

And so on.

At the conclusion of each interview we were told either that the matter was completely out of the hands of the person to whom we had just spent half an hour or an hour talking, that it was necessary to obtain a clearance from someone else, or that an additional deposition had to be made. About two o'clock we were sent to the other side of the river—into what my guidebooks insist is an entirely different jurisdiction—to visit a penal facility. There we were forced to look for Kreton among five hundred or so miserable prisoners, all of whom stank and had lice. Not finding him, we returned to the F.E.D. building past the half-overturned and yet still brooding figure called the Seated Man, and the ruins and beggars of the Silent City, for another round of interrogations. By five, when we were told to leave, we were both exhausted, though Ardis seemed surprisingly hopeful. When I left her at the door of her building a few minutes ago, I asked her what they would do tonight without Kreton.

"Without Harry, you mean." She smiled. "The best we can, I suppose, if we must. At least Paul will have someone ready to stand in for him tonight."

We shall see how well it goes.

I have picked up this pen and replaced it on the table ten times at least. It seems very likely that I should destroy this journal instead of continuing with it, were I wise; but I have discovered a hiding place for it which I think will be secure.

When I came back from Ardis's apartment tonight there were only two candy eggs remaining. I am certain—absolutely certain—that three were left when I went to meet Ardis. I am almost equally sure that after I had finished making the entry in this book, I put it, as I always do, at the left side of the drawer. It was on the right side.

It is possible that all this is merely the doing of the maid who cleans the room. She might easily have supposed that a single

candy egg would not be missed, and have shifted this book while cleaning the drawer, or peeped inside out of curiosity.

I will assume the worst, however. An agent sent to investigate my room might be equipped to photograph these pages—but he might not, and it is not likely that he himself would have a reading knowledge of Farsi. Now I have gone through the book and eliminated all the passages relating to my reason for visiting this leprous country. Before I leave this room tomorrow I will arrange indicators—hairs and other objects whose positions I shall carefully record—that will tell me if the room has been searched again.

Now I may as well set down the events of the evening, which were truly extraordinary enough.

I met Ardis as we had planned, and she directed me to a small restaurant not far from her apartment. We had no sooner seated ourselves than two heavy-looking men entered. At no time could I see plainly the face of either, but it appeared to me that one was the American I had met aboard the *Princess Fatimah* and that the other was the grain dealer I had so assiduously avoided there, Golam Gassem. It is impossible, I think, for my divine Ardis ever to look less than beautiful; but she came as near to it then as the laws of nature permit—the blood drained from her face, her mouth opened slightly, and for a moment she appeared to be a lovely corpse. I began to ask what the trouble was, but before I could utter a word she touched my lips to silence me, and then, having somewhat regained her composure, said, "They have not seen us. I am leaving now. Follow me as though we were finished eating." She stood, feigned to pat her lips with a napkin (so that the lower half of her face was hidden) and walked out into the street.

I followed her, and found her laughing not three doors away from the entrance to the restaurant. The change in her could not have been more startling if she had been released from an enchantment. "It is so funny," she said. "Though it wasn't then. Come on, we'd better go; you can feed me after the show."

I asked her what those men were to her.

"Friends," she said, still laughing.

"If they are friends, why were you so anxious that they not see you? Were you afraid they would make us late?" I knew that such a trivial explanation could not be true, but I wanted to leave her a means of evading the question if she did not want to confide in me.

She shook her head. "No, no. I didn't want either to think I did not trust him. I'll tell you more later, if you want to involve yourself in our little charade."

"With all my heart."

She smiled at that—that sun-drenched smile for which I would gladly have entered a lion pit. In a few more steps we were at the rear entrance to the theater, and there was no time to say more. She opened the door, and I heard Kreton arguing with a woman I later learned was the wardrobe mistress. "You are free," I said, and he turned to look at me.

"Yes. Thanks to you, I think. And I do thank you."

Ardis gazed on him as though he were a child saved from drowning. "Poor Bobby. Was it very bad?"

"It was frightening, that's all. I was afraid I'd never get out. Do you know Terry is gone?"

She shook her head, and said, "What do you mean?" but I was certain—and here I am not exaggerating or coloring the facts, though I confess I have occasionally done so elsewhere in this chronicle—that she had known it before he spoke.

"He simply isn't here. Paul is running around like a lunatic. I hear you missed me last night."

"God, yes," Ardis said, and darted off too swiftly for me to follow.

Kreton took my arm. I expected him to apologize for having tried to rob me, but he said, "You've met her, I see."

"She persuaded me to drop the charges against you."

"Whatever it was you offered me—twenty rials? I'm morally entitled to it, but I won't claim it. Come and see me when you're ready for something more wholesome—and meanwhile, how do you like her?"

"That is something for me to tell her," I said, "not you."

Ardis returned as I spoke, bringing with her a balding black man with a mustache. "Paul, this is Nadan. His English is very good—not so British as most of them. He'll do, don't you think?"

"He'll have to—you're sure he'll do it?"

"He'll love it," Ardis said positively, and disappeared again.

It seemed that Terry was the actor who played Mary Rose's husband and lover, Simon; and I—who had never acted in so much as a school play—was to be pressed into the part. It was about half an hour before curtain time, so I had all of fifty minutes to learn my lines before my entrance at the end of the first act.

Paul, the director, warned me that if my name were used, the audience would be hostile; and since the character (in the version of the play they were presenting) was supposed to be an American, they would see errors where none existed. A moment later, while I was still in frantic rehearsal, I heard him saying, "The part of Simon Blake will be taken by Ned Jefferson."

The act of stepping onto the stage for the first time was really the worst part of the entire affair. Fortunately I had the advantage of playing a nervous young man come to ask for the hand of his sweetheart, so that my shaky laughter and stammer became "acting."

My second scene—with Mary Rose and Cameron on the magic island—ought by rights to have been much more difficult than the first. I had had only the intermission in which to study my lines, and the scene called for pessimistic apprehension rather than mere anxiety. But all the speeches were short, and Paul had been able by that time to get them lettered on large sheets of paper, which he and the stage manager held up in the wings. Several times I was forced to extemporize, but though I forgot the playwright's words, I never lost my sense of the *trend* of the play, and was always able to contrive something to which Ardis and Cameron could adapt their replies.

In comparison to the first and second acts, my brief appearance in the third was a holiday; yet I have seldom been so exhausted as

I was tonight when the stage darkened for Ardis's final confrontation with Kreton, and Cameron and I, and the middle-aged people who had played the Morelands were able to creep away.

We had to remain in costume until we had taken our bows, and it was nearly midnight before Ardis and I got something to eat at the same small, dirty bar outside which Kreton had tried to rob me. Over the steaming plates she asked me if I had enjoyed acting, and I had to nod.

"I thought you would. Under all that solidity you're a very dramatic person, I think."

I admitted it was true, and tried to explain why I feel that what I call *the romance of life* is the only thing worth seeking. She did not understand me, and so I passed it off as the result of having been brought up on the *Shah Namah,* of which I found she had never heard.

We went to her apartment. I was determined to take her by force if necessary—not because I would have enjoyed brutalizing her, but because I felt she would inevitably think my love far less than it was if I permitted her to put me off a second time. She showed me about her quarters (two small rooms in great disorder), then, after we had lifted into place the heavy bar that is the sigil of every American dwelling, put her arms about me. Her breath was fragrant with the arrack I had bought for her a few minutes before. I feel sure now that for the rest of my life that scent will recall this evening to me.

When we parted, I began to unloose the laces that closed her blouse, and she at once pinched out the candle. I pleaded that she was thus depriving me of half the joy I might have had of her love; but she would not permit me to relight it, and our caresses and the embraces of our couplings were exchanged in perfect darkness. I was in ecstasy. To have seen her, I would have blinded myself; yet nothing could have increased my delight.

When we separated for the last time, both spent utterly, and she left to wash, I sought for matches. First in the drawer of the unsteady little table beside the bed, then among the disorder of

my own clothes, which I had dropped to the floor and we had kicked about. I found some eventually, but could not find the candle—Ardis, I think, had hidden it. I struck a match; but she had covered herself with a robe. I said, "Am I never to see you?"

"You will see me tomorrow. You're going to take me boating, and we'll picnic by the water, under the cherry trees. Tomorrow night the theater will be closed for Easter, and you can take me to a party. But now you are going home, and I am going to go to sleep." When I was dressed and standing in her doorway, I asked her if she loved me; but she stopped my mouth with a kiss.

I have already written about the rest—returning to find two eggs instead of three, and this book moved. I will not write of that again. But I have just—between this paragraph and the last—read over what I wrote earlier tonight, and it seems to me that one sentence should have had more weight than I gave it: when I said that in my role as Simon I never lost the *trend* of the play.

What the fabled secret buried by the old Americans beneath their carved mountain may be I do not know; but I believe that if it is some key to the world of human life, it must be some form of that. Every great man, I am sure, consciously or not, in those terms or others, has grasped that secret—save that in the play that is our life we can grapple that trend and draw it to left or right if we have the will.

So I am doing now. If the taking of the egg was not significant, yet I will make it so—indeed I already have, when I infused one egg with the drug. If the scheme in which Ardis is entangled—with Golam Gassem and Mr. Tallman if it be they—is not some affair of statecraft and dark treasure, yet I will make it so before the end. If our love is not a great love, destined to live forever in the hearts of the young and the mouths of the poets, it will be so before the end.

Once again I am here; and in all truth I am beginning to wonder if I do not write this journal only to read it. No man was ever happier than I am now—so happy, indeed, that I was sorely

tempted not to taste either of the two eggs that remain. What if the drug, in place of hallucination, self-knowledge, and euphoria, brings permanent and despairing madness? Yet I have eaten it nonetheless, swallowing the whole sweet lump in a few bites. I would rather risk whatever may come than think myself a coward. With equanimity I await the effects.

The fact is that I am too happy for all the Faustian determination I penned last night. (How odd that *Faust* will be the company's next production. Kreton will be Mephistopheles of course—Ardis said as much, and it would be certain in any case. Ardis herself will be Margaret. But who will play the Doctor?) Yet now, when all the teeth-gritting, table-pounding determination is gone, I know that I will carry out the essentials of the *plan* more surely than ever —with the ease, in fact, of an accomplished violinist sawing out some simple tune while his mind roves elsewhere. I have been looking at the ruins of the Jeff (as they call it), and it has turned my mind again to the fate of the old Americans. How often they, who chose their leaders for superficial appearances of strength, wisdom, and resolution, must have elected them only because they were as fatigued as I was last night.

I had meant to buy a hamper of delicacies, and call for Ardis about one, but she came for me at eleven with a little basket already packed. We walked north along the bank of the channel until we reached the ruins of the old tomb to which I have already referred, and the nearly circular artificial lake the Americans call the Basin. It is rimmed with flowering trees—old and gnarled, but very beautiful in their robes of white blossom. For some little American coin we were given command of a bright blue boat with a sail twice or three times the size of my handkerchief, in which to dare the halcyon waters of the lake.

When we were well away from the people on shore, Ardis asked me, rather suddenly, if I intended to spend all my time in America here in Washington.

I told her that my original plan had been to stay here no more than a week, then make my way up the coast to Philadelphia and

the other ancient cities before I returned home; but that now that I had met her I would stay here forever if she wished it.

"Haven't you ever wanted to see the interior? This strip of beach we live on is kept half alive by the ocean and the trade that crosses it; but a hundred miles inland lies the wreck of our entire civilization, waiting to be plundered."

"Then why doesn't someone plunder it?" I asked.

"They do. A year never passes without someone bringing some great prize out—but it is so large . . ." I could see her looking beyond the lake and the fragrant trees. "So large that whole cities are lost in it. There was an arch of gold at the entrance to St. Louis —no one knows what became of it. Denver, the Mile High City, was nested in silver mines; no one can find them now."

"Many of the old maps must still be in existence."

Ardis nodded slowly, and I sensed that she wanted to say more than she had. For a few seconds there was no sound but the water lapping against the side of the boat.

"I remember having seen some in the museum in Teheran—not only our maps, but some of your own from a hundred years ago."

"The courses of the rivers have changed," she said. "And when they have not, no one can be sure of it."

"Many buildings must still be standing, as they are here, in the Silent City."

"That was built of stone—more solidly than anything else in the country. But yes, some, many, are still there."

"Then it would be possible to fly in, land somewhere, and pillage them."

"There are many dangers, and so much rubble to look through that anyone might search for a lifetime and only scratch the surface."

I saw that talking of all this only made her unhappy, and tried to change the subject. "Didn't you say that I could escort you to a party tonight? What will that be like?"

"Nadan, I have to trust someone. You've never met my father, but he lives close to the hotel where you are staying, and has a

shop where he sells old books and maps." (So I had visited the right house—almost—after all!) "When he was younger, he wanted to go into the interior. He made three or four trips, but never got farther than the Appalachian foothills. Eventually he married my mother and didn't feel any longer that he could take the risks . . ."

"I understand."

"The things he had sought to guide him to the wealth of the past became his stock in trade. Even today, people who live farther inland bring him old papers; he buys them and resells them. Some of those people are only a step better than the ones who dig up the cemeteries for the wedding rings of the dead women."

I recalled the rings I had bought in the shadow of the broken obelisk, and shuddered, though I do not believe Ardis observed it.

"I said that some of them were hardly better than the grave robbers. The truth is that some are worse—there are people in the interior who are no longer people. Our bodies are poisoned —you know that, don't you? All of us Americans. They have adapted—that's what Father says—but they are no longer human. He made his peace with them long ago, and he trades with them still."

"You don't have to tell me this."

"Yes I do—I must. Would you go into the interior, if I went with you? The government will try to stop us if they learn of it, and to confiscate anything we find."

I assured her with every oath I could remember that with her beside me I would cross the continent on foot if need be.

"I told you about my father. I said that he sells the maps and records they bring him. What I did not tell you is that he reads them first. He has never given up, you see, in his heart."

"He has made a discovery?" I asked.

"He's made many—hundreds. Bobby and I have used them. You remember those men in the restaurant? Bobby went to each of them with a map and some of the old letters. He's persuaded them to help finance an expedition into the interior, and made each of

them believe that we'll help him cheat the other—that keeps them from combining to cheat us, you see."

"And you want me to go with you?" I was beside myself with joy.

"We weren't going to go at all—Bobby was going to take the money, and go to Baghdad or Marrakesh, and take me with him. But, Nadan," here she leaned forward, I remember, and took my hands in hers, "there really is a secret. There are many, but one better—more likely to be true, more likely to yield truly immense wealth than all the others. I know you would share fairly with me. We'll divide everything, and I'll go back to Teheran with you."

I know that I have never been more happy in my life than I was then, in that silly boat. We sat together in the stern, nearly sinking it, under the combined shade of the tiny sail and Ardis's big straw hat, and kissed and stroked one another until we would have been pilloried a dozen times in Iran.

At last, when I could bear no more unconsummated love, we ate the sandwiches Ardis had brought, and drank some warmish, fruit-flavored beverage, and returned to shore.

When I took her home a few minutes ago, I very strongly urged her to let me come upstairs with her; I was on fire for her, sick to impale her upon my own flesh and pour myself into her as some mad god before the coming of the Prophet might have poured his golden blood into the sea. She would not permit it—I think because she feared that her apartment could not be darkened enough to suit her modesty. I am determined that I will yet see her.

I have bathed and shaved to be ready for the party, and as there is still time I will insert here a description of the procession we passed on the way back from the lake. As you see, I have not yet completely abandoned the thought of a book of travels.

A very old man—I suppose a priest—carried a cross on a long pole, using it as a staff, and almost as a crutch. A much younger one, fat and sweating, walked backward before him swinging a

smoking censer. Two robed boys carrying large candles preceded them, and they were followed by more robed children, singing, who fought with nudges and pinches when they felt the fat man was not watching them.

Like everyone else, I have seen this kind of thing done much better in Rome; but I was more affected by what I saw here. When the old priest was born, the greatness of America must have been a thing of such recent memory that few can have realized it had passed forever; and the entire procession—from the flickering candles in clear sunshine, to the dead leader lifted up, to his inattentive, bickering followers behind—seemed to me to incarnate the philosophy and the dilemma of these people. So I felt, at least, until I saw that they watched it as uncomprehendingly as they might if they themselves were only travelers abroad, and I realized that its ritualized plea for life renewed was more foreign to them than to me.

It is very late—three, my watch says.

I resolved again not to write in this book. To burn it or tear it to pieces, or to give it to some beggar; but now I am writing once again because I cannot sleep. The room reeks of my vomit, though I have thrown open the shutters and let in the night.

How could I have loved that? (And yet a few moments ago, when I tried to sleep, visions of Ellen pursued me back to wakefulness.)

The party was a masque, and Ardis had obtained a costume for me—a fantastic gilded armor from the wardrobe of the theater. She wore the robes of an Egyptian princess, and a domino. At midnight we lifted our masks and kissed, and in my heart I swore that tonight the mask of darkness would be lifted too.

When we left, I carried with me the bottle we had brought, still nearly half full; and before she pinched out the candle I persuaded her to pour out a final drink for us to share when the first frenzy of our desire was past. She—it—did as I asked, and set it on the little table near the bed. A long time afterward, when we lay

gasping side by side, I found my pistol with one groping hand and fired the beam into the wide-bellied glass. Instantly it filled with blue fire from the burning alcohol. Ardis screamed, and sprang up.

I ask myself now how I could have loved; but then, how could I in one week have come so near to loving this corpse-country? Its eagle is dead—Ardis is the proper symbol of its rule.

One hope, one very small hope remains. It is possible that what I saw tonight was only an illusion, induced by the egg. I know now that the thing I killed before Ardis's father's house was real, and between this paragraph and the last I have eaten the last egg. If hallucinations now begin, I will know that what I saw by the light of the blazing arrack was in truth a thing with which I have lain, and in one way or another will see to it that I never return to corrupt the clean wombs of the women of our enduring race. I might seek to claim the miniatures of our heritage after all, and allow the guards to kill me—but what if I were to succeed? I am not fit to touch them. Perhaps the best end for me would be to travel alone into this maggot-riddled continent; in that way I will die at fit hands.

Later. Kreton is walking in the hall outside my door, and the tread of his twisted black shoe jars the building like an earthquake. I heard the word *police* as though it were thunder. My dead Ardis, very small and bright, has stepped out of the candle-flame, and there is a hairy face coming through the window.

The old woman closed the notebook. The younger woman, who had been reading over her shoulder, moved to the other side of the small table and seated herself on a cushion, her feet politely positioned so that the soles could not be seen. "He is alive then," she said.

The older woman remained silent, her gray head bowed over the notebook, which she held in both hands.

"He is certainly imprisoned, or ill; otherwise he would have been in touch with us." The younger woman paused, smoothing the fabric of her *chador* with her right hand, while the left toyed with the gem simulator

she wore on a thin chain. "It is possible that he has already tried, but his letters have miscarried."

"You think this is his writing?" the older woman asked, opening the notebook at random. When the younger did not answer she added, "Perhaps. Perhaps."

The Nebula Winners 1965–1978

1965

Best Novel: DUNE *by Frank Herbert*
Best Novella: "The Saliva Tree" *by Brian W. Aldiss* "He Who Shapes" *by Roger Zelazny* (tie)
Best Novelette: "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth" *by Roger Zelazny*
Best Short Story: " 'Repent, Harlequin!' Said the Ticktockman" *by Harlan Ellison*

1966

Best Novel: FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON *by Daniel Keyes* BABEL-1 *by Samuel R. Delany* (tie)
Best Novella: "The Last Castle" *by Jack Vance*
Best Novelette: "Call Him Lord" *by Gordon R. Dickson*
Best Short Story: "The Secret Place" *by Richard McKenna*

1967

Best Novel: THE EINSTEIN INTERSECTION *by Samuel R. Delany*
Best Novella: "Behold the Man" *by Michael Moorcock*
Best Novelette: "Gonna Roll the Bones" *by Fritz Leiber*
Best Short Story: "Aye, and Gomorrah" *by Samuel R. Delany*

1968

Best Novel: RITE OF PASSAGE *by Alexei Panshin*
Best Novella: "Dragonrider" *by Anne McCaffrey*
Best Novelette: "Mother to the World" *by Richard Wilson*
Best Short Story: "The Planners" *by Kate Wilhelm*

1969

Best Novel: THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS *by Ursula K. LeGuin*
Best Novella: "A Boy and His Dog" *by Harlan Ellison*
Best Novelette: "Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones" *by Samuel R. Delany*
Best Short Story: "Passengers" *by Robert Silverberg*

1970

Best Novel: RINGWORLD *by Larry Niven*
Best Novella: "Ill Met in Lankhmar" *by Fritz Leiber*
Best Novelette: "Slow Sculpture" *by Theodore Sturgeon*
Best Short Story: No award

1971

Best Novel: A TIME OF CHANGES *by Robert Silverberg*
Best Novella: "The Missing Man" *by Katherine MacLean*
Best Novelette: "The Queen of Air and Darkness" *by Poul Anderson*
Best Short Story: "Good News from the Vatican" *by Robert Silverberg*

1972

Best Novel: THE GODS THEMSELVES *by Isaac Asimov*
Best Novella: "A Meeting with Medusa" *by Arthur C. Clarke*
Best Novelette: "Goat Song" *by Poul Anderson*
Best Short Story: "When It Changed" *by Joanna Russ*

1973

Best Novel: RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA *by Arthur C. Clarke*
Best Novella: "The Death of Doctor Island" *by Gene Wolfe*
Best Novelette: "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand" *by Vonda N. McIntyre*
Best Short Story: "Love Is the Plan the Plan Is Death" *by James Tiptree, Jr.*

1974

Best Novel: THE DISPOSSESSED *by Ursula K. Le Guin*
Best Novella: "Born with the Dead" *by Robert Silverberg*
Best Novelette: "If the Stars Are Gods" *by Gordon Eklund and Gregory Benford*
Best Short Story: "The Day Before the Revolution" *by Ursula K. Le Guin*
Grand Master: *Robert A. Heinlein*

1975

Best Novel: THE FOREVER WAR *by Joe Haldeman*
Best Novella: "Home Is the Hangman" *by Roger Zelazny*
Best Novelette: "San Diego Lightfoot Sue" *by Tom Reamy*
Best Short Story: "Catch That Zeppelin!" *by Fritz Leiber*
Grand Master: *Jack Williamson*

1976

Best Novel: MAN PLUS *by Frederik Pohl*
Best Novella: "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" *by James Tiptree, Jr.*
Best Novelette: "The Bicentennial Man" *by Isaac Asimov*
Best Short Story: "A Crowd of Shadows" *by Charles L. Grant*
Grand Master: *Clifford Simak*

1977

Best Novel: GATEWAY *by Frederik Pohl*
Best Novella: "Stardance" *by Spider and Jeanne Robinson*
Best Novelette: "The Screwfly Solution" *by Raccoona Sheldon*
Best Short Story: "Jeffty Is Five" *by Harlan Ellison*
Grand Master: *Jack Williamson*

1978

Best Novel: DREAMSNAKE *by Vonda N. McIntyre*
Best Novella: "The Persistence of Vision" *by John Varley*
Best Novelette: "A Glow of Candles, A Unicorn's Eye" *by Charles L. Grant*
Best Short Story: "Stone" *by Edward Bryant*
Grand Master: *L. Sprague de Camp*

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—(ALA) *Booklist*

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—(ALA) *Booklist*

NEBULA AWARD STORIES TEN
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